Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel ibn Naghrela: An Examination of Life and Death

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Abstract

This thesis focuses upon the poetry of Samuel ibn Naghrela (993-1056) and Solomon ibn Gabirol (c. 1021-1057), two of the most notable poets of the Andalusian period of Hebrew poetry. These two contemporary poets personify different characteristics of medieval Andalusia: Ibn Gabirol’s poetry incorporates the Neoplatonic philosophical ideas that infused medieval Andalusian society, while that of Ibn Naghrela, written several years earlier, is unaffected by Neoplatonism. The first chapter introduces the historical and cultural context which gave birth to these two poets. The second chapter introduces the two poets. Chapters three and four present the themes of death and life in the context of eight poems. Ibn Gabirol accepts death as inevitable and reflects on life’s brevity. He regards death as a new beginning and celebration of the soul’s release. Ibn Naghrela regards death with trepidation. But in the poetry that is examined, he neither advises his reader to prepare for death, nor indicates that he himself is altering his life to prepare for death. Examining the two poets’ views towards death in these poems also indicates how they lived their lives. As will be shown, in the poems that are discussed Ibn Naghrela exhorts his readers to enjoy life, reminding them that life is fleeting, and that life’s pleasures will not outlast death. He does not advise his reader to renounce the material world in preparation for death, for he views death as a grim finality, and broods on the gruesome aspects of physical decay. Ibn Gabirol, on the other hand, influenced by the Neoplatonic theme of spiritual purification and the soul’s release, advocates more pietistic practices in the poems that are examined, urging his readers to improve themselves while they are alive for the edification of their trapped soul, so that she may escape the corporeal body upon its demise.
Dedication

Dedicated to those who helped in every way.
Vita

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Introduction

Tenth and eleventh century Andalusia was a place of intellectual creativity. Hebrew and Arabic speaking intellectual communities coexisted, producing similarly themed literary, philosophical, and religious compositions. For members of the Jewish community, relative acceptance into Andalusian culture as *dhimmis* under Muslim rule promised certain civic and personal benefits. In return for a special tax and certain restrictions to which they had to comply, the Muslim state recognized these Jews as members of an autonomous community, thereby granting them protections derived from the state’s current regime. Jewish culture in Spain underwent an *Arabization*, through which the Jewish community began speaking Arabic.\(^1\) Along with their studies of Jewish religious texts such as the Bible, the Talmud, and other literatures, some Jewish children studied formal Arabic grammar, poetry, literatures, and sometimes even the Qur’ān and other Islamic religious texts.\(^2\) At this time all Jewish texts were written in Judeo-Arabic except for Hebrew poetry. Until the Middle Ages liturgical *piyyut* dominated the Hebrew poetry scene. In medieval Andalusia, Jewish poets also began writing secular Hebrew poetry, which adopted the rhyme schemes and meters of Arabic poetry, combining these with the language of the Hebrew Bible. Throughout the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries-- the ‘Golden Age of Hebrew Poetry’-- Jewish poets in the Andalusian city of Granada, which eventually became the center of Arabized Jewish culture, produced this unique style of Hebrew poetry.\(^3\)

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This thesis focuses upon the poetry of Samuel ibn Naghrela (993-1056) and Solomon ibn Gabirol (c. 1021-1057), two of the most notable poets of the Andalusian period of Hebrew poetry. The first chapter highlights those historical developments in Andalusia that allowed the birth of a new style of Hebrew poetry. In addition to illustrating the historical and cultural context in which these two poets wrote, it describes the development of ‘Arabized’ Hebrew poetry—introduced to Andalusia by Dunash ben Labraṭ—and the significance of the revival of biblical Hebrew. The second chapter introduces Ibn Naghrela and Ibn Gabirol, two contemporary poets who personify different characteristics of medieval Andalusia: Ibn Gabirol’s poetry incorporates the Neoplatonic philosophical ideas that infused medieval Andalusian society, while that of Ibn Naghrela, written several years earlier, is unaffected by Neoplatonism.

Chapters three and four present the themes of death and life in the context of eight poems. Chapter three discusses Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Naghrela’s attitudes towards death, a theme put forth by many scholars. Tanenbaum reflects on the importance of death to both poets:

As one who had enjoyed the recognition and material wealth which accrued to him in this world, Samuel [ibn Naghrela] viewed death with trepidation. Repeatedly emphasizing its finality, he laments the inescapable decay of the grave in gruesome detail. His only solace derives from the thought that death may be reversed through resurrection. […] He is thus a staunch adherent of classical rabbinic eschatology, seemingly unimpressed by the spiritual concerns that enflames his younger contemporary, Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Neoplatonism led Ibn Gabirol to view death not as the cessation of life, but as a veritable release. Genuine life would begin only when the soul had withdrawn from the body and was free to contemplate the true realities of the upper world.4

Examining the two poets’ views towards death also indicates how they lived their lives. Based on the conclusions from chapter three, chapter four presents their respective attitudes towards life in several poems. As will be shown, Ibn Naghrela exhorts his readers to enjoy life, reminding them that life is fleeting, and that life’s pleasures will not outlast death. He does not advise his reader to renounce the material world in preparation for death, for he views death as a grim finality, and broods on the gruesome aspects of physical decay. Ibn Gabirol, on the other hand, influenced by

the Neoplatonic theme of spiritual purification and release of the soul, advocates more pietistic practices, urging his readers to improve themselves while they are alive for the edification of their trapped soul, so that she may escape the corporeal body upon its demise.
Chapter 1: Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Andalusia

This chapter presents the historical and cultural context in which Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Naghrela composed their poetry. It presents two different angles in order to provide a comprehensive and contextually relevant portrayal. First, it examines the historical context. Second, this chapter traces the development of Hebrew literature to include secular poetry alongside liturgical *piyyutim*.

I. Historical Context

Arabs first landed in Andalusia when Tāriq b. Ziyād crossed the Straits of Gibraltar in 710 or 711 C.E. Several Arabic historical accounts claim that the Jews in the Iberian Peninsula played a significant role in achieving the Islamic conquest of Spain. The Jews, says Ross Brann, “are portrayed as a fifth column on the ground, as a legion of sympathizers eager to aid and abet the Berber-manned and Syrian Arab-directed force in its rout of the hated Visigoths.” By the end of the tenth century, a majority of people living in Andalusia were Muslims and spoke Arabic. The Muslims lived peacefully alongside those who preferred not to convert, namely the Christians and Jews, who still participated fully in the society. Ḥasdai ibn Shaprūt (905-975) became the first Jewish scholar to rise to prominence within the Andalusian Muslim court as court physician. He also attained the additional positions of chief of customs and foreign trade, and he acted as a diplomat who conducted negotiations with the Christians on behalf of the Muslim court. Due largely to Ḥasdai’s patronage, Jewish culture began to separate from the main centre

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of Jewish religious life of that time in Iraq. After the fall of the Umayyad rule centered in Cordoba in 1013, Andalusia became divided into independent kingdoms, called *mulūk al-tawāif* (‘party kingdoms’). During this period, in which each local ruler sought to emulate the grandeur of Umayyad Cordoba, there arose opportunities for the Jewish elite to rise to prominent political and administrative governmental positions. It was the group of Jewish intellectuals in Granada, who worked and participated in Muslim Andalusia, who made significant contributions to the corpus of Hebrew literature and thought, including the introduction of secular Hebrew poetry. This period fostered the works of great poets such as Samuel ibn Naghrela and Solomon ibn Naghrela, as well as Moses ibn Ezra (1055-c.1135), Judah Halevi (1075-c.1141) and Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164). These poets often wrote poetry for a living, and they were often dependent on the whims of a patron who employed them to write verses. Many poems thus were intended for publicity, with the aim of extolling or tarnishing someone’s image.

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7. Hourani, *History of Arab Peoples*, 25-33, and 41-43. Even as they gained their own independence, the Andalusian rabbis and scholars in Lucena and Barcelona still corresponded with the intellectual leaders, or *geonim*, of the Jewish center of Babylonia. Babylonia, similar to Andalusia, was under Muslim rule at this time (under Abbasid rule, as opposed to the Ummayad rule of Spain). Jews had also been living in Babylonia before the Muslim conquest: scholars commonly estimate that over 90% of the world’s Jewish population were at this time living in Babylonia. When the Abbasids came to power in 750 C.E., they transferred the capital of the western Muslim Empire, Damascus (Syria), to Baghdad (Babylonia), thus placing the Babylonian Jews at the political centre of the Muslim empire. Both Judaism and Christianity were recognized as accepted religions under the Muslim rule, and although the Jews had to pay various taxes, they had almost complete religious freedom. The Muslim rulers even recognized and allowed Jewish sovereignty over the Jewish population. Jewish leadership was organized into three main institutions: the Exilarchate, who was a temporal leader, and the Geonic academies of Sura and Pumbedita—the *geonim* served as intellectual and religious leaders of the community. The Andalusian Jews corresponded with the Geonic leaders of the Jewish cultural and intellectual center in Babylonia, and from Geonic responsa dating to the 9th century, we see evidence that Andalusian Jews depended on intellectual guidance from the Babylonian Geonim. However, later sources show a decrease in correspondences between the Andalusian and Babylonian intellectuals. According, for example, to Abraham ibn Daud (d. circa 1180)—a well-known Andalusian astronomer, historian, and philosopher—once the Andalusian Jews developed their own strong religious center, they ceased needing support from Babylonia. (Brody, *Geonim*, xix-xxi; 132-133.)


II. Medieval Hebrew Poetry

A. The Advent of Hebrew Liturgical Poetry

Before the advent of secular Hebrew poetry, Jewish poets wrote liturgical religious poetry, called *piyyuṭim* (singular: *piyyuṭ*). Similar to early Arabic poetry, the first Hebrew *piyyuṭim* were not written down, and only the thematic ‘gist’ of their content was remembered. Before the Babylonian exile, there was little provision for public prayer. However in the post-exilic period, the public began to take on a more active role in the Temple cult, and institutions such as *ma’amadot*¹⁰ were established to guarantee people’s participation in the religious rituals. As individual religious piety increased, so did the need for public worship, and the formation of a fixed liturgy became inevitable as fixed patterns began to emerge and regularly recur. Additionally, as more communities grew throughout Palestine-- each with their own religious centers-- a uniformity of the liturgy was a way to guarantee religious unity.¹¹ Spiegel talks of the liturgical corpus as a cohesive device uniting the scattered Jewish communities: “the standard prayers, the oldest nucleus of the liturgy, always and everywhere became the center of Jewish worship, a bond of union despite the geographic dispersal, and a bridge across the ages linking the present to the past.”¹² However, in his article “On Medieval Hebrew Poetry”, Spiegel also discusses not only how interpretations of the same biblical verse change in each age as Jews read it to speak to their own time and place, but he additionally recognizes the need for the creation of new literature to keep up with the changing social environment:

Fortunately, the synagogue discovered quite early how hopeless it would be to invite the great poetry of biblical antiquity to keep new expression suppressed in Judaism. It was better insight to make room in the synagogue, along with the classical heritage, also for new creative endeavor, and thus enlist the genius of the poets to lend freshness and vigor to the religious quest of medieval Jewry.¹³

¹⁰ a rotating system in which each week different people were chosen to represent the community and to witness the sacrifices in Jerusalem.
So even while a body of statutory prayers was emerging, poets still continued to enrich (or supplement)\textsuperscript{14} the liturgical corpus with additions of artistic poems, hymns, elegies, or petitions, which they attached to the statutory prayers\textsuperscript{15}; “At the same time, people in each period and place were free, if not encouraged, to speak their own mind in new compositions added to, or inserted within, the ancient prayers.”\textsuperscript{16} Scheindlin notes:

we can no longer distinguish between a period of statutory prayers and a period of piyyuṭ that followed it. The truth of the matter is that the wellspring of Hebrew poetry was never stopped, even at the close of the biblical period-- that is, about the second century B.C.E. Just when the statutory prayers were being edited and fixed, poems of a different type were being composed in Palestine, as a continuation of the biblical tradition, and as a transition stage to the art of the piyyuṭ.\textsuperscript{17}

Poets embellished established texts--such as the ‘Amida and the Shemah-- by inserting poetic prayers directly into them. For instance, poems were inserted surrounding the benedictions before and after the Shemah in the morning service.\textsuperscript{18} Around the eleventh century, the practice of writing piyyuṭim spread in all directions: to the east, the south, as well as the west and north, to Byzantium, Italy, and German lands.\textsuperscript{19} The piyyuṭim were not usually structured around meters or strict rhyme schemes, however, the lines did often exhibit organization of rhythmic units composed of a set number of accented words. Yannai, a paytan living in the 6th century, introduced the use of regular rhymes into piyyuṭim. But the rhymes differ from the rhymes we

\textsuperscript{14} According to Ezra Fleischer’s theory, the piyyuṭim were intended as a replacement for the fixed corpus. c.f. Fleischer, Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in Middle Ages, Brann, Compunctious Poet, 7.

\textsuperscript{15} Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, 188-219. c.f Fleischer, Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in Middle Ages, and Hainman, ha-Tefilah be-Tekufat ha-Tana’tm

\textsuperscript{16} Speigel “On Medieval Hebrew Poetry”, 188.

\textsuperscript{17} Scheindlin [addendum] in Elbogen, Jewish Liturgy, 220.

\textsuperscript{18} The medieval poet asks for permission “reshut” to insert his own words into the prayers. After the first benediction preceding the Shema-- which voices thanks for the gift of light-- a piyyuṭ called yozer is inserted. Yozer usually voices wonder at creation. Towards the end of the first benediction is a prayer to renew Zion’s light, and here Hebrew poets insert a piyyuṭ called meora. After the second benediction preceding the Shema-- which thanks God for the Torah-- poets insert a piyyuṭ called ahaba, which talks about God’s love for Israel and Israel’s love for God. After the Shema a piyyuṭ called zulat-- which talks of the hardships Jews face from their environment-- is often inserted. And lastly, a piyyuṭ named geulla-- which talks of the present hardships and seeks solace in the God of Israel-- is inserted after the Shema’s concluding benediction. (Spiegel (1976), 189-194.

\textsuperscript{19} Speigel “On Medieval Hebrew Poetry”, 198.
encounter in Arabic poetry: rather than consisting of the end vowel, these rhymes involved the entire word, and at least two or three of the root consonants had to match for two words to rhyme. Each strophe had its own rhyme scheme (such as \textit{aaaa bbbb}), rather than one rhyme scheme extending throughout the entire poem.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{B. The Development of Secular Hebrew Poetry}

Prior to the contact between the Arabs and the Jews in Andalusia, and the subsequent adoption of Arabic poetry into Hebrew poetry, the Jews and the Arabs had prolonged contact in the East. However, when Jewish and Muslim cultures first encountered each other in the East, Hebrew poetry did not immediately adopt the technical and thematic structures of Arabic poetry, and Hebrew liturgical \textit{piyyutim} continued to be the only form of written Hebrew poetry. Even in the west, although the Jews enthusiastically welcomed the Arab army, they did not immediately adopt the Arabic poetical conventions and styles. The two literary traditions remained distinct for several reasons. First, the two cultures were separated by language: the Muslims spoke Arabic, while the Jewish population spoke Aramaic and also was able to understand Hebrew. The second reason, speculates Yosef Tobi, was the strength and importance of \textit{paytanic} compositions, which left neither room nor desire for new styles of writing. For over two centuries, Hebrew literary culture remained distant from Arabic literary culture. But changes within both cultures led to the eventual literary contact between the two, especially as Arab poetry shifted from Bedouin desert themes to increasingly urban and courtly themes. Additionally, Jews began to abandon farming and to move closer to the Muslim urban city centers.\textsuperscript{21}

Following is a brief discussion of the styles and themes of Arabic poetry which were adapted into Hebrew poetry. There are two main categories of classical Arabic poetry: \textit{qit’a}, and \textit{qasīda}. The former literally means ‘fragment’, believed to be either the only fragments

\textsuperscript{20} Tanenbaum, \textit{Contemplative Soul}, 13.
\textsuperscript{21} Tobi, \textit{Proximity and Distance}, 31-64.
remaining from longer lost poems, or whole pieces that were written for specific occasions. The qaṣīda, or ode, is the most prevalent form of classical Arabic poetry. Practically, qaṣīdas are poems whose purpose is either to entertain or to praise a benefactor who presides at court. The opening (nasīb) depicts the social life of the court, and the poem later turns to praise of the benefactor. The main recurring themes in pre-Islamic and early-Islamic poetry are: self-praise (fakhr), panegyric (madiḥ), satire (hijāʾ), elegy (rithāʾ), description (waṣf), amatory verse (ghazal) -- in which the poet sings the praise of a lovely young girl (a ‘gazelle’) or boy (a ‘fawn’)--, ascetic verse (zuḥd), and wine poetry (khamriyyāt), in which the poet describes a banquet held in a palace or in a surrounding garden. The pre-Islamic poets also included many elaborate desert descriptions, while the more urban Islamic poets switched to lush descriptions of courtly gardens. Both the gardens and the desert were described and praised with similar stock phrases, making one versified garden indistinguishable from another.

