

From the Pages of Tradition

RABBI EZEKIEL LANDAU: LETTER OF RECONCILIATION

In 1666, Shabbetai Zevi, the Jewish mystic who had been proclaimed the true Messiah, converted to Islam. Despite his conversion and subsequent death (in 1676), the movement he initiated continued to thrive throughout much of the eighteenth century. During his lifetime, he enjoyed the enthusiastic support of many prominent rabbinic authorities. After his conversion and death, rabbinic support for the Sabbatean movement waned, but did not disappear entirely. In the eighteenth century, rabbinic opposition would ultimately drive Sabbateanism underground but not without considerable internecine strife among the rabbis themselves. In 1751, the distinguished rabbinic scholar, R. Jacob Emden (d. 1776), accused one of the leading rabbinic authorities of his generation, R. Jonathan Eibeschutz (d. 1764) – the Chief Rabbi of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck – of being a secret believer in Shabbetai Zevi. Emden’s accusation was largely based on his reading of some kabbalistic amulets that were ascribed to the Chief Rabbi. In effect, Emden labeled Eibeschutz a heretic, whose halakhic rulings were null and void. The controversy that ensued – the Emden-Eibeschutz controversy – would pit rabbi against rabbi in Jewish communities throughout Europe. During the controversy, Eibeschutz and his rabbinic supporters placed Emden and his supporters under the ban. Emden and his rabbinic supporters placed Eibeschutz and his supporters under the ban. Since almost every major rabbinic figure alive at the time took sides in the controversy, virtually everyone – at least in theory – was under the ban.

Such an absurd and scandalous state of affairs could not long endure. Nowhere was the tension more acute than in Hamburg and in its neighboring bedroom community, Altona, where the two antagonists resided around the corner from each other. Families split over their allegiances to the one or the other of the antagonists. According to Emden, all breads

and meats under the supervision of the Chief Rabbi were non-kosher. The same was true for any communal institution – like the *mikveh* – under the aegis of the Chief Rabbi. Moreover, Emden characterized the internationally renowned Yeshiva presided over by the Chief Rabbi as a den of iniquity. Needless to say, the Chief Rabbi's supporters thought otherwise. It should come as no surprise that due to differing opinions about Emden and Eibeschuetz, fisticuffs broke out on the floor of the stock market in Hamburg, and it had to be closed until order could be restored.

Much larger issues had to be addressed by the Jewish community at large outside of Altona and Hamburg. Should students be advised not to study under Eibeschuetz? Could the leading rabbi of the generation – whose Yeshiva was attended by students from all over Europe – be deposed without bringing down Judaism in the process? Who, if anyone, had the authority to intercede and decide between these two Torah giants? Was Sabbateanism a threat that still needed to be addressed in Jewish communities throughout Europe? If so, how? What was to be done about the growing desecration of God's Name, as the controversy made its way into the Christian press throughout Europe? The Christian press reported – with no small glee – that a civil war was raging among the Jews about whether or not the Messiah had already come; some rabbis ruled that he came and others thought otherwise. More than ever, Jews became the laughing-stock of Christian conversation and the target of missionary activity.¹

In 1752, at the height of the controversy, R. Ezekiel Landau (d. 1793),² then Rabbi of Yampol – a small but distinguished settlement in Volhynia – made a valiant attempt to bring the controversy to a close. Landau addressed

¹ For a general introduction to the Emden-Eibeschuetz controversy, see H. Graetz, *דברי ימי ישראל*, edited, annotated, and translated (into Hebrew) by S.P. Rabbinowitz (Warsaw, 1899) [photo-offset: Jerusalem, 1972], vol. 8, pp. 455-528 and 614-636. See also M. Grunwald, "Der Hamburger Amulettenstreit," in his *Hamburgs deutsche Juden bis zur Auslösung der Dreigemeinden 1811* (Hamburg, 1904), pp. 89-124. For more recent analysis and bibliography, see G. Scholem, *מחקרי שבתאות* [edited and annotated by Y. Liebes], (Tel Aviv, 1991). Cf. S. Ettinger (together with annotation and additional bibliography prepared by Y. Barnai), "הפולמוס עמדה-אייבשיץ לאורה של ההיסטוריוגרפיה היהודית," *Kabbalah* 9(2003), pp. 329-392

