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 Sourcesheet for Lecture #4

Source 1:

Preface to Genesis, from Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī’s *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ wa-l-Ḥadā’iq* (*The Book of Gardens and Parks*); RNL Evr.-Arab. I:1366, 1v.
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In the name of God, the Eternal

“I hate and abhor falsehood; I love Your teaching.”

When I finished composing this book on the interpretations of the Torah, those which relate to the non-legal parts of the Torah, I considered what I had done in my interpretation of the weekly portion of Genesis, and I found it to be extremely long. I had discussed rational and philosophical issues at (such) length that the scriptural issues were nearly drowning in them – to the point that the reader would arrive at an understanding of most of them only after being exhausted by prolonged reading. I feared that many of those who read it would be repelled by its length, and might even rebuke me for this, or perhaps even find fault with me.

I therefore saw fit to abbreviate it [= the original commentary on the weekly portion of Genesis] and to bring together in it the scriptural issues with a small measure of the rational and philosophical issues. In this way, it will be easy for the reader who wishes to memorize it, and especially for someone who preaches to the people in synagogues (*majālis*). I will mention in this shortened version some, but not all, of my answers to scriptural explanations and issues. Likewise, I will omit the thirty-seven principles that I established as a foundation for interpreting the meaning of the Book. (Therefore) anyone who wants to acquaint himself with them, as well as to know all of the rational matters and answers to scriptural questions that I have omitted, can see them there [in the original long version, in *Tafsir Parashat Bereshit*]. And now I will begin, with the help of God.

Source 2:

Sa‘adya Ga’on, “Long Introduction” to Pentateuch Translation
 (ed. Haggai Ben-Shammai; translation from Judeo-Arabic, Miriam Goldstein)

In God’s Name, the Long Introduction.

Blessed be God, the Lord of Israel, the One, the Eternal, Who speaks the truth in His promises, the loving, the compassionate.

The composer of the book said: Volition, in which no time period interposes between it and the action intended, is that of the Eternal. When he wants something to be, the thing occurs, without any time between the will and the created action. This is perceived by the rational intellect, that is, that the Creator does not need time to carry out His actions. But it is also stated explicitly in Scripture, in describing the acts of God: “For he spoke, and it was; He commanded, and it endured” (Psa. 33:9) and “He sends forth His word to the earth; His command runs swiftly” (Psa. 147:15).

Volition, in which there is a period of time in between it and the action intended, is the volition of human beings, because humans require time to plan the actions that they are hoping to accomplish, and all the more so, to carry the actions out well, because they do things step by step. This is all the more true if they are impeded by any sort of impediment.

While I was living in my hometown, I had long intended to compose for those of our religion a translated version of the Pentateuch, an appropriate one, [and] one which would accord with rational speculation as well as with rabbinic tradition. However, I hesitated to take this on, fearing to display my inner beliefs in public, for I imagined that in faraway places distant from my hometown, there existed clear and apt translations... [manuscript source is cut off at this point]

35 His lips keep watch over all learning,
 and from his mouth the Law is taught;
 his glory glows just like the moon,
 his deeds are like a brook to thirst.
 Virtue and merit are bound to his shoulder,
 40 authority's always sealed at his side.
 He sought out wisdom and fathomed its secrets,
 knowledge until he knew where it was.
 He's brother to counsel, a breaking dawn
 through death's shadow in troubled times.
 45 Kings by the light of his countenance walk;
 faces are covered with shame as he passes.
 Before him the viziers resemble cattle,
 and all the advisers like sheep go dumb.
 My lord, whose love gives rest to my soul,
 50 and when it's forgotten leaves me in ruins,
 I've written that love within my heart—
 from youth it has been engraved on its walls.
 A noble spirit and wisdom are yours,
 knowledge and cunning you also command;
 55 your heart's as wide as East to West,
 your hand as generous as the season's rains.
 The flow of your pen is honor and grace,
 although its frame is thin and plain;
 cut from the reed—when its writing is read
 60 glory, craft, and power reign.
 Riding it's raised like a mighty warrior;
 left on the ground its hope is vain;
 its two teeth are sharpened arrows—
 vengeance the spit of its mouth, or mercy;
 65 it scatters precious gems to books
 inlaid like silk, bright with embroidery.
 My love for Yehosef, the fruitful vine,
 exceeds all love in its force of feeling
 for the lion's cub and child of joy,
 70 for one who fathoms all that's hidden.
 A bud has blossomed in the Levites' camp,
 by the fountain of judgment, by wisdom's spring,
 tender in years but at ease in the Law,
 young yet at home in mysterious things—

as though the men of his age were a harvest, 75
 and he among them the priestly portion.
 I'd give up my life itself for him—
 to whom my own soul is bound.

Hear me, prince above my people;
 lend yours ears to what I say: 80
 Take this poem, in its splendor arrayed,
 an enduring token of love that's pure,
 like a bride dressed in her gown and veils,
 like a maiden adorned with all her jewels—
 intended for you though forever virgin, 85
 sent by a father, but sole as an orphan.
 I leave with you, my lord and prince,
 two brothers who fled for their lives;
 whose inheritance now is strangeness alone,
 whose land in ruins, like Admah, lies: 90
 without the shelter of your shadow across them
 they'll wander out to the ends of the earth.
 May you carry greetings of peace in your greatness
 to the noble heads of our splendid school,
 those men far off, who are near to my soul, 95
 which languishes here within its longing.
 And by your life, my lord, and theirs
 may our Lord soon raise the fallen.