The qaṣīda can range anywhere from twenty to a hundred couplets. One opens with a rhyming couplet, bayt, consisting of two rhyming hemistichs (miṣrāʾ). The rhyme that is established in this opening bayt is maintained throughout the rest of the poem. The Arab poets also used a rhetorical style of playing with homonyms and near-homonyms (called tajnīs) in their poetry. The pre-Islamic qaṣīda is generally partitioned into the same sections, beginning with an amatory prelude, nasīb, in which the poet encounters an abandoned campsite where his beloved once lived, and he reminisces about his beloved as he gazes at the ruins. In an attempt to overcome his loss, the poet begins a journey through the desert with his female camel. He usually describes the different aspects of desert life, as well as sings the praises of his camel in elaborate

23. Tobi, Between Hebrew and Arabic Poetry, 5.
25. cf Decter, Iberian Jewish Literature.
26. c.f. Arberry, Arabic Poetry, 1-27, and Badawi, Critical Introduction, 2-6
27. Scheindlin, WWD, 49.
and loving details. In last section of the poem, the poet concludes by praising either himself, his tribe, or his patron.28

The qaṣīda contains both monorhyme and monometer. Further, each couplet is a self-contained unit, and a line that runs over to the next couplet is considered flawed. The poet had a great variety of meters from which to choose, however, as mentioned, once he chose a meter it had to be maintained throughout the entire poem. Scholars believe that the earliest meter the Arab poets invented is rajaz, which is said to capture the rhythm of a camel lifting and lowering her feet. The pre-Islamic poets favored longer meters, but under the Muslim empire, as they began to write more martial themed poetry, as well as wine and love poems, they also began to use short meters.29

After the 10th century Jewish secular poetry (as well as liturgical) was written exclusively in biblical Hebrew.30 Abraham Halkin speculates a reason for this:

Poetry among the Arabs served the purpose of displaying the beauties of their language, and they strove to emulate one another in elegance of style and extravagance of metaphor. The finest example of style was believed by them-- as a principle of faith rather than as a conviction, one feels certain-- to exist in the Qurʾān. At this the Jews balked. Their pride in their own language and in their own Bible not only restrained them from displaying the beauties of Arabic and its masterwork, but also impelled them to do for Hebrew as their neighbors did for their tongue.31

Hebrew secular poetry -- created in the East and controversially introduced into Andalusia by Dunash ben Labrat32-- is an emblem of a resurgence of Jewish national pride. In competition with the “inimitability” of the Arabic Qurʾān, according to Ross Brann, Jews began to view the Hebrew Bible as a “Jewish Qurʾān”. As the Andalusian poets used biblical Hebrew as a linguistic method to promote Jewish culture in Andalusia, the revival of biblical Hebrew had a dual significance: on the one hand, it indicated that the Jews embraced Arabic norms and social life

28. c.f. Arberry, Arabic Poetry, 1-27, and Badawi, Critical Introduction, 2-6
29. c.f. Arberry, Arabic Poetry, 1-27, and Badawi, Critical Introduction, 2-6
30. Tobi, Proximity and Distance, 31-64.
32. Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 10, 13.
sufficiently to emulate it in their poetry, but on the other hand, it also signifies a resistance to the Arab language, and a competitive renunciation of what N. Allony\(^{33}\) labels ‘arabiyya (‘Arabism’). According to Allony, the revival of biblical Hebrew represents the Andalusian Jewish poets’ conscious competition with Arabic poetry and language, and it signifies Jewish dissatisfaction with the political, religious, and cultural hegemony of Islam.\(^{34}\)

Saadiah Gaon (882-942), the leader of the intellectual circle of Jews in Babylonia--spurred by the polemical Karaite claims that rabbinic Judaism relied more heavily on the “counterfeit” oral Torah (torah ba’al peh) than on revealed scripture-- initiated the revival of biblical Hebrew instead of the rabbinic Hebrew that was used in the piyyuṭim.\(^{35}\) In the first half of the tenth century, Saadiah not only translated the Hebrew Bible into Arabic (adding his own commentary), but in order to rectify the general ignorance of the Hebrew language, Saadiah innovated the discipline of biblical Hebrew grammar, using terminologies and analytical tools developed by Arab grammarians in Basra and Kufa in the eighth century. And in an introduction to the Hebrew edition of his dictionary, the Egron\(^{36}\) he regrets the neglect of the Hebrew language. During this same period, other scholars were making new grammatical discoveries linking the Hebrew and Arabic languages. For instance, in 1000 Judah Hayyuj discovered that all Hebrew words-- similar to Arabic-- have a trilateral root. And building on Hayyuj’s discovery, Jonah ibn Janah (c. 10th century) composed a grammar and lexicon of biblical Hebrew. Hayyuj’s and Ibn Janah’s works were both composed in Judeo-Arabic.\(^{37}\) Dunash ben Labrat (d. \textit{circa} 990) was a student of Saadiah in Babylonia when he first constructed secular Hebrew poetry that used not only the Arabic rhymes and metrical structures, but secular themes as well. Dunash introduced his

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34. Brann, \textit{Compunctious Poet}, 16; 23-58; Tanenbaum, \textit{Contemplative Soul}, 7-8; Tobi, \textit{Proximity and Distance}, 55-58;
36. The second edition was in Arabic
new style of Hebrew poetry to the intellectuals of Andalusia, where it was met with hesitation, and he was met with anger. His main critic was the poet and lexicographer Menaḥem ibn Sarūq (910-970), who, although he agreed with Dunash’s use of biblical Hebrew, strongly believed that the study of the Hebrew bible and biblical Hebrew not be linked with foreign knowledge (in other words, with Arabic lexicography and grammar). Although Dunash eventually emerged triumphant from these vicious polemics, there remained proponents for both sides of the debate in the Andalusian intellectual community. In the 11th century, for instance, Isaac ibn Barūn wrote a book furthering the collaboration of the study of Hebrew and Arabic, Kitāb al-muwāzana bayn al-lugha al-‘ibrāniyya wa-l-‘arabiyya (The Book of Comparison between the Hebrew and Arabic Languages), while on the other hand, both Abraham ibn Ezra and Joseph Qimḥi introduced their works by apologizing for the discipline of Hebrew linguistics.

38. Ibn Sarūq, living in Cordoba before Dunash’s arrival, served as the Hebrew secretary to Hasdai ibn Shaprūṭ (905-975), a prominent Jewish courtier, physician, and statesman active in the courts of the Umayyad caliphs ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III and al-Ḥākim II. Ibn Sarūq published a lexicon of biblical Hebrew entitled Sefer ha-piptōnūm (The Book of Interpretations), in which he arranged the Hebrew words according to their roots, and next to each word cited verses illustrating the word’s meaning and use. He understood Hebrew words to be composed of between one and four root letters. He also sought to explain hapax legomena words that only appear once in the Hebrew Bible through examining their context. Ibn Sarūq and his followers believed that Jews had once possessed knowledge of biblical Hebrew grammar, however it had been lost in the exile. They stressed that the solution lay not in turning to Arabic for enlightenment on the Jewish scriptures, but in drawing upon the Hebrew piyyuṭin, which represented a living tradition the Andalusian poets could draw upon. Dunash, newly arrived to Cordoba and seeking prominence in Hasdai ibn Shaprūṭ’s circle, wrote a critical response to Ibn Sarūq’s lexicon, entitled Tʾshūbōt (Answers), in which he attacked Ibn Sarūq’s grammatical analyses, challenging many of his verbal root identifications. Dunash agreed with Ibn Sarūq’s evaluation that Hebrew verbs are composed of one, two, three, four, or five root letters, but he disagreed with his religious views, claiming that Ibn Sarūq introduced heretical views into his interpretations of verses. The disagreement between the two poets became a prominent controversy, as disciples of the two scholars exchanged polemical letters upholding their leaders’ views and exposing the flaws in the others’ thoughts and arguments. Within the confines of their heated scholarly debate, Dunash and Ibn Sarūq vied for political favor in Ibn Shaprūṭ’s circle. For instance, Ibn Sarūq’s disciples accused Dunash of violating the rules of Hebrew grammar with his employment of Arabic meters in poetry, claiming that Hebrew poets would have to violate rules of Hebrew (such as altering accents) in order to accommodate the Arabic meters. The poet Isaac Ibn Kapron accused Dunash of destroying the holy Hebrew language by forcing upon it “foreign meters” (Ashtor, Jews of Moslem Spain, 244-263; Brann, Compunctious Poet, 28-32; Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 13.)
C. Themes and Settings in Secular Poetry

The Hebrew poets of Andalusia began to follow Dunash’s example, writing poetry in pure biblical Hebrew using Arabic quantitative meter, based on the alternation of long and short vowels, rhyme schemes, as well as rhetorical styles, such as playing with homonyms (tajnīs). They composed verses in both the qaṣīda and in the strophic muwashshah forms; these verses became so popular that they were even incorporated into the religious piyyuṭim. The new secular Hebrew poetry did not replace the piyyuṭ but, according to Brann, competed with it for attention and literary prestige. The Hebrew poets also incorporated the themes and motifs of Arabic poetry into their own verse, including festive themes of wine, erotic themes of love, describing courtly garden settings, and philosophical Neoplatonic themes regarding the plight of the soul. The genres of wine poetry and death poetry will be briefly discussed, as they are relevant in the following discussions of poetry.

i. Wine Poetry (khamriyyāt)

The genre of poetic wine poetry arose among the aristocracy of the Abbasid empire, from whom it was adopted by the Arab poets of Andalusia, who were later emulated by the Andalusian Hebrew poets. Wine parties, usually occurring in enclosed palace gardens, were common among literary Andalusian circles. During their gatherings, carousers enjoyed the performances of dancers and singers who were accompanied either by themselves of by a small musical ensemble composed of various instruments, while conversing about literature and poetry, and reciting and discussing their own and others’ poetry. The poets also composed poetry based around the institution of the wine party. These wine poems fall into two categories: descriptive and meditative. In the former, poets recount the wine gathering, describing the wine (with details such

39. Scheindlin, WWD, 3-17 and Scheindlin, Gazelle, introduction.
40. Brann, Compunctious Poet, 7-8.
41. Scheindlin, Gazelle, introduction.
42. For more on descriptions of gardens in medieval Hebrew poetry, see Decter, Iberian Jewish Literature, chapter 1 “Space: Landscape and Transition”, and chapter 3 “Imagery: The Protean Garden”.
as its age, smell, and color), the cup (usually made of crystal), the jug that fills the cup, the table upon which the jug rests, the young male *saki*, the performers, and the surrounding garden, room, or patio. The meditative poems deal not with the external aspects of the party, but with the poet’s conflicted emotions as he becomes intoxicated: on one hand, he appreciates the sounds and smells, sights of the performers, and the company of his friends, but on the other, he is gripped by the fleetingness of beauty, the transient nature of his friendships, and the coming night or winter. Wine poetry is usually short (four or five lines), and is composed in classical quantitative meter, in a verse well-suited for recitation at a wine party.  

**ii. Death and Asceticism (zuhdiyyät)**

Medieval literary culture contained a type of poet, whom Ross Brann dubs the “compunctious” poet, who in his youth wrote frivolous verse, but who in his old age repented of his wayward ways, regretted his youthful wayward poetry, and turned to a pious life. There are countless examples of Arab and Hebrew poets who underwent a similar spiritual change in mid life. Consider for example the Arabic Basran philologist AbūʾAmr ibn al-ʿAlʿā (d. 770) who allegedly burned his works of poetry, or the Arabic poet Khalaf al-Aḥmar (d. 796) who vowed never to compose another poem, as well as the Hebrew poet Moses ibn Ezra who deeply regretted his youthful erotic poetry, and the Hebrew poet Judah Halevi who also vowed never to compose another poem. In fact, the *sins of youth* (*ḥattot neʿurim*) was a traditional Jewish motif. In medieval Hebrew poetry, life is composed of two stages: youth and old age, the transition usually occurring when the poet was around forty years old, when his hair started to whiten. In their old age, poets who were affected by regret either contemplated their lost youth and lamented life’s brevity and oncoming death or turned to a life of devotion and piety. In the latter, the poet often felt it was his duty to educate his reader on his own mortality, so that he would be continually

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conscious of it, and will direct all his actions towards self-improvement. This led to the development of a new type of poetry, the *tokheha*, or poem of rebuke.\textsuperscript{44}

One reason many Jewish poets were so concerned with ideas of mortality and self-improvement stems from the influence of Neoplatonism among medieval Islamic philosophers.\textsuperscript{45} More specifically, these philosophers were influenced by translations of the Greek philosopher Plotinus (c. 204-270), most notably through *The Theology of Aristotle*, a paraphrase of several books of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, and Proclus (412-485), whose work *Elements of Theology* was transmitted to Jewish intellectuals in the ninth and tenth centuries through its Arabic translation, *Kalām fī Mahd al-Khaīr*.\textsuperscript{46} Plotinus is notable for having joined the Platonic notion of the immortal soul with Aristotle’s psychology. Plotinus was not himself a monotheist, but his theories were adapted by scholars who adhered to the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.\textsuperscript{47} The Islamic philosophers adapted Neoplatonic beliefs concerning the soul to the scripture of the Qur’ān and the tenets of Islam, and such prominent Muslim philosophers as al-Kindī (d. 873), al-Fārābī (d. 950), and Averroës (d. 1198), supported ideas of the dualism of the soul and body. They believed that the soul alone survives death, while the body perishes.\textsuperscript{48} Although the medieval Arabs did not know Plotinus by name, it is through various Arabic syntheses of his major work, *The Enneads*, that they acquired their views of body and soul.\textsuperscript{49}

The Neoplatonic theory of soul, and its purification, can be summarized briefly as follows. The soul, which is separate from the body, temporarily resides in the human body; however its home is in the celestial realms. The soul originates from these celestial realms, and as

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\textsuperscript{44} Chapter one: “The Compunctions Poet”, in Brann, *Compunctious Poet*, 9-22; Scheindlin, *WWD*, 135-141.
\textsuperscript{45} Scheindlin, *Gazelle*, introduction.
\textsuperscript{47} Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 2.
\textsuperscript{48} Maruf, “Allama Iqbal on ‘Immortality’”, 373.
\textsuperscript{49} Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 2.
such it is incorporeal and immortal. It descends into the physical world, and then is joined with
the mortal body. However, the soul yearns to return to the celestial realms, and the body is often
viewed as a prison that entraps the soul in the physical realm.\textsuperscript{50} It was believed that if people were
very disciplined, their souls could strive to regain a level of intellectual perfection; the peak of
human perfection was viewed as attaining absolute intellectual truths. Further, because the body
and soul are two separate entities, the soul lives on after the death of the body.

Both Arab and Hebrew poets incorporated Neoplatonic themes into their poetry. More
specifically, the poets incorporated themes of the soul’s entrapment and the duality between the
soul and the body into their poems. The poets often personified the soul as a woman, who is
“attracted to the body; polluted by evil and crude matter; divorced from the intellect-- the
menstruating, sinful woman soul is called upon to purify herself, to rid herself from her
femaleness os that she can be re-allied with the elevated male elements of Creation.”\textsuperscript{51}

These Neoplatonic themes are prominent in the following two chapters dealing with life
and death, especially in the poetry of ibn Gabirol, a strong adherent and contributor to the ideas of
Neoplatonism. The female soul, entrapped in the body, is a prevalent theme in his poetry, as is the
notion of the soul’s edification. In contrast, as we shall see below, Neoplatonic themes are notably
absent from the poetry of Ibn Naghrela’s, who remained unaffected by the Neoplatonic ideology
seeping into medieval Andalusia popular thought.

\textsuperscript{50} Tanenbaum, \textit{Contemplative Soul}, 1.
\textsuperscript{51} Rosen, \textit{Unveiling Eve}, 17.
Chapter 2: Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel ibn Naghrela

The differing views of contemporary Andalusian poets Ibn Naghrela and Ibn Gabirol on how to live reflect their divergent understandings of death: while both accept death as inevitable, Ibn Gabirol views death as a new beginning, while Ibn Naghrela sees it as a finite end.52 The two poets had contact with each other, as Ibn Naghrela was Ibn Gabirol’s patron, but based on their poetry scholars speculate that they had a falling out.53 The contrasting views held by the two poets not only represent their personal philosophical stances, but they illuminate the religious and philosophical ideas circulating in medieval Andalusia. Solomon ibn Gabirol’s poetry reflects his adherence to medieval Neoplatonic themes, which were filtered into Jewish culture through Arabic translations of the writings of Plotinus (c. 204-270) and Proclus (412-485), whose work *Elements of Theology* was transmitted to Jewish intellectuals in the ninth and tenth centuries through its Arabic translation, *Kalām fī Mahd al-Khaīr*.54 Unlike Ibn Gabirol and his other contemporary Andalusian poets, Ibn Naghrela evinces little trace of Neoplatonic influence. On the contrary, as Tanenbaum says, Ibn Naghrela “enjoyed recognition and the material wealth of his life”.55 This chapter explores the lives of both poets, emphasizing their poetry and their beliefs.