² Recent studies on R. Ezekiel Landau include: Sharon Flatto, *The Kabbalistic Culture of Eighteenth-Century Prague: Ezekiel Landau (the 'Noda Biyehudah') and his Contemporaries* (Oxford, 2010); David Katz, *A Case Study in the Formation of a Super-Rabbi: The Early Years of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau* (U. of Maryland Ph.D., 2004); and Maoz Kahana, *From Prague to Pressburg: Halakhic Writing in a Changing World From the Noda Biyehudah to the Hatam Sofer, 1730-1839* [Hebrew] (Hebrew University Ph.D., 2010). These studies supersede all previous work on R. Ezekiel Landau, and provide full bibliographies for further research.

a lengthy missive – אגרת שלומים (here translated as: *Letter of Reconciliation*) – to all the involved parties and to leading Jewish authorities throughout Europe. In it, he called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and proclaimed that due respect be accorded to Eibeschuetz and Emden by all. Landau basically vindicated Eibeschuetz by depicting him as one of the greatest rabbinic scholars of the generation. Landau ruled that, henceforth, anyone who would slander Eibeschuetz in any way would immediately be placed under the ban. On the other hand, Landau admitted that if not for the fact that the amulets were ascribed to Eibeschuetz, he would have concluded that their author could only have been a Sabbatean. Landau suggested the possibility that either he – Landau – misread them, or else they were partially falsified between the time Eibeschuetz had written them and the time they were shown to Emden. In any event, all the amulets were to be returned to Eibeschuetz and withdrawn permanently from circulation. Moreover, Eibeschuetz was proscribed from writing and distributing amulets ever again. Since numerous alleged Sabbatean works in manuscript form – aside from the amulets – were circulating under his name, Eibeschuetz had to publicly condemn all those works by title, and place their author under the ban. With that, Eibeschuetz was vindicated of the charges that were brought against him. Landau made sure to vindicate Emden as well, ruling that no one could sully his name without being placed under the ban. Additionally, Landau – in order to bring the controversy to a close – banned the future publication of any and all broadsides and pamphlets relating to the controversy.

Landau's *Letter of Reconciliation*, while personally welcomed by Eibeschuetz and many of the moderates involved in the controversy, was torpedoed by Emden. Emden rejected the compromise out of hand, demanding nothing short of total capitulation on the part of Eibeschuetz. Indeed, Emden's sustained effort at the character assassination of Eibeschuetz probably has only one parallel in the annals of Jewish history, namely, Emden's sustained effort at the character assassination of Landau. It will come as no surprise that Emden – somewhat guardedly and probably tongue-in-cheek – accused Landau of being a Sabbatean. And that was among the nicer things he had to say about him.³ Although Landau's attempt to end the controversy failed at the time, his *Letter of Reconciliation* provided – after the deaths of the protagonists – the general contours of a public policy that would allow both R. Jonathan Eibeschuetz and

³ See, e.g., R. Jacob Emden, פתח עינים (Altona, 1756), throughout. Cf. Emden's ספר התאבקות (Altona, 1769), pp. 147b-148b

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R. Jacob Emden to remain recognized as two of the greatest rabbinic authorities of all time.⁴

Landau's *Letter of Reconciliation* is surely one of the most important documents authored by a rabbinic figure in the eighteenth century. It is significant religiously, ethically, and historically. The excerpts presented here, while substantive, cannot possibly capture the full scope, significance, and drama of the original. The interested reader is encouraged to read the original Hebrew letter in its entirety.⁵

I can only tell the truth. The Gaon R. Jonathan, with all due respect, did not act properly initially. He poured out his wrath on the distinguished rabbi, zealot the son of a zealot, Rabbi Jacob the son of the renowned Gaon, master of the Torah and pillar of faith, the late *Hakham Zevi* of blessed memory. He placed him under the ban, hauled him up in his trawl, for reasons unfathomable to me. If it was due to the controversy stirred up by R. Jacob Emden against him, and perhaps R. Jacob was about to initiate a ban against him, surely he [R. Jacob] was compelled to do so due to his suspicions regarding the amulets.

Even if R. Jonathan was persuaded that the truth rested with him, and that not even the slightest fault could be found with the amulets, the fact remains that R. Jacob is not a prophet, and a man can judge only by what he sees. It is inappropriate to place a distinguished rabbi under the ban for wishing to be zealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts. And it is surely inappropriate to place a Talmudic scholar under the ban publicly. Has anyone ever seen or heard of such a practice? If R. Jonathan felt that

⁴ For a fuller discussion of R. Ezekiel Landau's role in the Emden-Eibeschutz controversy, see S. Z. Leiman, "When a Rabbi is Accused of Heresy: R. Ezekiel Landau's Attitude Toward R. Jonathan Eibeschutz in the Emden-Eibeschutz Controversy," in J. Neusner, E.S. Freirichs and N. Sarna, eds., *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox* (Atlanta, 1989), vol. 3, pp. 179-194.

⁵ The original letter is no longer extant. Fortunately, the following has been preserved: one excerpt published in a broadside in 1753; one manuscript copy, copied from one of the original copies of R. Ezekiel Landau's letter in 1754; four large excerpts published by R. Jonathan Eibeschutz in 1755; and a complete but skewed version published by R. Jacob Emden in 1756. A judicious comparison of all these sources allowed for the reconstruction of an almost perfect copy of the original text of the letter, which will appear in the forthcoming Professor Simon Schwarzfuchs Festschrift. All previously printed editions of the letter are either abridged or skewed.

his opponent deserved to be placed under the ban, it would have sufficed to send him a private note that he could no longer leave the confines of his home. Indeed, our rabbis have taught us: One never places a rabbinic scholar under the ban publicly, unless he sinned like Jeroboam, who led the public astray, subverting them into worshipping the golden calves.⁶

I am unaware of any instance where R. Jacob led anyone astray. Throughout his life, he has concentrated on Torah study and worship. Happy is he whose childhood does not embarrass his old age. From his youthful years on, no evil report has cast aspersions on his behavior.

The Gaon R. Jonathan may wish to claim that R. Jacob has led the public astray by raising doubts in their minds about his integrity. After all, he, R. Jonathan, has taught Torah throughout the Jewish communities since his youth. He has raised many disciples, and disciples of disciples, so that virtually most of the Torah scholars in our generation are his disciples. He is considered the primary master of all of them. One who entertains suspicions about his teacher is considered like one who entertains suspicions about the *Shekhinah!* The biblical verse likens the respect due to a Torah scholar to the respect due to God. Surely to raise doubts about R. Jonathan's integrity is to lead the public astray, much like the sin of Jeroboam that led everyone astray.

My reply is: This would be the case only if R. Jacob intended to lead others astray. But he never intended to lead others astray, but rather to remove a stumbling block which, in his opinion, had caused R. Jonathan to fall into a grievous sin relating to the principles of the faith. For these reasons, it is my humble opinion that the ban was issued improperly, and that R. Jonathan did not rule properly, for he treated an inadvertent sin as if it were an intentional one...

I know full well that the argument presented here will be turned against me. They will say: "Adorn yourself first, for you too are not worthy to enter between the towering mountains, and all you will accomplish is to further stir up the roaring waves." I admit that I am not worthy. But I have not, Heaven forbid, come to dispute with anyone, and certainly not with the *gedolei ha-dor*. Heaven forbid that I should stomp on the heads of the holy nation. I have come neither to render impure nor to distance, but rather to bring near and make peace in the world. For such purposes, all restrictions are removed and all may participate, young and old, poor and rich alike. If I speak at length, it is because I cannot restrain myself. I am full of words; the wind is pressuring my belly, like jugs of wine ready to burst.