52. cf. Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 56.
Solomon ibn Gabirol

_i. Life_

Solomon ibn Gabirol (c. 1021-c. 1057) was a prominent but reclusive member of Andalusian Jewish intellectual society. What little is known biographically of him is mostly gleaned from statements in his poetry which scholars have interpreted as reflective of his real life circumstances. He was born Shelomoh ben Yehudah ibn Gabirol in Malaga in either 1021 or 1022 to parents who had no known rank or status. It is speculated that his family joined the Jewish refugees who fled the areas surrounding Córdoba following the collapse of Umayyad caliphate in 1031; however all that is certain is that at some time Ibn Gabirol and his family moved north to Saragossa. Here in Saragossa, the young Ibn Gabirol was educated in the intellectually stimulating environment of a crossroads of Arabic and Hebrew centers of learning. After the death of his father while he was still a young man, Ibn Gabirol was cared-for by Yequitiel ibn Hasan al-Mutawakkil ibn Qabrun, a Jewish noble in the Saragossan court. By the age of 16, Ibn Gabirol was already composing his own poetry, which Peter Cole dubs “accomplished”, and by the age of 19 he was already writing poems Cole describes as “important”.

In 1039, his patron Yequitiel was killed due to court intrigues, and Ibn Gabirol, who was greatly affected by the tragic injustice of his friend’s death, composed poems commemorating his friend. Zinberg suggests that as a youth Ibn Gabirol was already disgusted with life’s profanity and vanities. However, there is evidence that he did participate in courtly society, and composed at least one wine poem. Especially after the death of Yequitiel, Ibn Gabirol grew more sorrowful, and he began to withdraw from his friends. The feeling of alienation only increased as Ibn Gabirol developed his spiritual beliefs, and as he rejected the profane world more and more.

withdrew, Ibn Gabirol’s poetry suggests that he resented his failed social aspirations, and in his poetry he often complains bitterly about his social frustrations. After losing his patron in 1039 and his mother in 1045, Ibn Gabirol left Saragossa and, notes Cole, most scholars assume his next destination was Granada in order to try to enter Samuel ibn Naghrela’s intellectual circle. By the time Ibn Gabirol arrived in Granada, Ibn Naghrela was already a notable figure in Jewish Andalusian society: he was already nagid of the Jewish community in Granada, prime minister of the Muslim ta’ifa party under the Berber king, and commander-in-chief of the Granadan army. The two poets collaborated for a time, but by the time Ibn Gabirol was in his twenties they had ceased being friends; the exact reasons for this hostility are unknown. From his poetry, scholars have deduced that Ibn Gabirol was physically weak and lived on the fringes of society, mostly on his own, where he spent much time devoting himself to philosophy. Decter further describes the way scholars --from images in his poetry-- perceive Ibn Gabirol’s reclusive life:

Ibn Gabirol is a poet believed to have been frustrated in love. Scholars generally find his love poems unconvincing and unrealistic and believe that he led a lonely life, deprived of intimacy and social companionship. He was haughty, acerbic, afflicted with a disfiguring disease, and lacking in social grace, generally incapable of personal or romantic intimacy.

Although Ibn Gabirol turned his back on the profane world of the courtiers, he did not reject Hebrew secular verse, nor did he resent the Arabic influences on Hebrew poetry. In addition to his

61. Such as in his poem " considers a stranger, an outsider,
Living where the ostriches dwell,
Surrounded by cheats and fools,
Though he is wise as Taḥkemoni,
[...]
By a people whose ancestors were too low
To be sheep dogs for my flocks."

64. Scheindlin, WWD, 12.
65. Decter, Iberian Jewish Literature, 76.
diwan of both secular and liturgical poetry, Ibn Gabirol additionally composed non-poetic texts which incorporate themes of medieval Neoplatonism. His magnum opus Meqqor Hayyim Source of Life, was extremely influential among Christian philosophers, although it was barely referenced in Jewish works. He wrote as well as a brief ethical treatise entitled Tikun Midot ha-Nefesh On the Improvement of Moral Qualities. In one of his poems, Ibn Gabirol mentions other texts he wrote-- including philosophical, linguistic, scientific, and religious texts-- which are now lost; other medieval scholars also quote his biblical commentary, which is likewise lost.66

ii. Poetry

Ibn Gabirol’s poetry reflects his Neoplatonic understanding of both life and death. His poems, writes Tanenbaum, “express a strong sense of individuality”.67 In contrast to the poetry of Samuel ibn Naghrela, which conveys the poet’s vivacity for life and interest and investment in the material world, Ibn Gabirol’s poetry, writes Tanenbaum, “reveals an ardent commitment to metaphysical study.” She continues, “Indeed, the incorporation of speculative ideas into these poems was one of his most significant innovations”.68 Ibn Gabirol wrote liturgical piyyutim that incorporated classical styles while also using pure biblical Hebrew in the style of his contemporary Andalusian poets. His piyyutim were thematically centered around the spiritual journey of the soul seeking freedom from the body, as Ibn Gabirol explored the relationship between the individual and God. He combined a religious sentiment of devoting one’s life to God with philosophical notions of the soul in his poetry. This duality is exemplified in Ibn Gabirol’s rhymed-prose poem Keter Malkhut, in which he “combines sublime praise for God with philosophical contemplation and penitential themes”.69 In his poetry, Ibn Gabirol writes of death as a release from life-- if one has lived a pious and devotional life, death is a joyous occasion.

67. Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 57.
68. Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 56.
69. Ibid, 56-58.
Samuel ibn Naghrela

i. Life

Samuel ibn Naghrela was born in 993 CE in the Andalusian city of Córdoba, (in what is now southern Spain), during a period of political and religious upheaval for the region of the Iberian Peninsula, and especially for the Jewish population. In the 11th century, Islamic rule of Andalusia was replaced by taifa kingdoms (miniature states). Ibn Naghrela’s family, originally from the town of Merida in what is now western Spain, along with Merida’s entire Jewish population, was exiled to southern Spain by the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus, according to accounts by the contemporary historian Abraham ibn Daud. Thus, growing up in the intellectual Jewish community of Andalusia, Ibn Naghrela was a product of the collaboration between Jews and Muslims there, and he accordingly received an education in both the Jewish and Arabic traditions. He studied halakhah (Jewish law) under Hanokh b. Moses of Córdoba, a leading authority in Jewish liturgy in tenth century Córdoba. Although he was well-versed in Arabic literatures and traditions, Ibn Naghrela still took immense pride in his self-claimed Davidic descent and Jewish origin. In fact, as Weinberger notes, he viewed his Davidic ancestry as his entitlement to rule the Jewish community in Spain.70 In 1013, the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba, the second of four Islamic Caliphates after the death of the prophet Muhammad, was overthrown by Berber forces.71 In this year, Ibn Naghrela fled Córdoba and opened a spice shop in Malaga, a port city of southern Andalusia. Historian Ibn Daud relates an anecdote describing how Ibn Naghrela progressed from working as a merchant to his appointment on the staff of the Berber ruler of Granada, King Ḥabbus:

Since his shop happened to adjoin the courtyard of Ibn al-ʿArif-- who was the Katib of King Ḥabbus b. Maksan, the Berber king of Granada-- the Katib’s maidservant would ask him to write letters for her to her master, the Vizier Abu’l-Qasim ibn al-ʿArif. When the latter received the letters, he was astounded at the learning they reflected. Consequently,

70. Weinberger, Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain., 1-17; and Habermann, “Samuel Hanagid”
71. Cole, Selected Poems of Shmuel Hanagid, xvii.
when, after a while, this Vizier, Ibn al-'Arif, was given leave by his King Ḥabbus to return to his home in Malaga, he inquired among the people of his household: “Who wrote the letters which I received from you?” They replied: “A certain Jew of the community of Cordova, who lives next door to your courtyard, used to do the writing for us.” The Katib thereupon ordered that R. Samuel ha-Levi be brought to him at once, and he said to him: “It does not become you to spend your time in a shop. Henceforth you are to stay at my side.” He thus became the scribe and counsellor of the counsellor to the King.\textsuperscript{72}

In 1020, after becoming the assistant to vizier Abu al-Abbas, Ibn Naghrela became a vizier himself. The Andalusian Jews, who were primarily engaged in agriculture, manufacture, and handicraft, bestowed upon Ibn Naghrela the title of Nagid, or chief dignitary, in 1027. The death of Berber ruler King Ḥabbus in 1038 resulted in a struggle for power between his two sons, Bādis and Bullugin. With Ibn Naghrela’s aid, Bādis emerged victorious, and he appointed Ibn Naghrela as his vizier and leading influence. As vizier, Ibn Naghrela was now not only the commander of Granada’s Muslim army, but he was also the only Jew to hold a position of power above Muslims, Berbers, and slaves. During the period of years from 1038 to 1056, Granada was engaged in constant warfare with Arab Seville, and Ibn Naghrela also spent those years engaged in various battles. His victories were applauded by the Andalusian Jews, for instance: the battle of 1038-1039, in which his army emerged victorious against the Slavic ruler of Almeria, a province in what is now southeastern Spain, was celebrated with Purim festivities by the Jews of Granada, he writes in a poem. Throughout the decade of the 1050’s, Ibn Naghrela and his army progressed throughout Andalusia, fighting Seville and her armies. He met his death in 1056, while still on a military campaign; his son Jehoseph, to whom he dedicated many of his poems, took over his position.\textsuperscript{73} During the years in which he lead Granada’s army, Ibn Naghrela helped establish Granada as one of the wealthiest and most powerful of the thirty-eight \textit{taifa} states in Andalusia.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibn Daud, \textit{Sefer ha-Qabbalah} (trans. Gerson D. Cohen), 72-73.
\textsuperscript{73} Weinberger, \textit{Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain}, 1-17 and Habermann, “Samuel Hanagid”, 776-777.
\textsuperscript{74} Cole, \textit{Selected Poems of Shmuel Hanagid}, xvii.
Ibn Naghrela recounts many of his military campaigns in his *diwan* (corpus) of poetry, making him the first medieval poet to introduce themes of war and battle into Hebrew literature.\(^75\)

**ii. Poetry**

Weinberger notes that in 11th century Granada, every educated person composed poetry (including Ibn Naghrela’s children, who studied poetry, and who also arranged and copied their father’s poems). Some Jewish poets prior to Ibn Naghrela, although they composed Hebrew poetry in an Arabic style, had reservations about completely abandoning the styles and themes of liturgical Hebrew poetry; however Ibn Naghrela did not hesitate to use Arabic quantitative meters and secular themes in his poetry.\(^76\) He both translated poems from Arabic, and composed several poems in Arabic and Aramaic.\(^77\) This is significant as it illustrates his rejection of liturgical and religiously themed Hebrew poetry, and his embrace of new Arabic influences. In the words of Peter Cole, in Ibn Naghrela’s poetry, the “great antagonism between Arab and Jew is woven into a particularly supple and at the same time metallic-- possibly defensive-- sort of beauty.”\(^79\) Although Ibn Naghrela embraced Arabic literary styles, he did not support the religion of Islam.\(^80\) Also despite the fact that he supported a change in traditional Hebrew poetry, and introduced themes of war into Hebrew verse, Ibn Naghrela was committed to Jewish belief: he was one of the leading authorities of rabbinic studies in Andalusia, and he denounced orthodox Jews who debased the teachings of rabbinic sages.\(^81\) His poems reflect many biblical allusions and

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75. Weinberger, *Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain*, 1-17
76. c.f. Dunash b. Labrat’s poem "מִי יִתְנֹא " in Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1: 34, in which he questions the values of a secular lifestyle.
77. Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 55; Cole, *Selected Poems of Shmuel Hanagid*, xvii
80. Weinberger, *Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain*, 1-17 and Habermann, “Samuel Hanagid”, 777-776. Scholars have also attributed to Ibn Naghrela a criticism of the Qur’an, which was challenged by the contemporary Arab historian and philosopher Ibn Hazm. Sarah Stroumsa shows that this work is misattributed, and the work against which Ibn Hazm argues is actually the lost *Kitâb al-dâmîgh* written by the ninth-century heretic Ibn al-Râwandi (Stroumsa, “Jewish Polemics”, 244-245).
religious sensitivities. Ibn Naghrela used the technique *shibbuts*-- the interspersion of biblical passages with poetic verses. The concept of *shibbuts* was adapted from the Arabic tradition of *iktibas*-- the interspersion of Qur’anic passages within poetic verses. By adapting this Arabic technique into Hebrew poetry, Ibn Naghrela was able to achieve a unique synthesis of the two traditions. Peter Cole describes his talent: “working this elaborate weave of surfaces, [Ibn Naghrela] was able to fuse Hebrew and Arabic, given and personal, lyric and epic dimensions in what we now thing of as his signature manner”.

Ibn Naghrela wrote three compilations of poetry: *Ben Tehillim* “The Little Book of Psalms”, *Ben Mishlei* “The Little Book of Proverbs”, and *Ben Qohelet* “The Little Book of Ecclesiastes”. These collections do not contain philosophical poems; Tanenbaum describes the latter two as containing “pithy political advice and universal truths about mortality”. Ibn Naghrela’s poems are devoted to themes of wine, love, glory, death, friendship, mourning, mortality, and illness. He viewed himself as the ‘David of his age’, and many of his poems echo the martial and lyrical spirit of second Samuel and the Davidic psalms. Ross Brann notes that Ibn Naghrela is driven by a grand vision of himself, and that “at times, he seems obsessed by his own unique career as a man of letters, politician, and Jewish communal leader”. Ibn Naghrela’s view of himself as a new sort of David is strengthened by his many references to his Levitic descent. In the opinion of Ross Brann, Ibn Naghrela believed his own military exploits and prominent position of power to be legitimized by Jewish history.

82. Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 55.
84. Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 55.
88. Ibid., 53.
Beliefs

i. Contemporary Beliefs

In classical rabbinic Judaism, the congregation, and not the individual, was the focus of prayer. The congregation itself would not utter the words of the prayers, but a precentor spoke on behalf of the entire congregation. He would usually speak in the first person plural, and would incorporate shared concerns and collective phrases, included in the often anonymously written *piyyutim*. These *piyyutim* did not include biographical references to the author, and only occasionally did they refer to the assembled congregation.\(^{89}\) The emphasis in these prayers and gatherings was thus communal.

With the advent of philosophical sensibilities into Judaism, increased emphasis upon the individual soul became evident. Influenced by both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian sources, medieval Jewish philosophers began to emphasize the “rational” component of the human being, and in order to achieve knowledge of God, philosophers claimed that humans must perfect their rational faculty in order to achieve intellectual perfection. Philosophers perceived the soul’s attainment of knowledge as constituting true happiness, believing that if the soul comprehended the truths of the divine world while still attached to the body, then when released it would return to the divine world more easily. Once the soul returned and achieved union with the One, it would enjoy eternal happiness in contemplation of the divine.\(^{90}\) Influenced as well by the Sufi tradition of *zuhd* poetry, Jewish liturgical prayers began to adopt more personal tones, and addressed the individual rather than the congregation. For the first time, Jewish poets wrote prayers intended for private devotion. In these new poems, the poet might refer to specific biographical details about himself, as well as to his own personal ideas and opinions.\(^{91}\)

\(^{90}\) Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 21-22.
\(^{91}\) Scheindlin, *Gazelle*, 22.
ii. Beliefs of Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel ibn Naghrela

As noted in the introduction, and as seen in the biographical notes above, the theme of regret does not play a prominent role in the work of either Ibn Gabirol or ibn Naghrela. This seems to be largely due to their individual relationships with Neoplatonic thought. Ibn Gabirol incorporated Neoplatonic elements into his core philosophical beliefs, and thus withdrew from the profane world, focusing on his soul’s redemption. He was, in a sense, at the avant garde of Jewish intellectual thought in his time, combining his deep-rooted Jewish religious beliefs with the philosophical ideas that were circulating at the time. He and his successors combined religion and philosophy both in their daily life and in their liturgical piyyutim. Ibn Gabirol was particularly gripped by the image of the soul and its release from the human body. However, as notes Tanenbaum: “it was not simply the plot [of the soul’s escape] that attracted them. The odyssey of the soul afforded them with a crucial vehicle for exploring the human relationship with God and provided a key to questions of individual poetry and spirituality”.

Ibn Gabirol believed that despite the impassioned and sinful desires of the body, the soul remains inherently pure. He identifies the rabbinical world to come with the soul’s release and individual immortality, thus combining classical Jewish and philosophical motifs. When the soul is released, its reward is intellect and repose. However, these rewards are only bestowed upon the deserving soul, and so one must cultivate the purity of their soul during his lifetime.

Ibn Naghrela on the other hand was unconcerned with the plight of his soul after his death. He enjoyed material wealth, and because of his interest in the physical rather than in the spiritual world, he viewed death as the end of a physical existence, regarding it with fear. Scheindlin notes that he wrote “for the sheer pleasure of [his] macabre fantasy of death”.