⁶ B. *Moed Katan* 17a. Cf. *Shulhan Arukh: Yoreh De'ah* 334:42.

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I will express my opinion regarding the status of the amulets, the one who writes them, and those who carry or use them. I do not state: “You must accept my opinion.” All I ask is that the wise weigh the matter on the scales of reason, and hear me out. Pay attention to the views I express here, for men do not frighten me and their pressures do not weigh upon me. I am committed to the fundamentals of our faith; I will not budge from them. I will not favor any man, even if tall as a cedar and his head reaches into the clouds. Wherever possible, I will judge favorably. I love to acquit and detest to convict.

Regarding the copies of the amulets that were sent to my country from Hamburg and Metz, a simple reading based upon a cursory inspection would lead me to conclude that their author fell into the trap of belief in Shabbetai Zevi – if not for the presumption of innocence of the Gaon Rabbi Jonathan, and the fact that the wise are greater than prophets, and that a reputable scholar is treated favorably. All the above relates to suspicion of guilt, and the need to investigate the author [of such an amulet]. But it does not identify the author with certainty as a heretic. Who can judge matters of the heart? And this especially when no signature appears on the amulets themselves. If testimony was taken before the rabbinic court of Metz, I question its legality. Do we take testimony when the accused party is not present? This should certainly not be done in life and death cases like ours. How many different hands did the amulets pass through before they reached the rabbinic court? Who knows whether or not they were forged or falsified? Did the witnesses testify that the amulets did not leave their hands from the time day they received them until now? Surely, this is an impossibility. Such is the case when the author [of the amulets] is an ordinary person, whose standing is unknown to us. But, in our case, where the [purported] author is a scholar of repute, a master of the Torah, the renowned Gaon R. Jonathan, we are obligated to strive officiously and to extend ourselves on behalf of the rabbi, and we may not put our head to rest until he is vindicated. We learn from our elders and from our sages that the book of *Kohélet* was vindicated because it opens and closes with the fear of Heaven.⁷ So too, the Gaon R. Jonathan opens and closes with the fear of Heaven. His great and assiduous study of Torah is common knowledge; from his youthful days until today he has always been associated with a Yeshiva. He studied Torah and taught it publicly. Surely such a person cannot be the cause of sin. His righteousness, humility, and good deeds are widely known. Many have turned from sin based upon his words of rebuke. Who else in this generation can preach

⁷ B. *Shabbat* 30b.

so effectively? I have heard reports from honest observers that “with the breath of his lips the wicked detest their ways.”⁸ Heaven forbid that the disciples reside in the Garden of Eden while their teacher resides in Gehenna! Heaven forbid that anyone raise suspicions about his integrity! Why do you all censure him, seeking to expose his shame publicly? The words of the book of Ezekiel contradict the words of the Torah. Did the sages of Israel raise suspicions about the integrity of the prophet Ezekiel? Rather, they set their minds to explaining away the contradictions.⁹

Regarding the amulets, I will reveal the truth and not engage in a cover up. Despite all the praise of the Gaon R. Jonathan, I made every effort to decipher them in a manner that would not lend support to the nonsensical teachings of the [Sabbatean] fools, but did not succeed. Nonetheless, I do not read them as heretical texts, for the heresy is not explicit. It may be that I don’t know how to decipher them correctly, or it may be that they have no obvious meaning. Proof of the latter possibility are the two *alephs* at the beginning of the word “*aazerka*.”¹⁰ Rashi explains that the two *alephs* appear independently only in the texts of amulets [but otherwise have no obvious meaning].¹¹ Now the amulets are certainly not to be treated with greater deference than the book of Ezekiel. Let the profane not be confused with the sacred. Regarding the book of Ezekiel, prior to the explaining away of the contradictions, the rabbis sought to withdraw it from circulation. This, despite the fact that they were fully confident that it was authored by an established prophet, and that it reflected the words of the living God. They sought to withdraw it from circulation so that readers would not be misled by the plain sense of its words. So too these amulets need to be withdrawn from circulation.