Naghrele’s poems do not evince a Neoplatonic influence, and do not share ibn Gabirol’s concern with spiritual purification.

The next two chapters examine a selection of poems that articulate the themes of death and life. The poems—several of which are liturgical, although most are secular—were selected on the basis of their thematic contents. They represent different stages in both poets’ lives, as well as present glimpses into their different poetic collections. Ibn Gabirol’s two poems on death were written to commemorate the death of his father and his patron, respectively. One of Ibn Naghrela’s poems on death was composed after the death of his brother Isaac, and the other reflects his fears about his own death. Ibn Gabirol’s two poems on life are both liturgical *reshut* written in exultation of God and the soul. Ibn Naghrela’s two poems on life are both secular; one taken from his collection *Ben Qohelet*, and the second categorized⁹⁵ among his poems on the subject of wine.

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⁹⁵. by Jefim Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:79
Chapter 3: On Death

This chapter examines poems by Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel ibn Naghrela that deal with the theme of death. Solomon ibn Gabirol’s poem ‘יִחֲא לֵבֵת (Dweller of the Mundane World) is not only a lament for death, but is also a celebration of the soul’s release which death initiates. The poem explores the soul’s ascent to the splendors of heaven as she is released from the body in which she was held captive. And in his poem ‘ְֶל-וֹלֶם יָאָוִים (Go Forth to Those Who Say), which is a consideration of time’s finitude and a reflection on certain demise, ibn Gabirol sees the death of his patron and friend Yequiel ibn Ḥasan as a sign that time and the world will also end one day. In the poem ‘הֶיְהִתֲה בָּבְבִיִּים תֶָוָמ הָרָוִג (Will You Have Strength When Death Comes), Ibn Naghrela forecasts a cynical view of his own death, painting a picture in which all the material wealth he has amassed in life becomes worthless and where his friends abruptly transition from mourning at his tomb to greedily squabbling over his possessions. And his poem ‘סָיֲה יִניֵבּ יֶָניֵבוּ (Is There a Sea Between You and Me?) is an elegy he composed for the death of his brother Isaac, in which he realizes that he cannot reach his brother and that he will remain separated from him until his own eventual death. In this poem Ibn Naghrela displays death as an insurmountable barrier dividing the dead from the living.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol

The analysis of the following two poems shows that on the one hand Ibn Gabirol accepts death as inevitable and reflects on life’s brevity. On the other hand he also regards it as a new beginning and celebration of the soul’s release.
Ibn Gabirol wrote this poem on the occasion of the death of his father Hasan ibn Hiyon. Although it is a lament, the poem also serves as a consolation for death; throughout, ibn Gabirol stresses the soul’s immortality, and advises his reader not to fear death. In addition to my own observations, the following analysis considers helpful interpretations of several lines by Jeffim Schirmann, Shulamit Elizur, and Israel Levin.

1. Dweller of the Mundane World
ask this world, ask: what is to be the end of her people

2. that she will eat her children--
and they will not eat her bread

3. surely she is called ‘tevel’--
because she and they are as her name

4. yet if the the sons of the mundane world were wise,
they would have advised to lay waste to her

5. if man will know that which I know--
then his heart would be fed up of being with her

6. the mundane world loathed my soul--
and my soul loathed her defect

7. Life is the span of one night,
and here I am when it ends

8. how shall I sleep-- my heart is awake
and my eye rejects rest

9. truly I must chastise,
and impart more wisdom to my soul

10. for my soul’s sake, for she is the one who will live
truly after her body perishes

11. to spend time in the shadow of celestial light,
to delight in the goodness of her supernal bliss

97. Yahalom, “At First Day Light”. (Ibn Gabirol’s corpus includes poems of lament over the deaths of his father, his patron Yequtiel ibn Ḥasan, and other anonymous individuals.)
12. and the soul will also understand the paths of light\textsuperscript{ii}
and she will know the morrow of her day
13. when the soul will depart her body
she will return to God who placed her in a human body
14. she will go up as our friend went up\textsuperscript{iii}--
towards heaven!
15. the deceased\textsuperscript{iv} was the magnificence of his land
and he was the land’s sapphire and her diamond,
16. and her hero and her great one,
and her unbeatable hero and her Zamzum\textsuperscript{vii}
17. and the grape cluster that was very pleasing
from the clusters of her vineyard
18. why did the earth kill him,
she bereaved her mother (תּלֵבֵן)?
19. we buried him and the light darkened,
even though\textsuperscript{vi} the sun was at the time of her heat
20. and if not for the fact that the buriers\textsuperscript{viii} carried
him to his grave\textsuperscript{vii}
the sun\textsuperscript{vii} would have carried him upon her shoulder!
21. we are dwellers of the mundane world
who fell inside her snare\textsuperscript{vi}
22. and indeed our images
are engraved in her impression\textsuperscript{viii}
23. and why should we fear death,
and become very alarmed at its mention?
24. and how will man cry for his soul--
when he is her expiation and her redemption?
25. and why do we despise the glass
when we must drink the cup’s blood?\textsuperscript{xi}

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\textsuperscript{i.} he who chases after the world’s vanities, Schirmann, 
HPSP 1:229, n. 1
\textsuperscript{ii.} without enjoying any good, Schirmann, HPSP 1:229,
n. 2
\textsuperscript{iii.} could also read: they will not fight her fight
\textsuperscript{iv.} Schirmann, HPSP 1:229, n. 3a
\textsuperscript{v.} which means abomination, Schirmann, HPSP 1:229, n.
3b
\textsuperscript{vi.} Schirmann, HPSP 1:229, n. 7
Each *soger* (the second half of the line) of the poem ends with the rhyme ‘רָה’ (‘what’). The ‘ר’ comes from the body of the word, and the ‘ה’ is the possessive suffix ‘her’, which refers to the earth and the soul (both are feminine subjects). The interrogative ‘what’ reiterated in every line recalls the question asked in the poem’s opening line (‘what will become of the earth’s people?’) as the poem explores humanity’s relationship with the material world and with death. The first

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98. Mirsky notes that many poets use a rhyme that is a combination of the body of the word and the end suffix. Often these rhymes use just one letter from the body of the word (Mirsky, “Mashma’ut he-haruz”, 153-154).
section of the elegy (v. 1-9) presents a dreary picture of life in which people grow weary of the abusive earth and in which the ephemerality of time weighs prominently in people’s thoughts. Ibn Gabirol’s representation of the world here is not unique; tevel is frequently personified as a woman, often as a temptress or a whore, but also as a bad mother who is estranged from her children and whose children have an obligation to despise her and to reveal her disgrace.99 The first line begins with a command הָנַשׁ (ask) that is addressed to יִחְאֵב (Dweller of the Mundane World)-- he is commanded to ask the mundane world about the fate of her inhabitants. The words used to denote this-- תְּרַחַא-- recall the prophetic phrase 100, which refers to an eschatological time of peace or punishment. It seems that the earth does not treat her children kindly-- she eats them and they don’t even have the opportunity to eat of her bread. She must eat and kill them, notes Shulamit Elizur, before they have sufficiently enjoyed her pleasures.101 This is the opposite of the invitation that wisdom extends to those devoid of sense (בְּנַהֲרַה לִבּ) to come eat in the house she has just built in Proverbs 9:5.102

In the third line, ibn Gabirol says that the material world (לָב) is aptly named, for the word לָב also means abomination. This word appears several times in Leviticus when impure deeds are labeled as abominable.103 But if people were smart, ibn Gabirol writes in the next verse, they would have destroyed the earth. Elizur notes that if the earth is destroyed, she cannot give birth to more children in order to kill them.104 Indeed, in the fifth line, ibn Gabirol admits that he

99. Levin, Zeman ve-tevel, 72. Levin notes 9 ways in which tevel is used in poetry: 1) to represent the material world; 2) tevel is compared to a jail which entraps good people, or a garden of eden for criminals; 3) as a sweet but false illusion; 4) idea that tevel turns good things bad, “the way of the world is to turn sweet honey to bitter poison” (Samuel ibn Naghrela); 5) the betrayal of the evil earth, which tempts and deceives; 6) tevel is personified as a whore; 7) poets criticize tevel and covet her beauty; 8) man can never be happy in the earth until he has gained equality with her; 9) biblical expressions of tevel. Also see Rosen, Unveling Eve, 14.
100. cf for example Isa 2:2
102. לִבְנֵךְ לָבַתְמוֹ (Come, eat my food).
103. cf Lev 18:23; 20:12
104. Elizur, Shirat ha-hol, 2:332.
knows man’s heart has rejected the earth. But the feeling is mutual, as we see in line 6. This mutual loathing recalls the interactions between Zechariah and some shepherds in 11:8. Ibn Gabirol begins line 7 with a calculation in which all life is equated with the size of a single night. And as a night ends, time too will end-- it is close to death, notes Schirmann.

Ibn Gabirol also examines the idea of the transience of time in his poems commemorating the death of his patron Yequiel ibn Hassan, Go Forth to Those Why Say (ְֶלַּכְּלָה יִשְׁמַוִּוָל) and In Yequiel’s days, Which Have Ended (בְּמִי יְקוּתִיָּל אָשֶׁר נִמְרֶד), in which he concludes that just as Yequiel perished, time also must come to an end. ‘If night’s end parallels the end of time, how can one sleep?’ Ibn Gabirol asks in the eighth line. His heart keeps him awake with dreams but they are not the pleasant dreams of one’s beloved that keeps the sleeper awake in the Song of Songs verse that is referenced. Does the poet here refer to wakeful nights in which he is sunk in his studies, asks Levin? Sleep, he speculates, is for the naïve, while the learned devote their nights to two important obligations: educating and chastising the soul.

In the next section (v 9-14), ibn Gabirol talks about the soul. From the context, it is clear that he refers to the Neoplatonic soul that is distinguishable from the body and which is immortal after its death. His portrayal of the soul is hopeful-- even amidst an abominable world one’s soul can transcend the vulgar. In defiance of the heart and eyes that keep him awake in line 8, the poet determines to chastise his soul in line 9. Ibn Gabirol uses the same word for chastise--לָצִוָּר--as the second Psalm’s admonition addressed to kings and rulers of the earth: ‘וַעֲהַתָה, מִיכֵל מ’

105. ‘וַאֲכָה בַּיּוָת-שֶׁלֶשׁ תָּרָעָם, כְּרֵרָה אָדָע, מַעֲסֶר נַפְשִׁי בָּהָם; גָּוֶּה-נָפִישָׁם בַּיּוָת בִּים.’ (But I lost the three shepherds in one month; then my patience with them was at an end, and they in turn were disgusted with me).
106. Schirmann, HPSP 1:229, n. 7
107. Song of Songs, 5:2 : ‘וַאֲכָה בַּיָּוָת, לָלָלִי עָרוֹ; כְּלַלְוַי דַּוִּים, פַּתָּה-יִלְוַי אָהֹבָה, יִנְחָה יִתְּחַד-יִתְוִי-יִתְנַי יַתוֹצֶּוָּיו; שֶּרֶפַּיָּי-יֵאָהָא, הָלֲחָבָי-יִבָּא (I was asleep, but my heart was wakeful. Hark, my beloved knocks! Let me in, my own, my darling, my faultless dove! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night)
108. Levin, ha-sod ve-ha-yesod, 149.
The rulers must accept discipline in order to serve the Lord, while the poet uses his discipline for edification of his soul. Ibn Gabirol’s portrayal of the duality of the soul as an entity that can survive the body’s death is apparent in the tenth line:

Amot. אמות כלות исכתה / למשה היה איש תחתו ליִכְּשַׂה וּרְסָוִּה, יֵטְפֹשׁ צֶָא (So now, O kings, be prudent; accept discipline, you rulers of the earth!). The rulers must accept discipline in order to serve the Lord, while the poet uses his discipline for edification of his soul. Ibn Gabirol’s portrayal of the duality of the soul as an entity that can survive the body’s death is apparent in the tenth line:

תֶמֱא, רַחַא תַָּּוָה / נַעַמְל אִה רֶשֲׁא הֶיְחִתּ (for the sake of her (my soul) who will live / truly after her body perishes). The word ibn Gabirol uses for body--כם--specifically means the physical body. It appears five times in the Bible, all of them in Daniel. The next several verses (v 11-14) narrate what the soul will do after she departs from the body. Line 11 mentions that she will spend time in לֵצ הרָוֹא, literally shadow of her light. Schirmann notes that this is the light of heaven. The language of this line recalls imagery from Psalm 36: v 8, which talks of hiding in the shadow לֵצ of God’s wing, and v 10, which attests to God’s light Роֹא. The images of light and shadow also recalls the language Ibn Gabirol uses to describe God in his philosophical poem Keter Malkhut:

Keter Malkhut:

The Neoplatonic imagery is clear in verse 13 as the soul leaves her body and returns to God:

בּתֵעְ בוזְעַתּ הּתָּיִּוְג / בֹוּשְתְוּ לֶא רֶשֲׁא הָּמָשִׁג (when she [the soul] will depart her body / she will return to Him [God] who placed her [in a human body]). The last line of this section is a transition to the following section where Ibn Gabirol, still talking of the soul’s ascent, mentions Ibn Hiyon for the first time. This transition-- takhalluf in Arabic-- is a formal feature of Hebrew

109. cf Daniel 3:27, 28; 4:30; 5:21; 7:11; 110. Schirmann, HPSP 1:229, n. 11
111. (How precious is Your faithful care, O God! Mankind shelters in the shadow of Your wings)
112. (With You is the fountain of life; by Your light do we see light).
113. Keter Malkhut, 1: 14-15 (Schirmann, HPSP 1:258. (Translated by Raphael Lowe, in Loewe, Ibn Gabirol, 120.)
and Arabic panegyric poetry. In this line ibn Gabirol equates his friend’s death with the soul’s ascent.

The poem’s next section (v. 14-20) is explicitly about Ibn Hiyon’s death: ibn Gabirol enumerates his father’s attributes and laments his death. He lavishly praises his accomplishments in verses 15, 16, and 17, as he describes him as a champion of the land (designated by the feminine possessive suffix ר on each word). In line 16, Ibn Gabirol emphasizes his friend’s unmatchable strength with the description הָּמוּקְלַא הָּמֻּזְמַזְו (her unbeatable hero and her Zamzum). The word אלכוס only appears one time in the Bible-- in Proverbs 30:31-- in a description of four creatures who carry themselves well: they are the lion, the greyhound, the he-goat, and ‘[...] וֶּלֶמ, םוּקְלַא וֵּמִּע (‘[...] the king whom none dares resist). In addition to this high praise, Ibn Hiyon is also labelled as a Zamzum, the proper name of a nation of giants, who in ancient times dwelled within the borders of the Ammonites but became extinct before the time of Moses. The tone again shifts in v 18, as Ibn Gabirol questions Ibn Hiyon’s death: ‘הָמָּלְו הָלְכִּשׁ /וֹתוֹא /הָמדֲָא /הָלְכָשׁ /הָּמִּא?' (why did the earth kill him / she bereaved her mother (תּלֵב)). He holds the earth (הָמדֲָא) responsible for killing his father, but notes that in doing so, she also deprived her own mother (תּלֵב) of her child. These expressions of bereavement recall the words Samuel speaks to Agag, the Amalekite King, before slaying him.114 In line 19, Ibn Hiyon’s burial is so somber an occasion that the sky darkens even the though the sun is at its zenith. And Ibn Hiyon is so remarkable that even if the buriers were not present to lift him into his grave, the sun herself would have hoisted him upon her shoulders in line 20.

The last section (v 21-25) turns from the specific details of Ibn Hiyon’s death to a more general discussion of mortality. The primary idea in these lines is that since death is inevitable, it

114. ‘וְיִאמֶר שְׁמָטָל–כָּאֲרָה שְׁכֵלָה נַעַשׁ הָרְבּ–כִּנְתּשָׁל שְׁמְשִׁים אָמַר [... ‘(Samuel said: ‘As your sword has bereaved women, so shall your mother be bereaved among women’[...])’ (I Sam 15:33)
should be neither feared nor dreaded. In line 21, ibn Gabirol writes that all people—
(dwellers of the earth)—have fallen into the earth’s snare, recalling Ecclesiastes’ description of
ensnaring women.\(^{115}\) Schirmann understands line 22, in which ibn Gabirol writes that our images
are engraved in the earth’s impression, as a reiteration of the idea that everyone will die.\(^{116}\) Ibn
Gabirol makes a similar comment about the inevitability of death in his lengthy eulogy for his
patron Yequiel. (In Yequiel’s days, Which Have Ended):’
שׁיֵנְכֹלֵבּ (dwellers of the earth)
לֵבֵתּ (You must take heed, you must know that
time prepares people’s graves before they exist).\(^{117}\) He introduces the fatalist idea that the time of
our death is known before we are even born, echoing Sa’adia’s theory of the soul— as stated in his
book of treatises Kitab al-mucktār ft ’l-amānāt wa’l-i’tiqādāt (The Book of Beliefs and
Opinions)—, according to which God creates the soul, appoints it to a certain body, and
determines the length of time (ajal) they will be united, after which God separates them
temporarily before finally reuniting them once more.\(^{118}\) In both poems, ephemeral objects— the
world in one, time in the other—cause humans to perish as well. In the last three lines, Ibn
Gabirol challenges people’s fear of death: ‘וּאֶזֶּה נִמְנַעְתַּ אִנָּא / וּאֵמוּר מֵאָדָא נַתַּפֶּהוּ (and why
should we fear death / and become very alarmed at its mention?). He offers consolation in line
24, claiming that we should not mourn for our souls— for in fact, as Schirmann notes, after we
die, our souls will still have an eternal existence.\(^{119}\) He ends the poem with an acceptance of
death’s inevitability, and he advises his readers to do the same:’
ַעַלִּיְוָו (Now, I find woman more bitter than death; she is all traps, her
hands are fetters and her heart is snares. He who is pleasing to God escapes her, and he who is displeasing
is caught by her).