I, an ordinary rabbi, am willing to take the lead. If two or three of the more famous rabbis in Germany will agree with me, I will join them in bearing responsibility for this legal decision. I decree that from the moment these words are made public, anyone – man or woman – wearing any of the amulets in question must remove them and hand them over to a rabbinic court. Adults are responsible for implementing this decree on behalf of their children. The ban of Joshua the son of Nun will be applied against any adult who continues to wear the amulets, or any who allow his or her children to continue to wear the amulets. The amulets must be removed and handed over to the local rabbinic court. The local rabbinic

⁸ Cf. Is. 11:4.

⁹ B. *Shabbat* 13b.

¹⁰ Is. 45:5.

¹¹ B. *Shabbat* 103b.

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courts, upon receiving the amulets, will neither open nor read them, but rather shall store them away via burial in an earthenware vessel, and the matter will recede from memory.

Should the rabbinic courts wish to follow my personal advice, each one – upon receiving the amulets – should forward them to their original owner, the Gaon R. Jonathan, who will store them away in an appropriate place. Either way, from this day on, no one is permitted to use these amulets. Upon hearing our ruling, anyone who violates its stipulations will come under the category “He who breaches a fence, may he be bitten by a snake,” i.e., the bite of a serpent inflicted on those who transgress the words of the rabbis, for which there is no cure.¹² May he suffer continuously from fevers and chills. In contrast, whoever obeys our decree, may his illnesses be healed, and may he be protected, so that no evil or further illness befalls him.

I know full well that the Gaon R. Jonathan will be greatly angered by my decision. What can I do? Flattery will not influence me; truth is more beloved than anything else. Indeed, what I have done is for his benefit, for I have removed the stumbling block from the midst of the people. For even if the amulets are entirely pure, without perversion and crookedness, they have become a stumbling block for the community of Israel. They provide support for the sinners, the believers in Shabbetai Zevi. The sinners count R. Jonathan among their own. They say: “We have a Rabbi among us. We have found a Tanna who supports us.” And relying on his reputation, they have sought to seduce many astray. Indeed, due to our many sins, the rash has spread in our country throughout many of the districts of Pokucie¹³ and Podolia. They cast off the yoke of Torah, they turned upside down the words of the living God, claiming that the world is upside down. All the positive commandments became negative commandments; all the negative commandments – especially those whose violation is punished by extirpation – became positive commandments. They permitted the prohibited sexual unions. “They were weeping regarding the restrictions on their family life.”¹⁴ They sought to make the formerly forbidden unions permissible even in public. Each lusted after his own sexual perversion; they broke out against all restraints. Woe to the ears that hear such matters! They offer sacrifices that sadden the Kingdom of Heaven, yet claim: “Do we offer sacrifices without the approval of

¹² Koh. 10:8. Cf. b. *Avodah Zarah* 27b.

¹³ Pokucie was a region in Ukraine on the upper Pruth and Czeremosz rivers. It served as the southeastern corner of Poland’s territories at the time.

¹⁴ Nu. 10:11. Cf. b. *Shabbat* 130a.

our leaders?” Whatever is said to them in the name of God they reject, for they say that so-and-so the scholar – he is a mighty Torah scholar who wears an amulet on his arm – has rendered the reptile clean and the frog unclean. Thus, they rely on a giant tree. But you, O God, cast them down into the nethermost pit and to the bottom of *She’ol*. God will take up the cause of the innocent and despoil the life of the wicked.