115. Ecc. 7:26
116. Schirmann, HPSP 1:230, n. 22
117. Solomon ibn Gabirol, ‘(Now, I find woman more bitter than death; she is all traps, her
hands are fetters and her heart is snares. He who is pleasing to God escapes her, and he who is displeasing
is caught by her).
253-255.
(and why do we despise the glass / when we must drink its blood?). Blood, explains Schirmann, should be understood as it is used in Genesis 49:11, as דם-עבנין, blood of grapes.120 This section ends the poem with a note of reassurance-- Ibn Gabirol advises us not to fear death, and he assures us that our souls will live immortally even after our bodies are gone.

ii. 'רְֶל-לָלָםירְֶמְו Go Forth to Those Who Say121

Throughout this poem, Ibn Gabirol considers the idea of the world and time coming to an end. Although in the beginning he presents different viewpoints of the argument, by the end he seems convinced that the death of his patron Yequiel ibn Hasan, for whom this poem was composed, is a sign that the world too will end. His thoughts concerning time’s finitude are common themes in medieval poetry, in which time is often personified as an “evil” or “treacherous” entity which targets men with a vow of evil, and fulfills the vow with disaster.122 Ibn Gabirol didn’t view ibn Hasan--for whom he composed panegyrics with stylized expressions of praise-- as only a wealthy prince, but also as a learned scholar with the ability to deeply understand spiritual ambition. More than just a patron, Ibn Hasan was to Ibn Gabirol an attentive and cherished friend. In 1039, Ibn Hasan was killed due to court intrigues, when nobles who had once been his friends conspired against him. A year after the conspiracy, affairs in the court changed and the same men who had conspired against Ibn Hasan were themselves punished. Ibn Gabirol was greatly affected by the tragic injustice of his friend’s death and it was only after a full year passed and Ibn Hasan’s enemies were punished that he was able to compose poems commemorating his friend.123 Ibn Gabirol composed two poems upon Yequiel’s death, a lengthy

120. Schirmann, HPSP 1:230.
122. Levin, Zeman ve-Tevel, 75-78.
formal elegy of 102 verses and a shorter descriptive poem. The following analysis considers
Israel Levin and Jefim Schirmann’s insightful comments in addition to my own observations.

1. Go forth to those who say, that
time will end and will be completed--

2. The ways of the earth are hidden
from their understanding and their knowledge.

3. You took a sign from heavenly lights
(that) their lights and their time will darken,

4. To which do you pay more attention:
their ascent or to their descent?

5. Reject all this, and be amazed
about Yequiel, who ended.

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i. (plural)
ii. The setting of the sun comes at an appointed time,
which you know. For nothing is permanent, and time
will also come to an end. (Schirmann, HPSP 1:202,
n. 3)

This poem adheres to the consistent monorhyme pattern of the qasīda; each soger ends with סת
(to end’),-- which in some lines is formed from the final word’s suffix and in others is formed
from the word itself125-- the repetition of which achieves the effect of constantly emphasizing
the idea of finitude. Ibn Gabirol begins this poem by talking about the transience of time in line 1--

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125. A main difference between rhymes formed from the suffix and rhymes formed from the body of the
word, notes Mirsky, is that the former has a meaning and the latter usually does not. (Mirsky, ‘Mashma’ut
he-Ḥaruz’, 155). In his article on the meaning of rhyme in Hebrew poetry, Aharon Mirsky notes that at
times the poet will alternate rhymes formed from the word and suffix-rhymes that have the same sound--
when this occurs, the meaning of the rhyme can change throughout the poem. (Ibid., 158.) When ibn
Gabirol uses a suffix- rhyme (vv 2, 3, 4), סת is a suffix of possession meaning ‘theirs’. It refers to different
subjects throughout the poem: the people mentioned in the first stanza and to the lights of the heavens.
The use of the suffix meaning ‘their’ provides a contrast between them and the stark reality of Yequiel’s death.
In the first and last stanzas, סת is a verb meaning ‘to end’.

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echo God’s instructions to Abraham in Genesis 12:1. However instead of being sent forth to another land, the command here is to confront those who say that time will end. The ways of the earth are hidden from those who say this-- אָמְרֵם from line 1-- in the second line. So if those who prophesy the end of time do not understand the ways of the earth, ibn Gabirol’s message is that time will not end. However the tone changes in line 3, as ibn Gabirol attests that in fact nothing lasts, and even time will end-- every day, the lights will darken at the same appointed time. This is clear from a sign, תוא. This word frequently occurs in the Bible to denote a sign from God; however here the sign comes from מּיי (lights), which often denote the lights of the sun and the moon. The idea of these lights darkening also appears in Ezekiel 32:8.

Ibn Gabirol here likens his friend Yequtiel to the concept of time-- his death is proof they both will one day perish.

In line 4 he asks a question: 'הַמְנָעִשּׂתּוֹדַעְי מְלַבָּבֵם מְלַבָּבֵם מְלַבָּב / מְלַבָּב / מְלַבָּב (To which do you pay more attention / their ascent or their descent?). Their (indicated by the possessive suffix ‘מ’) refers to the subject from line 3-- מְלַבָּבֵם. Thus, the question asks: do you pay more attention to the light’s setting or rising? This is a question of perspective: one could see doom with every setting sun, or one could see renewal in every dawn. Rather than provide answers to his questions, in the last line Ibn Gabirol advises his readers to ‘מַמָשֶׂתּוֹדָל (reject all of this). כָל זֹה (all of this) seems to refer to the various quandaries that have surfaced throughout the poem-- will the world end, or won’t it? does time have an ending point? Does the dimming of lights signal the end of time? Which has more gravity, the setting of

126. 'יהוה יקר ה' אל-ארק. ל-ל-ל מְלַבָּבֵם מְלַבָּב ...וֹדַע (The Lord said to Abram,'Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you).
127. Schirmann, HPSP 1:202, n. 3.
128. c.f Gen 4:15; 2Kings 42:28; Isa 7:11
129. c.f Gen 1:14, 16; Ps 74:16.
130. 'כָל מְלַבָּבֵם יאָו בָּשַׁמִּי. אָכָדוֹר ילָו (And all the lights that shine in the sky I will darken above you).
lights or the rising? Regardless of the answers, Ibn Gabirol instructs his readers to be amazed ‘! יֵלֵד יְהוֹתִיאֵל אָשֶׁר תָּמַם (Over Yequtiel who has ended!). The word that ibn Gabirol uses to denote that Yequtiel has ended-- לֵאיִתוּקְי can also mean innocent, such as in Job 8:20: 'ןֶה-לֵא, אֲלָו, סַאְמִי--Surely God does not despise the blameless. The two meanings of the word are important-- not only is Yequtiel dead, but he is dead through no fault of his own. Why are people amazed? The answer, it seems, is that despite the uncertain nature of time, and of the world, Yequtiel has died-- his end is certain, so the end of time is certain as well. This last line echoes a sentiment from Ibn Gabirol’s 102 line elegy over Yequtiel’s death:’יֵמיִלֵאיִתוּקְיָ, וּרָמוּגִנ/תוֹא יִכָּשַח פָּלָחַל וּרָצֻי (In the days of Yequtiel which have ended / there was a sign that the heavens were created to perish). The line is filled with despair, as Ibn Gabirol relates his friend’s death to all humankind.

Samuel ibn Naghrela

These next poems show us that Ibn Naghrela regards death with trepidation as the ultimate end. But he neither advises his reader to prepare for death, nor indicates that he himself is altering his life to prepare for death.

i. ‘וְלָבָב תֶּוָמ הֹרוּבגּ (Will you Have Strength When Death Comes?)

This poem is from Ibn Naghrela’s his secular collection בֵּן קוהָלָה (ben qohelet), which signifies to us from the outset that the poem is not religious--‘but even if we did not know its provenance’, writes Scheindlin about this poem, ‘we could identify it as a secular poem on purely internal literary grounds’. Ibn Naghrela describes his own death in this poem, and as the scene opens after he is already dead, the poem presents a vivid reminder that death awaits all men; as Levin says, ibn Naghrela’s poem emphasizes life’s end, when humans are powerless to defy

death. Ibn Naghrela illustrates a cynical view of death as he deals with the social aspects of dying: the deceased has gone from a man of prominent social standing to a corpse with no social status at all. He realizes that social qualifications and material wealth amount to little in death, but he does not exhort his readers to reform their lives and abandon material pleasures. As Scheindlin says: the poem ‘does not exhort to repentance any more than it recommends eating, drinking, and merry-making. It tells the reader only to weep and fear, two activities that are static in themselves’.

Tobi notes the sarcastic element to this poem, noting Ibn Naghrela’s nod to the tradition of Arabic nihilistic zuhd poetry which, based on the pagan fatalist outlook characteristic of Arabic culture and poetry in the jāhilī period, pessimistically viewed life as having no value.

Ibn Naghrela concedes that all one can do is mourn for his soul and body, not take any preventative measures. The following analysis considers the interpretations of Jefim Schirmann, Raymond Scheindlin, Leon Weinberger and Israel Levin in addition to my own.

1. Will you have strength with death’s coming and will your soul be saved from Sheol’s hand?  
2. You will sit a little-- and honored men will gather at your house, a band of men as one man  
3. You will be washed, cleaned, and anointed and spread upon the earth as a board  
4. you will be dressed in all magnificent shrouds and placed upon an unsightly bed  
5. a loud cry will be heard in your room a voice of anguish, like a birthing woman in distress  
6. a man laments over your loved ones as they bring you to the grave

133. Levin, ‘al Mot, 84-86.  
134. Scheindlin also notes ibn Naghrela’s message that status cannot withstand death (Scheindlin, WWD, 170).  
135. Scheindlin, WWD, 170.  
136. Tobi, Proximity and Distance, 211; 237.
Levin notes that the poem’s Arabic origins are noticeable in its meaning, style, and personal content. The poem— which follows the metrical pattern \(\text{מְרֹבָה} (\text{merubah})--\) adheres to the consistent monorhyme pattern of the \(\text{qas\text{"}da};\) the last word of each \(\text{soger}\) ends with the vowel and consonant construct \(\text{רָה} (\text{rah}),\) which has the same sound as \(\text{ער,}\) meaning wicked. The constant repetition of \(\text{רָוּפֲח,}\) \(\text{רָוְעֲר,}\) \(\text{רָוְעֶר}\) in each line reminds us of man’s innate superficiality and inherent wickedness, as throughout the poem we see the mourners’ selfish reactions to the death of their kinsman. Ibn Naghrela intersperses biblical references throughout the poem; in some instances he quotes directly, using the technique of \(\text{shibbuts},\) adapted from the Arabic technique of \(\text{iktibas,}\) while in other instances he changes the words, referring to a biblical passage through content rather than precise word order. The poet addresses himself in the second person (for example: \(\text{בּהֵכ,}\) \(\text{בָּשׁפַנ,}\) \(\text{בָּתיֵב,}\) \(\text{בָּבָבְלִב,}\) \(\text{בָּרְוּפֲח,}\) --) as he describes what will happen to his body after he is dead using passive verbs; the poem’s active verbs concern the actions of the mourners.

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137. Levin, ’Al Mot, 84-86.
138. Schirmann, \textit{HPSP} 1:136, n; This is the most common meter in Hebrew poetry, (Scheindlin, “A Guide to Golden Age Hebrew Prosody”). It is adapted from the Arabic \(\text{wāfir}\) meter (Schirmann, \textit{HPSP} 4:722).
139. The feminine suffix does not here designate a female.
In the opening line, Ibn Naghrela questions his own composure at death’s approach and, almost tauntingly, asks if perhaps his soul will be saved from death’s grasp. This line challenges biblical pronouncements against death and the notion that God can save one from death. The poet taunts himself and his readers with this hopeful idea of salvation, but his projection of his own death clearly presents his own belief that God will not intercede on his behalf. The second line serves as a bridge to the next part of the poem; lines 2-9, says Levin, describe the rituals of mourning and burial. The poet addresses himself with an active verb for the last time in the beginning of the second line: יָשִּׁבָת (you will sit a little). This echoes the words that prophet Elijah speaks to Elisha in 2 Kings: בֵּא יֵלֵא (stay here). Each time, Elijah explains that God has sent him and each time Elisha has faith and agrees. Like Elisha, the dead man is told to have faith and to wait. But instead of God, honored men come to him. Ibn Naghrela confers the title of nagid, the same title that he himself bears—and which Scheindlin notes is a special honor bestowed only upon prominent public figures upon the visitors he expects to appear when he is dead. In the next two lines the poet describes what will be done to his own dead body. For example, line 3 reads: יָשִּׁבָתִּיְּו / יָשִּׁיבָתִּיְּו / יָשִּׁיבָתִּיְּו (be cleaned, purified and anointed / and be pulled across earth as a beam’). The passive forms of tense verbs is important, as the dead man can no longer perform actions. These rituals of anointing the body and dressing it in new robes are common burial rituals, notes Levin. Schirmann notes the reference in this line to Second Samuel: בִּאֶדֶּמ מֶאָד וְנִנְנְו הנָבִּי (There upon David rose from the ground; he

140. Such as we see in Psalm 33:18-19: " Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him; who wait for His faithful care to save them from death, to sustain them in famine); And Hosea 13:14: (from Sheol itself I will save them, / Redeem them from very Death)
141. Levin, 'Al Mot, 84-86.
142. 2 Kings 2: 2, 4, 6.
143. This is Schirmann’s interpretation of nagid, in Schirmann, HPSP 1:136, n. 2
144. Scheindlin, WWD, 170.
145. Levin, 'Al Mot, 84-86.
146. Schirmann, HPSP 1:136-37, n.3
bathed and anointed himself [...]). The verbs to wash (ָץחר) and to anoint (ךסנ) are used in both; however David cleans and anoints himself (after his prayers fail to save his son from death). And so we encounter here another biblical mention of redemption from death-- but in this instance, David’s son, like Ibn Naghrela, is not saved.

The second half of line four begins with the passive verb נתנת (you will be given). This verb appears in this exact form several times in the Bible, and one specific passage adds particular meaning. Jeremiah 39:17 reads: ‘וְלַּא תִּתְנוּנְת אתִּו דיִּי מַיָּשִׂים אִשְׁרָא-אתִו יִותְר (you shall not be delivered into the hands of the men you dread). This is ironic, for in ibn Naghrela’s poem he has already been delivered into the hands of men--we don’t know if they are friend or foe-- and it is these hands that prepare his body for burial.

After the poet’s body is washed and dressed, it is placed on a bed: מֶשהָׁתֲרַעְּכָ מִשֶּׁהוּ. There are several ways to interpret these two words; for instance, Scheindlin has: ‘the hated bed’, and Weinberger has: ‘a bed like one who is awake’. Different understandings of ‘כַּעַרְּכַה’ account for the difference in translation. The word מֶשה is used with the connotation of death several times in the Bible, clearly showing a biblical link between מֶשה and death. After the body has been washed, dressed in ornamented shrouds, and placed on an unsightly bed, a loud cry will be heard (v 5). This is the cry of mourning and the distressed cry to which ibn Naghrela refers is described in Jeremiah 4:31.

147. 2 Sam. 12:20
148. 2 Kings 18:30, 19:10; Isaiah 36:16, 37:10, Jeremiah 21:10, 34:3, 37:3, 17, 38:3, 39:17; Esther 7:3; Daniel 8:12; Ezra 7:20
149. Scheindlin, WWD, 169.
150. Scheindlin understands it as an adjective from כַּעַר, and Weinberger reads ‘כ’ as the prefix like, and genitals as a noun.
151. for instance, 2 Kings 4:32: (and there was the boy, laid out dead on his couch), and 2 Chronicles 24:25: (they killed him in his bed and he died).
152. 2 Chronicles 24:25 (I hear a voice as of one in travail, anguish as of a woman bearing her first child).
In the poems’ following lines, the dead man is carried to his grave and placed inside. Beginning in line 6, active verbs are used to describe the actions of the crowd. The same verb is used in lines 6 and 7: "םוּקָי, he will rise." Line 6 literally says that a man will rise up to offer prayers of consolation to your loved ones while (they) carry you to your grave and line 7 says that the crowd will raise you onto your tomb. Line 7 ends with the deceased man being placed (another use of a passive verb) inside his grave. In v 8 the crowd returns home with heads covered (ףִּיוֹפִי רָאָו). These two words appear together three times in biblical passages— in Jeremiah 14:3, 2 Samuel 15:30, and Esther 6:12, each time conveying a sense of sadness. Ibn Naghrela captures this mood of mourning as the crowd of people walk away from the grave with their heads covered. However, as recounted in the next line, by the following day they have forgotten their sorrow; they rise early to divide the dead man’s possessions. There is no more mention of sadness, and their laments turn to song (ךֵפָהֵיְו יִהְנִי פֵּשְׁנִי). Levin notes the unexpectedness of this sudden shift, as Ibn Naghrela cynically recognizes the fleeting aspect of mortality, and that wealth matters only in life.

The poem’s closing couplet imparts ibn Naghrela’s reflections on life and death; he recognizes that death will come, and he urges his heart to weep for itself. He does not suggest that his reader turn away from the material life, but he warns him to fear the day of reckoning (םוֹיְל פְסָכָנ). This day could be either good or bad, as פְסָכָנ is used in both contexts; in Isaiah 10:3, it conveys punishment; in Isaiah 15:7 פְסָכָנ refers to amassed grains, and Micah 7:3 uses (Therefore, the gains they have made, and their stores).
Ibn Naghrela ends the couplet by warning his heart: לבר, וודרה (fear [the terror of your day of doom] my heart, and be in awe!). The word ארְָי (awe, fear) appears numerous times in biblical passages, most often in conjunction with a Hebrew word for God. Fear of the day of one’s reckoning is essentially a fear of God, for it is God who will perform the final reckoning.

ii. ‘הינמ ביני וביןך,’ (Is There a Sea Between You and Me?)

This poem is the fourteenth of nineteen elegies that Ibn Naghrela wrote in mourning for his older brother, Isaac (d. 1041). He began composing the elegies when he first learned his brother was ill, and continued writing them over one year throughout Isaac’s illness, death, burial, and his own grieving period after his brother’s death. Tanenbaum says these poems are non-devotional, and she describes their content as ‘gruesomely realistic evocations of death’. The analysis considers Jefim Schirmann, Israel Levin, and Leon Weinberger’s insights in addition to my own.

1. Is there a sea between you and me
   that I am not inclined to visit you

2. And I do not run with terrified heart
   in order to sit at your grave?

3. Truly, if I don’t do this,
   I would be a traitor to your fraternity!

4. Oh, my brother, I sit
   upon your grave in front of you,

5. there is pain in my heart for you
   as my pain at your death.

159. ינא ממניפכ פקדעת באה (on the day you waited for, your doom has come)
160. cf. for example Ecc 5:6, Ps 25:12, Prov 3:7
163. Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 221.
The poem adheres to the consistent monorhyme pattern of the qasīda: each soger ends with הָתֶָת, formed from the appended suffix ‘וּ’. In accordance with Mirsky’s assertion that a suffix-rhyme adds additional meaning to the poem, this suffix indicates the possessive you; the poem is addressed to the poet’s deceased brother, and the rhyme at each line’s end addresses him. The first section of the poem (v1-3) stresses that nothing will keep the poet from his brother’s grave. It is

6. If I give you greeting--
then I don’t hear your reply,
7. You do not go out to meet me
on the day I come to your land,
8. And you don’t laugh at my approach
and I don’t laugh at your approach,
9. You don’t see my image
and I don’t see your image,
10. Because Sheol is your home
and your dwelling place is in the grave--
11. First born of my father and son of my mother
peace to you in your future, ii
12. May the spirit of God rest
upon your spirit and your soul!
13. I go to my earth, for
in the earth they shut you.
14. I will sleep for a time and will awaken for a time--
and you are forever in your sleep,
15. And until the day of my death v
a fire is in my heart at your departure!

i. Schirmann, HPSP 1:108, n. 1
ii. Schirmann, HPSP 1:108, n. 6
iii. May you have peace in your future, Schirmann, HPSP 1:108, n. 11
written in the first person and ibn Naghrela addresses his deceased brother, asking him if there is a sea that separates them and which keeps the poet from visiting Isaac. This theme of division recurs throughout the poem--at the beginning the barrier seems surmountable, but by the end it becomes clear that as long as the poet is alive, the two brothers are permanently separated. The sea represents death, as the words sitting at your grave (התשא על קברותיך) tell us that Isaac is already deceased at the time this poem is written. The first line recalls the words that Ruth speaks to her mother-in-law Naomi as she vows to follow her, asking God to punish her if something other than death comes between them. Ibn Naghrela also echoes Ruth’s words in another poem that he composed for Isaac in his collection Ben Tehilim: (and by evening, / stones divide us--/ earth’s dust your shroud). The barrier that separates the brothers (stones) is physical--presenting a concrete obstacle, and suggesting that there is no link between the dead and the living-- rather than the metaphorical sea in the elegy. The image reflects ibn Naghrela’s non-philosophical attitude towards death, and his conviction that it presents an end-point. A sea on the other hand is vast, but not insurmountable. Beginning with the exclamatory formula תֶמֱא (truly) in v 3, Ibn Naghrela utters an oath statement, promising to visit his brother’s grave, for if he does not, he will be a traitor.

And indeed, in line four, the poet sits upon his brothers’ grave. Thus begins the second section (v. 4-10), in which ibn Naghrela talks of the grave and the obstacles that prevent him from conversing with his brother. He yearns to interact with his brother as when he was alive, but he finds that he cannot. There is little consolation in this section: the poet is desolate, and he presents

165. Ruth 1:17: (Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you).
168. Schirmann, HPSP 1:108.
no calming imagery to soften his pain. Likening the pain he feels for his brother in his heart to the pain he felt upon his brother’s death, in v 5 ibn Naghrela recalls the language of Lamentations:

וּטיִבַּה וּארְוּ,_smִא -שֵׁי בֹואְכַמ יִבֹאְכַמְכּ (Look about and see: Is there any agony like mine, which was dealt out to me when the Lord afflicted me on His day of wrath?). He stresses the depth of his pain, and by likening it to a pain inflicted by God, he implies that a pain greater than the one he feels does not exist. However, when ibn Naghrela visits the grave, there is no contact between the brothers. In verses 6 and 7, Isaac doesn’t acknowledge his brother— in v 6 he doesn’t return ibn Naghrela’s greeting, and in v 7, he doesn’t come out to meet him. Verses 8 and 9 continue describing Isaac’s reticence; however whereas in verses 6 and 7 the poet tries to approach his brother but is snubbed by him, in the next two verses both brothers disregard each other equally. In verse 8, neither brother laughs at each other’s approach, and in the following line, neither sees each other’s image. In Deuteronomy there are several mentions of men who encounter God, but who do not see him, and the word used for God’s form, הָנוּמְת, is the same that ibn Naghrela uses in verse 9. Verse 10, the concluding line of this section, unveils the reason that the brothers cannot interact:

לֹאְשׁו שֵׁי / וּבּכיִבָא (because Sheol is your home / and the grave is your dwelling place). The word ibn Naghrela uses for dwelling place, מַעֲנוֹת, does not appear in the Bible in connotation with graves or death, and so its use here is sinister.

The next five lines form the last section, in which ibn Naghrela laments the separation from his brother. In this section he accepts that his brother is dead and no longer tries to interact with him. Instead, he prays for him and considers how he will continue his own life without his brother. In line 11, ibn Naghrela refers to his brother as בּוכָר אָבִי (first born of my father).

169. Lament. 1:12
170. c.f. Deut 4:12,15
171. c.f for uses of מַעֲנוֹת in the Bible: Deut 33:27; Psalm 76:3; Amos 3:4 (for more see: Even-Shoshan, New Concordance, 687.)
although as בּרוֹכְ refers specifically to the first born son of a father, the designation could be superfluous. However, in Job, this same word is used to describe sickness; ‘(death’s first-born consumes his tendons). Isaac is not only his father’s first born son, but he is the first son to die; he is literally בּוכְ (death’s first born). The word אָנִית is frequently used as a designation of time. It appears many times in the Bible in the prophetic phrase אָנִית (literally: the end of days), signifying ‘the world to come’. In this sense, ibn Naghrela wishes his brother peace in the end of his own days. Schirmann suggests that אָנִית here has the specific connotation of future, as in Psalm 37:37. He continues his well-wishes in line 12, invoking רוֹחַ, the spirit of God. The words רוֹחַ and לֵא -- spirit, soul, or breath-- are both used in this verse. Both are applied to God in Job 33:4 (and this is the only time that לֵא and רוֹחַ appear together), and רוֹחַ is applied to men twice. By invoking Isaac’s נשמה, ibn Naghrela is implying that his brother’s soul still exists after his death.

The division between the brothers is completed in line 13 and Ibn Naghrela accepts that he will no longer cross the barrier: ‘(I to go my land, for / they have shut you in the earth). This line uses enjambment, as the soger completes the thought that is left dangling in the delet. This is significant, because although both brothers eventually go to כּץ (land), they go to different ones. The separation between יִצרְַא and בּץ is achieved through the enjambment: if כּ was after the line break, the division between them wouldn’t

173. Ibid., 34.
174. c.f. Isa 2:2; Gen 49:1; Mic 4:1; Num 24:14; Dan 10:4
175. Schirmann, *HPSP* 1:108, n. 11
176. שָׁמָם-תַּמְוַיִם, גֵּרָה, יִשְָׁר, יַדַּשׁ יָנְיַחְתּ (The spirit of God formed me; The breath of Shaddai sustains me).
177. שָׁמָם-תַּמְוַיִם, גֵּרָה, יִשְָׁר, יַדַּשׁ יָנְיַחְתּ (The utterance of the Lord, Who stretched out the skies And made firm the earth, And created man’s breath within him).
be so definite and it wouldn’t be as clear that they signify different places. Through contrasting himself to his brother in v 14, ibn Naghrela paints a grim picture of death; in life, the poet has time to both sleep and be awake. It is said that God neither slumbers nor sleeps in Psalm 121:4, and the attacking armies in Isaiah, spurned on by God’s anger, don’t either. On the contrary, in death his brother sleeps eternally. The poem ends on a note of sadness: until his own death, ibn Naghrela will feel sadness for his brother. Rather than speak of his own death directly, he uses יִתָפיִלֲח (literally: my changing) as a reference to Job 14:14: 'כּלָּיִם אָגָה אֲשֶׁר-יִאְבֶּד אֲכֶל-יִאְבֶּד -- דּוֹא-יֵתֶל אֹבּ, יִתָפיִלֲח' (All the time of my service I wait until my replacement comes). This is imagery used of soldiers waiting for replacements to relieve them of their shifts, however Ibn Naghrela is waiting to be relieved of his duty of living. He will find no consolation for his brother’s death while he himself is alive, and he offers no words of consolation to help people accept death.

**Concluding Remarks**

Through careful consideration of these poems, we have a glimpse of Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Naghrela’s views of death as conveyed through their poetry. Both acknowledge the certainty of death’s arrival, and view death as distinct from life. From his poetry we see that Ibn Gabirol is very aware of the presence of death, and devotes time to reflection on life’s brevity. However, he views death not with trepidation, but as a new beginning of sorts and a cause for celebration as the soul begins her journey alone. Ibn Naghrela, on the other hand, views death as a regretful and somber occasion to be regarded with morbidity and fear. He views death as a grim finality, one at which he shudders. But however sordid the picture he paints of death in these poems (as well as in the poems in the following section On Life), Ibn Naghrela does not exhort his reader to prepare for death, nor does he offer words of consolation to help them cope with death, either their own (impending), or that of others.

179. וְהָנֵה הִלְהוּ הַמַּלְאָכָּה לְאֵל יי-שָׁמוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל. 'See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!
180. Isa 5:27
Chapter 4: On Life

This chapter examines Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel ibn Naghrela’s views on life as seen in their poetry. Ibn Gabirol’s poem “I Sought You at Every Dawn” describes the poet’s intimate relationship and devotion to God. In his poem ‘Bow Down to God’, while offering enraptured praise to his soul, the poet also displays his desire to educate and purify his soul. Through reflection on having reached the age of fifty in his poem ‘She Said: Rejoice’, Ibn Naghrela reveals that he views the passage of time abstractly, and is concerned only with the present moment, not with the accumulated days or years, or, for that matter, with the future. His poem ‘You Owe to God’ is a testament to his desire for merriment, as he exhorts his readers to devote more time in their day to revelry than to God.

**Solomon ibn Gabirol**

The following poems both show Ibn Gabirol’s desire to purify his soul and devote himself to God during his lifetime. His attitude towards life, as expressed in his poetry, can be seen as a preparation for death, as he fortifies his soul for its solo flight. The following two poems are both examples of *piyyutim*, or liturgical poems, written by medieval *payyetanim* to be inserted into the actual prayer service. Although some aspects of the service—such as the benedictions—were unchangeable, the earliest Palestinian *payyetanim* were permitted to actually substitute their prayers for either the *Shema*’ or the *Amidah*, two central parts of the morning service. However, in the ninth and tenth century the prayer corpus was canonized by Babylonian *geonim*. By the Andalusian period, liturgical poetry was no longer substituted for portions of the service, but
served as an elaboration to the established prayer service, as poets replaced some portions leading up to the compulsory prayers with their own poetry. Moreover, since Andalusian poets, influenced by Neoplatonic thought, began to write liturgical poems on the soul (a new theme), they designed them to fit into different parts of the prayer service than those which previous previous payettanim had embellished. The medieval Andalusian poets also added a new genre of piyyutim called reshut, which could serve as introductions to the Nishmat, Qaddish, or Barekhu prayers in the morning service. This is possibly the only liturgical genre that uses the first person to refer to the precentor (the reciter) as an individual, rather than as a representative of the collective congregation. Reshut literally means “permission”, corresponding with the payyetanic practice of poets asking for God’s permission to represent the congregation:

the precentor petitions God to accept the prayer that he is about to recite on behalf of the congregation. He protests his unworthiness to speak for the congregation, excusing himself on the grounds that the deterioration of the age has left it without a truly worthy spokesman. He asks for fluency and eloquence (a reminder that the liturgical poetry was not fixed like the statutory prayers) and prays that his fear will not impede his mission. Furthermore, he pleads that his prayer be heard so that the congregation not be disappointed in their trust in him.\(^\text{181}\)

However, the precentor stands alone only inasmuch as he is the congregation’s spokesman; his entreaties represent the whole congregation, and are not an individual prayer. The following two poems by Ibn Gabirol are both examples of poems connected to Nishmat, a prayer that begins: “תַּמְשִׁינ לָכּ יַחְּרֵָבְתּ תֶא (‘the breath of all that lives will bless your name’). Both of these poems also illustrate the new emphasis on the individual’s relationship with God.

Tanenbaum notes that although the Hebrew word נשימה means both “breath” and “soul”, to the medieval poets it only meant soul, as they were convinced of the soul’s unique importance for praising God.\(^\text{182}\)

\(^{181}\) Scheindlin, Gazelle, 145.
\(^{182}\) Scheindlin, Gazelle, 144-148; Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 15-19.
i. "I Sought You at Every Dawn"183

In this devotional liturgical poem, Ibn Gabirol describes his relationship with God by juxtaposing you (God) with me (himself). Each verse of the poem-- which follows the rhyme scheme ha-merubah--ends with the consistent rhyme יִפְּשִׁנְו, my mouth, emphasizing the very personal nature of the relationship between the poet and God. The poem reflects the growing emphasis on the individual’s relationship with God that developed as the Neoplatonic influences in medieval Andalusia strengthened the importance of individual in addition to communal worship.184 However, as Scheindlin notes, the poem also presents the paradoxical nature of man’s personal relationship with an infinite and omnipotent God: “the paradox that the transcendent God, who overflows the heavens, can be contained in man’s soul is the poem’s pith”.185 The insights of Jefim Schirmann and Raymond Scheindlin are considered in the following analysis to supplement my own observations.

1. I sought you at every dawn and twilight and I spread my palms and my facei to you.
2. For you I’ll sigh in my thirsting heart, and I’ll appear as a pauper who implores me at my own door.
3. The heavens cannot contain you in your dwelling-- but you have a place in my thoughts!
4. Will I not conceal your precious name in my heart but the desire for youii will grow stronger, and pass through my mouth:
5. I therefore give thanks to your name, my Lord, while the breathiv of the living God is within mevi

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i. I lifted my face to you (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:238, n. 1). [The Hebrew literally reads: my nose]

ii. literally: your desire, but Schirmann suggests the desire for you (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:238, n. 4).