Such is the case today, when the Gaon R. Jonathan still lives among us, and their lies are exposed for the Gaon openly contradicts them. But when one hundred and twenty years shall pass and the Gaon rests with his fathers, the amulets will remain a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling for the House of Israel. Heresy will spread with no one to contain it, for the amulets will serve as a vindication, proving to all the correctness of the heresy. They will claim “an elder has already decided the matter” and that “the Pharisees have permitted the matter,” i.e., they have turned the plate upside down. Namely, they have ceased to do good and they have learned to do evil. Where there is the profaning of God’s Name, no honor is to be accorded to a rabbi. Surely the Gaon R. Jonathan is not greater than our teacher Moses, who fashioned a copper serpent so that the Israelites would concentrate their minds on the One up above. King Hezekiah came along and broke it into pieces – for the Israelites had strayed after it – and the sages of Israel approved his action.¹⁵ This, despite the fact that Moses had fashioned the serpent by divine fiat, and that it had served as a memorial for a miracle. How much more so is it permissible to destroy these amulets of little import, which already serve as lacerating thorns and prickling briars for the House of Israel! It is possible to err by simply glancing at them. The heretics have found a pretext for heresy, and there is no counter response at hand. I hear only a stressful sound; I am too anguished to listen.

Such is my decision regarding the amulets. Let the ban be announced in all synagogues, wherever the amulets have spread. But let it also be specified why they are being banned, lest people err in their understanding of the amulets and interpret them in a derogatory manner. This was never the intention of the author of the amulets; he is innocent of sin.

Regarding the Gaon R. Jonathan, do not ascribe to him what he never said or did. We need to concern ourselves greatly about his honor, for his honor is the honor of Torah and the honor of Heaven. Heaven forbid that we raise suspicions about him regarding words or actions of duplicity. How much more so must we refrain from ascribing to him the slightest hint of heresy, or from closing his Yeshiva, Heaven forbid, by

¹⁵ See Nu. 21:8-9; 2K18:4; and b. *Pesabim* 56a.

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refusing to support it. He shall be called holy, and his honor remains intact, as always. All shall seek Torah from his mouth. No mouth is sweeter than his. He never misses the mark; he is always right on target...

So too regarding the opposing side. Some persons have made derogatory remarks about the Gaon R. Jacob Emden, calling him “the cursed one” or “the excommunicated one” or “the heretic,” as I have seen in some scurrilous writings. If they are of lesser stature than me, I place them under the ban, and may all the curses recorded in the Torah of Moses come down upon them. If they continue to make derogatory remarks about him – causing defects to appear on what is holy – in order to treat the Gaon R. Jacob with contempt, may the one who stings be stung by a scorpion and may he be placed under the ban by others. If they are of greater stature than me, I ask only that they defer to the words of the one of lesser stature. Happy is the generation in which those of greater stature defer to the words of those of lesser stature...

I am dismayed by the great countries [involved in the controversy] and by their distinguished rabbis. I am especially dismayed by the Rabbi and Gaon, the crown of our head, the exceedingly wise, aged, and honorable Rabbi Joshua,¹⁶ who is among the remnants of our senior rabbis. He is surely worthy of resolving this controversy. He is not related to either side; he is even-handed. Why doesn't he extend himself in order to extinguish this great fire, the controversy that rages on like a fire? I am astonished and dismayed that no one is willing to intervene in order to resolve the controversy.

Therefore, I urge that the advice proffered above be followed. All will subsist and everyone will be able to return home safely. Namely, let all the amulets issued by the Gaon R. Jonathan be stored away, under the threat of a ban. By decree of the Watchers, the Gaon R. Jonathan may never again provide anyone with an amulet. He must swear to that effect. Once he agrees to the above, what else can the Gaon possibly do in order to clear himself? He has written everywhere, and even to this country, requesting that a ban be placed – in his name – on all the wicked ones, the believers in Shabbetai Zevi, may their name be blotted out. What else can the Gaon possibly do in order to remove the stumbling block? Thank God, no wrongdoing has ever been ascribed to the aforementioned Gaon,