183. Solomon ibn Gabirol, "I Sought You at Every Dawn", HPSP, 1:238 [ר]. Line numbers correspond to line numbers in Hebrew text.
184. c.f. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 22-25; Tanenbaum, Contemplative Soul, 18.
185. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 186.
In the first two verses, the poet describes his acts of devotion. He begins his poem with a testament of his unceasing devotion to God, and it is clear that he spends his mornings and evenings in prayer. The first verse begins with an exultation addressed to God—שָׁיִתּרְַחְ (literally: "I sought you at dawn")—describing the poet’s morning supplications to God with outstretched hands. The image of palms outstretched specifically to God appears four times in the Bible; however שֶׁרַָפ does not appear with יִפַא ("my face"). In the second verse, Ibn Gabirol compares his yearnings for God to the entreaties of a beggar at his doorstep. In this way he humbles, but does not disgrace himself for of the 47 times דַל ("poor man") appears in the Bible, it is as a figure to be pitied not despised. For instance, Leviticus 19:15 advises to deal equally with a beggar and a rich man, and Proverbs 22:22 warns against taking advantage of the poor. Scheindlin further interprets this line as an encouragement to seek God within oneself, not anywhere else:

for man to approach God he has not to look outward at a remote being that even the heavens cannot contain, but inward, at a God compressed within the compass of a man’s soul. The supplicant thus must stand like a beggar at his own door and at his threshold in order to speak to God.

Ibn Gabirol doesn’t describe another act of prayer in the third verse, but he attests to God’s omnipotence, claiming that—because of his incorporeal nature—the heavens cannot contain God, and that he also lives in the poet’s own thoughts. Scheindlin notes the allusion to

iii. The word תמשנ signifies that the poem is connected with the Nishmat prayer (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:238, n. 5b).

iv. literally: “in my nose”

186. Exodus 9:29, 33; Ezra 9:5; Psalms 44:21
188. Lev 19:13, 24; 25:47; Deut 15:7, 10, 15:21, 24:19; 26:12; Josh 24:13; 1Sam 1:26; 2Sam 11:17; 1 Kings 2:19; Job 14:5; Psalms 84:10; Proverbs 28:24, 29:13; Jeremiah 22:13; Ezekiel 44:24; Hosea 2:13; Amos 6:1; Micah 3:9; Malachi 3:10; Isaiah 3:16; 10:21;
189. (You shall not render an unfair decision; do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly).
189. (Do not rob the wretched because he is wretched; Do not crush the poor man in the gate).
190. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 186.
Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple in first Kings 8:27, “with its paradox of dedicating a mere building to house an omnipresent God”. The Bible does not often define God’s place (מהומך). In Isaiah 18:7 this place is designated as Mt. Zion, and Proverbs 15:3 mentions God’s omnipotence, meaning he is not confined to a single space. Thus, Ibn Gabirol’s description of God residing within his own thoughts offers a more personal connection with God. Scheindlin notes the connection between Ibn Gabirol’s thoughts and the Sufi tradition, which recounts God’s words to Muhammad: “My earth and My heaven contain me not, but the heart of My faithful servant contains Me,” as well as the rabbinic tradition that God has a heavenly temple which is identical to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Continuing with the idea of God living in the poet’s own thoughts from v 3, in the fourth verse, the poet tries to conceal God only in his heart. However, the urge is too strong, and despite the poet’s private relationship with God, the words flow from his mouth anyway, as in Jeremiah 20:9, where the idea of being unable to contain one’s words is portrayed with the imagery of fire. As we see in Psalm 119, seeking to conceal God within one’s heart is not necessarily a selfish act, but can be a way of keeping God close. This sentiment also appears in Job 23:12.

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191. כּי וֹמוֹקְמָה, בֶשֵׁי מַיָּלֱֹא, לַעְּלָהָהוּ; (But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built!)
192. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 185.
193. “לֶא-וֹמוֹקְמָה, בֵשֵׁי מַיָּלֱֹא; (At the place where the name of the Lord of Hosts abides, At Mount Zion)
194. “בּיִבֵּל-פָּה, אָתָנְתָה-כּוּר, אַּלְּו-רֶעְשׁוֹ, אַלְּו-רַע, אַלְּו-רֶעְשׁוֹ, אַלְּו-רַע, אַלְּו-רֶעְשׁוֹ, (The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, Observing the bad and the good).
195. Quoted in Scheindlin, Gazelle, 185.
196. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 185.
197. “וֹלוּכְלָכְי--ףַא, יִכּ-תִּבַּה הֶזַּה רֶשֲׁא יִתיֵנָבּ (And if I say: ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name’, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot). Scheindlin also discusses the reference to this verse (Gazelle, 185).
198. “בּיִבֵּל, קָפָרָה אֲמַרְתָּה--לֵפָה, אַלְּו-אַתָט-אֶל (In my heart I treasure your promise; therefore I do not sin against You).
199. “מִתָּתָה-שֵּפָמָה, אַלְּו-אַמָרְתָה-מַהְו, אַלְּו-אַמָרְתָה-מַהְו. (I have not deviated from what his lips commanded; I have treasured his words more than my daily bread).
There are many Psalms that describe songs of praise issuing from a person’s mouth (פּי), and in Psalm 17:3, it is held to be a virtue to give voice to one’s thoughts.

After the poet is unable to overcome his urge to praise God in the previous verse, he openly praises God in the final verse of his poem, recalling the words of Psalm 28:7. He transitions to the Nishmat prayer in the last verse of his poem with the phrase (while the breath of the living God is within me). The poem ends with the return of (my nose) as God’s breath fills the poet’s nostrils. Thus even as the poet openly sings his praises to the Lord, the intimacy of his relationship with God is still emphasized.

ii. “שׁייחַל (Bow down to God)”

Ibn Gabirol’s poem “שׁייחַל (Bow down to God)” is a prolonged exultation of the soul, in which he praises her, compares her to God, and instructs her to serve and honor God. Throughout this composition, we see Ibn Gabirol’s priority in doing all he can to ensure his soul’s purity and innocence while he is alive, so that after his death, she will immortally exist. Jefim Schirmann and Raymond Scheindlin’s analyses of this poem, as well as Adena Tanenbaum’s notes on the soul, are incorporated into my own observations.

1. Bow down to God, unique and wise soul, and run to serve him in awe.
2. Turn night and day to your heavenly world, for why do you pursue foolishness and nonsense?
3. In your life, you are compared to the living God, who is hidden as you are hidden.

201. "bowing to me at night, probed my mind, You have tested me and found nothing amiss, I determined that my mouth should not transgress). Literally: You tested me without finding a wicked thought which didn’t pass my lips.
202. (The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him. I was helped, and my heart exulted, so I will glorify him with my song.)
203. Solomon ibn Gabirol, "שׁייחַל “. Schirmann, HPSP, 1: 237-238 [א]. The line numbers refer to the numbering in the Hebrew text, where each verse is a separate numbered line.
This poem-- which follows the rhyme scheme *ha-merubah*-- uses the consistent rhyme הָמ, which is formed by a root letter and the suffix ה. The Hebrew word הָמ means “what”; the repetition of the interrogatory particle constantly urges the reader to consider what is worth pursuing in life, and what he should do to praise God. The significance in the rhyme also lies with the feminine ending ה, which-- as the poem revolves around the female soul-- reminds us of the soul’s personification as a woman.204

The poem has a circular organization: the first section offers the soul instructions, the second sings the soul’s praises and likens her to God, and the third offers more instructions. In the first section-- vv 1 and 2-- Ibn Gabirol begins his poem with a command-- addressed to the soul-- to bow down and serve God. He describes the soul as הדָיִח (unique) and (הָמָכֲח) wise. The former description appears in Psalm 22:21, in an appeal to God for salvation.205 The term "הָמ" is equivalent to " häliṣa burgem yishpin; ḥayim-velo, yitdaiḥ (”Save my soul from the sword, my precious one from the clutches of a dog). Due to the parallelism in those lines, yitdaiḥ is equivalent to " häliṣa burgem yishpin; ḥayim-velo, yitdaiḥ.

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4. Surely, if your creator is pure and blameless-- know, then, that you are pure and innocent.

5. The mighty one carries the heavens upon his arm-- as you carry a silent body.

6. Put forth songs, my soul, to your Rock who didn’t put your likeness in the earth.

7. My inner body, always bless your Rock whose name everything that breathes praises!

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i. soul (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:237, n. 1a).
ii. The rational soul: the highest of the three souls of man according to Aristotle’s teachings (the others are the animal and the plant) (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:237, n. 1b). c.f. Aristotle, De Anima.
iii. Schirmann, HPSP, 1:237, n. 2a.
iv. During your life (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:237-238, n. 3).
v. literally: my insides
vi. The word Nishmat tells us this poem is connected with the Nishmat prayer (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:238, n. 7).

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also alludes the soul’s loneliness, suggests Scheindlin, “implying a personified soul that feels out of place in the mundane world, where it is isolated from its divine source”. Schirmann notes that the latter descriptive term wise functions as a reference to Aristotle’s understanding of the soul in *De Anima*. In this work Aristotle distinguishes between three types of soul: the human (rational) soul, which is the highest, the animal soul, and the plant soul. Aristotle’s characterization, however, does not inform Ibn Gabirol’s entire understanding of the soul. Aristotle understands the soul to be an organism-- inseparable from the body-- which is responsible for a body’s functioning: “the soul of an animate organism, in this framework, is nothing other than its system of active abilities to perform the vita functions that organisms of its kind naturally perform. So when an organism engages in relevant activities, it does so in virtue of the system of abilities that is its soul.” Thus, Aristotle’s theory, contrary to Platonic dualism, expresses the view that souls are incapable of existence outside of the body. Ibn Gabirol partially adopts Aristotle’s tripartite soul; however unlike Aristotle, he subscribes as well to the Neoplatonic position of a duality between the body and soul. Like Aristotle, he ascribes a rational function to the soul and he praises God’s wisdom in giving the soul the capacity for reason, remarking that this rationality distinguishes man from animals.

In his philosophical poem *Keter Malkhut*, Ibn Gabirol illustrates ten spheres linking the earth to God, the tenth and highest sphere being the Intellect. Thus he views rationality to be the highest trait of all, and in describing the soul as he recognizes her worth. But God is above the Intellect, and so it is fitting that the soul-- despite her rationality-- be instructed to bow to God. This verse

207. c.f. Aristotle, *De Anima*, II:1-- Aristotle defines three substances: matter, form, and the compound of matter and form. He identifies compounds that are alive-- i.e. plants and animals-- as the compounds that have souls.
208. Lorenz, “Ancient Theories of Soul”. Also see *De Anima*, II: 3
209. Lorenz, “Ancient Theories of Soul” and Aristotle, *De Anima*
211. Tanenbaum, *Contemplative Soul*, 68.
bears an interesting similarity to Isaiah 51:23, in which God (through Isaiah), while accusing the
Israelites of causing their own ruin, says he will turn them over to their enemies, who will
literally walk all over them.213 Ibn Gabirol’s exhortation to bow to God, in contrast to Isaiah’s
order to bow down to the enemy, is not degrading.

Ibn Gabirol continues his address to the soul in the second line. He uses the synonyms
לעמל and לֶבֶה (foolishness) to contrast with עַלְמַן, advising the soul to heed the heavenly world,
not to waste time chasing foolishness in the material world. Because עַלְמַן means both your
world and your eternity-- is also an expression that means forever-- the soul also ensures
her immortality when she stops pursuing foolishness. Scheindlin notes the double meaning of
לעמל: although in earlier sources it means vanity, its ordinary usage means why. “Why”, notes
Scheindlin, is a question that can be asked about anything that exists. Thus, this verse, he
suggests, can be read as: “why concern yourself with things of which one may ask, “why?” that
is, with anything other than God.”214

In the third section-- vv 3-5-- Ibn Gabirol compares the soul to God; Schirmann points
out the similarities to the Talmudic tractate Berakhot 10 in which the soul is also likened to
God215:

 heb יִתְּמַשְׂוּ דַיְבּ - יִגוֹמ, רֶשְּא - וּרְמָאָלְשֶפַנְל יִחְשׁ הָרָֹבֲעַנְו; יִמיִשָּתַּו זֶרֶָאָכ - ויָגָו, ויּוּחַכ - ויִרְבֲעַל ( "I will put
you into the hands of your tormentors, who have commanded you, “Get down, that we may walk over
you”-- So that you made your back like the ground, like a street for passersby)."

213. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 205.
precincts. Let that which has these five qualities come and praise him who has these five qualities.\textsuperscript{216}

The first of these comparisons is in v 3, when Ibn Gabirol claims that both God and the soul are hidden. The word he uses for hidden--םָלְעֶנ-- does not appear in the Bible as an attribute of either God or the soul;\textsuperscript{217} however it is used once of wisdom.\textsuperscript{218} Verse 4 compares the soul’s purity and innocence to that of her creator. The word for purity--שָׁרָם-- does not appear as a biblical attribute of either God or the soul, although items being brought into God’s presence are described as שָׁרָם four times\textsuperscript{219} and both fear of God\textsuperscript{220} and God’s words\textsuperscript{221} are also described as שָׁרָם. Ibn Gabirol’s expressions of the soul’s similarity to God reach their culmination in v 5 as he even compares the tasks of both: as God upholds the entire heavens upon his arm, the soul too upholds a mute body. This is clearly an allusion to the body in which the soul is entrapped, and which one day she hopefully will escape. The epithet נִיסָח only appears once in the Bible (Psalm 89:9), also in a context of comparing the traits of others with those of God.\textsuperscript{222}

In the last section-- vv 6 and 7--, like the first, Ibn Gabirol instructs the soul how to act. In v 6 he instructs her to praise the Lord in song. He also praises God, for didn’t God put the soul’s likeness in the earth? This appears to be a way of distinguishing the soul from anything in the corporeal world: although man is formed in God’s image in Genesis 5:1,\textsuperscript{223} unlike man, whose image is formed from the earth, the soul is incorporeal. Because the soul is not bound to the earth, it can escape the confines of the material world. Ibn Gabirol concludes his poem with a piece of

\textsuperscript{216}. Translation from, The Babylonian Talmud (Complete Soncino English Translation).
\textsuperscript{217}. Even-Shoshan, Konkordentsia Hadasha.
\textsuperscript{218}. Job 28:21
\textsuperscript{219}. Isaiah 66, 20; Psalms 51:12; 2 Chron 30:17; Leviticus 24:6;
\textsuperscript{220}. Psalms 19:10
\textsuperscript{221}. Psalms 12: 7
\textsuperscript{222}. "יְהוָהָלֵו אָלֹהְיְהוָה, אָלֹהְיָהוָה אֲבֹאֹת--מִי-כָּמָהוָא מִשְׁמִי, יְהוָה וְיָמָא מַיְהָ, שָׁרָם קָוֵי, שָׁרָם מַיְיָה ;) (O Lord, God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness surrounds You).
\textsuperscript{223}. "זָהא סֵפַר, חֲלוֹלֵת אָלֹהְיָהוָה, בְּנֵו, בְּאָלֹהְיָהוָה אֲבֹא, בְּרָמְו אָלֹהְיָהוָה, אֲבֹא הָאָלֹהְיָהוָה ; אֲבֹא אֲלֹהְיָהוָה" (This is the record of Adam’s line.-- When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.)
advice addressed to his inner body, קְרָיַב (my insides), with an allusion to Psalm 103:1.²²⁴

Scheindlin notes the contrast between קְרָיַב in verse 7 and יִשְׁפַנ in verse 6, referring to to Abraham Ibn Ezra’s comment on this verse from Psalms:

[“My soul”:] this is the upper soul [neshama 'elyona]; “and all my insides” is said of the body, which is the flesh… It is [to be understood] thus: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all my insides bless His holy name.”… He mentions the ineffable name explicitly together with the soul and the name of God with the body;… he does not mention the ineffable name together with the insides explicitly, but only by allusion.²²⁵

In instructing his body to always bless God-- whose name every living thing praises-- Ibn Gabirol directly quotes the opening of the Nishmat, thereby transitioning from his piyyut to the prayer. But by ending his poem with an address to his inner self, Ibn Gabirol also asserts the importance of each person’s individual actions in determining the purity of his own soul: you must also act righteously, he seems to be saying, if you wish for your soul to be pure.

**Samuel ibn Naghrela**

In his poetry, Ibn Naghrela advocates living life for the immediate present and for achieving instantaneous pleasure. He does not seem to worry that one’s actions in life will negatively affect him in death, since he sees death is an finite end rather than as a continuation of life. Ibn Naghrela’s views are not very consistent with those commonly held by his contemporaries, who-- influenced by the ideas of Neoplatonism-- encouraged living righteously so that their souls might attain immortality after their own bodily demise. For people looking to achieve eternal salvation, their immediate actions would be tempered by the future consequences of those actions.

²²⁴ Cf. Scheindlin, Gazelle, 207.
In this small poem from Ibn Naghrela’s collection *Ben Qohelet*, an unidentified feminine speaker addresses the poet, urging him to rejoice that God has granted him fifty years of life thus far. But rather than rejoice, he conveys his own, different outlook on life; he advocates living not for the future consequences-- be they rewards or punishments-- but for the immediate moment.

Jefim Schirmann and Raymond Scheindlin’s observations are referred to in the following analysis in addition to my own.

1. She said: “rejoice for God has brought you to fifty years in your world”, but she didn’t know that there is no difference in my eyes between my days which passed and between the days of Noah I’ve heard of.
2. I have nothing in the world except the hour I am in, and it stands for a moment, and afterwards like a cloud moves on.

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The initial speaker is a motherly persona; she recognizes a reason to rejoice at the poet’s fifty years, but she doesn’t understand, nor seek to understand, the poet’s true feelings about aging.

*Fifty years* is a designation of time that does not appear in the Bible, and in biblical terms, it is not even particularly old (Noah lived 350 years after the flood, and 950 years in all). Ibn Naghrela uses the word יָתוֹמְי for “my days” in the third line, which is similar to the Hebrew word for death. The typical plural of the Hebrew word for day, יָמִין, is יָמִים, and the poetic form

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226. Samuel ibn Naghrela, “םָלָם יָתֵמוֹר: שֵׁמֶשׁ”, Schirmann, *HPSP*, 1:131 [ה]. I have numbered the lines according to the numbering in the Hebrew text, wherein each hemistich is referred to as a separate line.
227. Abrahem Even-Shoshan, *Konkordentsia Hadashah*
228. Genesis 9:28-29
which closely resembles the Aramaic תומי, only appears twice in the Bible, both times referring to an abstract period, not an exact number of days. So by speaking of his own days in the third line, Ibn Naghrela indicates that he views his life abstractly, and isn’t counting the exact number of days or years he has lived. Ibn Naghrela’s abstract method of viewing the passage of time in his own life becomes even more clear in v 4, as he equates his own 50 years to Noah’s 950 years, of which he’s only heard stories. The passage of time is abstract, measured as a total span.

Ibn Naghrela closes his poem with reflections that indicate his view of life’s significance. He lives his life for the individual moment, not for the past or for the future, and the world carries no greater significance for him than the present hour in which he is living. The imagery in line 6-- likening an hour to a cloud that stands still for only a moment before passing by-- conveys the fleeting sense of time. Interestingly, שׁהָעָ only appears five times in the Bible as a designation of time, all in the book of Daniel. In all but one of these occurrences, שׁ appears in a similar sense as in Ibn Naghrela’s poem: הבא-שׁ (in the same hour). Thus an hour imparts a sense of immediacy, which is also intended in Ibn Naghrela’s poem. The poet is not gladdened at having attained 50 years, for the only significant marker of time for him is the present hour.

**ii. ‘הָעָלִים לְמָשִׁיכֵם (You Owe it to God)**

Ibn Naghrela’s poem ‘הָעָלִים לְמָשִׁיכֵם (You Owe it to God) reads as a list of instructions addressed to a plural audience on how to live their lives. From the intimate nature of the advice, we can infer that it is modeled on Ibn Naghrela’s own life practices and beliefs. However, the

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230. c.f Deut 32:7; Psalms 90:15
231. Such as Deuteronomy 32:7: "[…] תומי טלחו[עָלִים, וּניִבּוּ תָנְשׁו - רֹכְז (Remember the days of old, Consider the years of ages past).
233. The exception being Daniel 4:16
poem’s primary message is not immediately evident as, after the initial lines, the message changes from one of pious severity to an exhortation to enjoy life. The analysis incorporates Jefim Schirmann and Raymond Scheindlin’s insights in addition to my own.

The poem— which follows the meter תורא, based on the Arabic tawil— has a consistent monorhyme מֶכֵי, a suffix formed from the plural noun ending combined with the plural possessive מֶכ meaning “your”. This rhyme constantly reminds the reader that each line is addressed directly to him, and, as Scheindlin notes, it also reinforces the emphasis on

1. You owe it to God to be righteous in your actions—
2. And He owes it to you to fulfill your rewards.
3. Don’t spend your days serving Him,
4. But make time for God and time for yourselves.
5. Give him half the day, and half of it for your pursuits
6. And don’t grant rest to wine throughout your nights!
7. Extinguish the candle’s light— and illuminate with your goblets,
8. Reject the voice of singers— and sing into your flasks.
9. And if there is no song, wine, or friendship in the grave— alas
10. Fools, let this be your reward for your labors!

i. It is a necessary obligation (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:161, n. 1a).
ii. literally: He who made you
iii. Conversely, it is also necessary for Him (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:161-162, n. 2).
iv. The wine within the glass spreads more light than the candle (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:162, n. 7).
v. Identical to the German phrase: Wein, Weib, Gesang (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:162, n. 9).
vi. While you are on the earth (Schirmann, HPSP, 1:162, n. 10).

The poem— which follows the meter תורא, based on the Arabic tawil— has a consistent monorhyme מֶכֵי, a suffix formed from the plural noun ending combined with the plural possessive מֶכ meaning “your”. This rhyme constantly reminds the reader that each line is addressed directly to him, and, as Scheindlin notes, it also reinforces the emphasis on
“you” (rather than on God): “the suffix khem also appears at the end of every hemistich in the poem but one, so that drumming in our ears we hear ‘you...you...you’”.

The poem’s first section-- lines 1 and 2-- recommends a devout lifestyle in which people are rewarded for piety. Although God is referenced, the actual word for God is not used; he is referred to by the attribute (he who made you), and by the simple designation (him). Ibn Naghrela begins in line 1 by instructing his readers to act righteously, for this is what each person owes God. Scheindlin notes the verbal play with the words and ; both derive from the root , to do. The first refers to God--the verb is used with God as the subject four times in the Bible-- and the second to man’s actions. Scheindlin suggests that the connection between the words signifies an obligatory relationship between God and man: “as God executed his work in creating you (the auditor) with integrity, so it behooves you to do your work, live your life, with integrity.” The first two lines read as a supplication to act righteously towards God, and the reward is that he will reciprocate. Interestingly, Ibn Naghrela doesn’t advocate piety for piety’s sake, but piety for the sake of reward. However, Scheindlin notes that the idea of God actually owing anything to people is “theologically outrageous”, and this humor foreshadows the continuation of the poem, which, as it unfolds, turns out to be an exhortation to seek pleasure.

The second section-- lines 3 and 4-- breaks the spell cast by the somber first verses, as it initiates a departure from the poet’s initial pious advice. The departure is not abrupt, and the lines are not a complete reversal of the previous lines. In line 3 Ibn Naghrela merely cautions his readers not to devote all their time to serving God. And in lines 4 and 5, he introduces the idea of

235. Scheindlin, WWD, 49.
236. I refer to each hemistich as a separate line, as this corresponds to the numbering of the Hebrew lines.
238. Exodus 15:17, Deuteronomy 32:27, Isaiah 41:4; Proverbs 16:4
239. Scheindlin, WWD, 48.
dividing one’s time between oneself and God. This idea of making time for oneself contrasts with a theme that figures prominently in Arabic ascetic—zuhd—poetry. The Arabic term mutawakkil designates a person who trusts God entirely, and when a mutawakkil succeeds, he achieves tawakkul. Hebrew poetry also developed a trend of repentance poetry, in which a poet—when he became old—would experience a religious return (tawba in Arabic) in which he re-examined his life—regretting every moment he spent in non-pious pursuits—and dedicated the remainder of his days to devout piety.241 By juxtaposing the religious conversions of such Hebrew poets as Judah Halevi—who experienced such a complete religious revival in his old age that not only did he reject spending time in frivolous company (a rejection he did not always maintain, but which when ignored often caused him regret over idol hours spent), but he embarked on a solo pilgrimage to Jerusalem242—Ibn Naghrela here advocates not devoting all of one’s time to God, but keeping half for oneself. However, by referring to the time to be set aside for oneself (in line 4) in the plural (םיִתִּע) and the time to be spent for God in the singular (תֵע), he really suggests spending more time on oneself. In these two lines, he alludes to a Talmudic phrase243 from Pesahim 68b: “וקלח והקלח, ויצח הל ויצחו ויצחו כלם” (divide half of your day to God and half to yourself).244 As Schirmann points out, Ibn Naghrela’s own proposals in lines 4 and 5 do not correspond with the Talmudic proposal.245

Line 5 (the first half of the third verse) marks the next section, in which Ibn Gabirol completes the rupture from his seemingly pious attitude in the first sections, and turns to frivolity. In line 6—parodying a verse from Lamentations in which the Israelites are instructed to unceasingly lament—he advises his reader to drink the night away, meaning that the scales have been tipped in favor of time devoted to oneself (as Scheindlin says: “if the auditor thought that

242. c.f. Scheindlin, *Song of the Distant Dove*
244. Pesahim 68 b in “Judaic Classics Deluxe Edition”
the poet was recommending that half one’s time be allotted to God and half to oneself, he is now reminded that nighttime was not included in the equation”). The Lamentation verse (2:18) which he mocks substitutes the word for לֵבֶן (yourself): “לֵבֶן תַּגְוַת לֵבֶן “ (give yourself no respite). Although Ibn Naghrela’s insertion of wine into a melancholic verse from Lamentations could easily be viewed as a mockery of religion, given his devout religious beliefs and his position as a leading rabbinical authority, the misquotation is most likely intended to be playful. Line 7 continues the frivolous mood as Ibn Naghrela exhorts his readers to extinguish the light of the candle-- whose light would aid someone studying at night-- and to seek light from the wine glass instead. It is more than an invitation to drink, but also to cast aside books and cease studying. In line 8, Ibn Naghrela plays with homonyms (a device commonly used in Arabic poetry-- tajnīs): the word נַבֶל means both flasks and harps, translating into an exhortation to sing either into your harps or your flasks. Thus, the line suggests rejecting singers and producing one’s own music with a wine flask or harp. The imagery of these two lines is reminiscent of a medieval Andalusian garden wine party with beautiful young girls and boys pouring the wine and performing.

The poem’s closing couplet departs slightly from the drunken revelry of the proceeding lines, as Ibn Naghrela momentarily ponder’s life’s fleetingness and acknowledges death’s looming presence. He recognizes that death robs us of life’s vanities; however he does not retract his earlier advice to seek merriment and to (partially) neglect God in favor of our own amusements. Thus, we garner from these closing lines that Ibn Naghrela advocates living life without fear of death, and certainly not in preparation for death-- a stance that conflicts with the views of the medieval Neoplatonists who spent their lives preparing their souls to achieve immortality after the death of their physical bodies. In line 9, Ibn Naghrela muses that the

pleasures enjoyed in life— which he identifies as *song, wine, and friendship*— will not follow man to the grave. Scheindlin notes that the threesome departs from the usual combination of “wine women and song”, indicating Ibn Naghrela’s emphasis on male camaraderie rather than on female eroticism. This is the only line that does not end with the rhyme רְחֵם, but with רְחֵם (alas). The break from uniformity emphasizes this line, causing the reader to pause and recognize the message as one of somber realizations rather than another frivolous exhortation. However, Ibn Naghrela is not daunted by the stark reality of this line and in the poem’s concluding line he infers that he expects nothing more from life than song, wine, and friendship. Addressing his readers as fools in the tenth line, he mocks them, asking if they really expected more. This line alludes to Ecclesiastes 2:10, in which the speaker earnestly attempts to find pleasure in vanities, but ultimately finds them empty, learning that happiness is truly found in wisdom. By recalling Ecclesiastes, Ibn Naghrela’s final line is a warning to his readers, acknowledging that *nothing* is all the reader will receive from his wealth, and from his song, wine, and friendships. Although Ibn Naghrela obviously realizes the implications of frivolity and a life spent in the pursuit of wine’s pleasures, he wholeheartedly accepts the consequence: he knows that a life devoted to frivolous past-times will yield only fleeting rewards, and yet he still chooses to partake in this life.

**Concluding Remarks**

Consideration of these poems reveals the views towards life which Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Naghrela express in their poetry. Ibn Gabirol’s poems both show the poet’s preoccupation with devoting himself to God and to purifying his soul during his life. Based on the previous examination of his reflections on death through poetry— in which we saw that on the one hand he accepts death as an unalterable fact, but on the other hand he views it as a new beginning— his

249. Scheindlin *WWD*, 49.
250. *I withheld from my eyes nothing they asked for, and denied myself no enjoyment; rather, I got enjoyment out of all my wealth. And that was all I got out of my wealth.*
attitudes on life can be seen as a preparation for death, as he readies his soul for her departure from his body once he dies. Accordingly, Ibn Gabirol advocates preparing for death in life. Ibn Naghrela, on the other hand, adopts an opposite view of life in his poetry: he advocates living life for the present moment, and for fulfilling every joyful desire. Based on his reflections on death--which he sees as a gruesome and terrifying finality--he views life as a separate entity. They are related insofar as death robs one of life, however, he does not seem to believe that one’s actions in life affect him in death, since death is an ultimate ending point rather than a continuation of life.
Conclusion

The poems of Solomon ibn Gabirol and Samuel ibn Naghrela provide us with insights not only into the two poets’ own beliefs, but into contemporary thought in medieval Andalusia. As discussed in the first chapter, Jewish scholar-poets in medieval Andalusia developed a new branch of Hebrew literature: poetry written in pure biblical Hebrew dealing with secular Arabic themes, incorporating Hellenistic Neoplatonic thought, and written in adapted Arabic poetic quantitative metrics. The poetry produced in this time period-- the Golden Age of Hebrew Poetry-- is the first Hebrew literature to be described by modern scholars as “secular”. And yet it is important to note that much of this poetry was composed by devout Jews who had no notion of “secularity”. These Jews were often conflicted over the paradox of being a devout Jew writing about non-religious courtly themes. Ross Brann discusses the propensity of the courtier-poets to regret the sinful poetry of their youth and to devote their later years to asceticism. Old age was the time to revaluate a life of material pleasures, and poets often lamented that they did not have enough time to devote to religious scholarship.

Although scholars have not identified trends of a midlife bout of repentance--such as that seen in the poetry of Judah Halevi and Moses ibn Ezra-- in the poetry of Ibn Gabirol or Ibn Naghrela, this is not to say they were not conflicted. Ibn Gabirol both loved and hated the courtly life, enjoyed by Ibn Naghrela, from which he was excluded: on the one hand he longed for acceptance, but on the other he rejected the shallow materiality which that life represented.251 Like that of his Andalusian contemporaries who were influenced by Neoplatonic themes and

251. Scheindlin, WWD, 177.
sensibilities, Ibn Gabirol’s poetry reflects his ongoing quest for knowledge in order to aid his soul’s ascent. His obsession with providing for the perfection of his soul is reflected in the underlying recurrent motif in many of his poems that life is temporary, and time is transient.

Ibn Gabirol’s two poems on the subject of death in this thesis present it from different, but not contrasting, angles. The first poem ‘יצחק תבלי’ (Dweller of the Mundane World) is a consolation for death. It portrays the material world as deceitful, and presents death as a joyous occasion of the soul’s release. It ends with the advisory that since we all will die, one should not waste time despairing over death. The second poem, ‘רל-לוב ליאתים’ (Go Forth to Those Who Say), broods on the definitiveness of the world’s finality. It does not celebrate death as in the previous poem, but presents it as an inevitable fact (as proved by Yequtiel’s death). Although the poem mourns Yequtiel’s death, and conveys a vague despair over the reality that all humanity will die, it is not cynical, nor does it deal with the physical aspects of dying (as does Ibn Naghrela). It examines death from a more abstract angle of resignation, advising people to be aware.

Following his understanding of death as both inevitable and as a new beginning of the soul’s solo flight, this thesis went one step further to examine his views on life. Ibn Gabirol urges his readers to live their life with devotion, preparing themselves for death. His poem ‘שאהרתך, יבכון ישחרי’ (I Sought You at Ever Dawn) illustrates the personal nature of the poet’s relationship with God, describing his daily acts of devotion. And his poem ‘ישרי לאל, ישחרי’ is an exultation of his soul, displaying his desire to educate her.

In contrast, Ibn Naghrela’s poetry does not reflect Neoplatonic ideas. Both of Samuel ibn Naghrela’s poems on the subject of death present similar views. In neither does he offer consolation. In the first, ‘יחמדתך בזכאות מיתה בוביל’ (Will You Have Strength When Death

Comes), Ibn Naghrela views his own death with trepidation. His view is cynical, imparting neither consolation nor despair. In the second, ‘דה בינו שניון’ (Is There a Sea Between You and Me?), he views death resentfully, as the obstacle standing between him and his brother. He is unable to surmount the obstacle while alive, nor to find peace, instead resigning himself to estrangement from his brother.

This thesis further examines Ibn Naghrela’s stance on life, based on his observations regarding death. Since he views death as formidable and final, he urges his readers to live for immediate pleasures. His poem ‘אמרה שמחה’ (She Said: Rejoice) reveals his abstract dealing with time, in which he views his life not in accumulated days or years, but only in the present hour. And his message is clear in his poem ‘עליכם לפזעכם’, as he exhorts his readers to allot more time in their day for revelry and wine than for God.

In conclusion, Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Naghrela present differing understandings of life and death in their poetry, largely stemming from their opposite relationships to Neoplatonism. Ibn Gabirol isolated himself from the profane world most of his life, and Ibn Naghrela indulged in it.
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