¹⁶ R. Jacob Joshua Falk (d. 1756), author of *Pnei Yehoshua*. Initially hesitant to intervene in the controversy, he ultimately would play a major role in it. Cf. S. Z. Leiman, “When a Rabbi is Accused of Heresy: The Stance of Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk in the Emden-Eibeschutz Controversy,” in D. Frank and M. Goldish, eds., *Rabbinic Culture and Its Critics* (Detroit, 2008), pp. 435-456.

either regarding a legal decision or any other matter. We have never heard that he has led anyone astray or that he himself has violated any biblical or rabbinic injunction. Even regarding supererogatory practice and pietistic teaching, he practices it himself and teaches it to others. Even his enemies admit this; they cannot deny what is self-evident. It is therefore incumbent on all the renowned Jewish communities – the remainder of the holy Jewish communities will learn from their example – to decree and announce, like Gevini the Announcer,¹⁷ that it is prohibited for anyone to continue to speak maliciously about the Geonim. Whoever slanders or denigrates the Gaon R. Jonathan or whoever disparages the Gaon R. Jacob Emden shall be placed under the ban, he and all his property. He shall be separated from the Jewish community – the golden bowl – and the jar shall be shattered at the spring.¹⁸ Regarding the Gaon R. Jonathan and the Gaon R. Jacob Emden themselves, shepherds and princes of men shall be appointed who will order them by Torah law to render void the bans they issued against each other. They will proclaim: “The ban is voided,” and those once distanced will, perforce, be joined together...

I know full well that both sides will find portions of this letter distasteful as wormwood. Each will say: This portion I approve and that portion I disapprove. It is even possible that the fire of zealousness will be kindled, and as three or four columns are read, they will be shredded by the scribe’s knife. A zealot will proclaim: “Who is it that has come to render judgment? Seed that is neither quick-maturing, nor slow-maturing, nor successful at all. There is neither wisdom nor old-age, neither greatness nor honor here. What overcame him to pass judgment in a land that is not his own? He acts as if his fame has spread to all countries, as if he is famous like Chalkol and Darda.¹⁹ But we know him not; he has never made himself known to us.”

Rest assured, I am aware of my faults and deficiencies; they are more in number than those listed. But I swear that I have come forward neither because I love nor detest a particular person. Whatever is said here, I have weighed on the scales of justice in order to judge favorably. Indeed, our Rabbis have taught us: “Judge every person favorably.”²⁰ I desisted from rendering honor, even as I did not restrain myself from doing what had to be done, in order to remove a stumbling block from the midst of the

¹⁷ M. *Tamid* 3:8.

¹⁸ Koh. 12:6. Cf. b. *Shabbat* 151b-152a.

¹⁹ IK5:11.

²⁰ M. *Avot* 1:6.

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nation, and in order to strengthen the pillars of faith on their foundations. Let my words not be considered a burden for you.

These are the words of the one who signs off with a blessing and a bow to the upright who are joyous and to the righteous for whom light is sown. May you reside securely, may your city stand on its foundation, and may you not abandon your place until the very ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God when the Lord bares His arm. These are the words of the youngest member of the group who – like an indentured servant – desires to serve the sages of Israel, and who rejoices when hearing or participating in their wisdom, and who fears being burned by their coals, and who does not refrain from drawing water in order to extinguish the fire of their controversy, and who risks his life in order to pass through the camp, and who looks forward to observing the rabbinic interpretation of “Waheb in Sufah,”²¹ so that like brothers and friends we will rejoice together, and when love is intense the bed can rest even on the blade of a sword, and the couch will not be too short for stretching out.²²

The insignificant one, Ezekiel Segal Landau, rabbi of the small town of Yampol, where he has established a temporary abode.

²¹ Nu. 21:14. Cf. b. *Kiddushin* 30b.

²² B. *Sanhedrin* 7a and Is. 28:20.