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A Z A R I A H   F I G O   A S   A   P R E A C H E R .

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## INTRODUCTION.

### The DARSHANIM and their Methods.

In considering the homiletical works of Azariah Figo we cannot view them correctly unless we bear constantly in mind that he was an Italian Darshan of the first half of the seventeenth century. Since the material from which Figo constructed his sermons was the same as that used by all the other Darshanim (the Scriptures, the Midrash, the Talmud, and their commentaries), and since in form as well as subject-matter, he followed closely the Midrashic model, we must turn for a general view of Azariah Figo as a preacher to the common characteristics of the Darshanim.

It will not be necessary for our purpose to give any attention to the gradual development of the "derashah" from the simple explanation of a text, by means of "petiḥa" "derush" and conclusion (as found in the Midrash), to the lengthy elaborate discourses of Figo and his contemporaries. Let us rather ignore the historical element in the evolution of the "derashah" and, without dwelling upon the homiletical addresses of the Talmudic and geonic periods, give all of our attention to the "derashah" and the "darshanim" as they were in the time of Figo and in a few centuries preceding his birth.

Although there are no sudden nor abrupt transitions in the development of rabbinical homiletics and although no one man can be said to have introduced an entirely new method and style of sermon-writing, we may safely say that Isaac Arama (d. 1494)

Isaac Aboab and Abraham Bibago (also 15th century-Spain) were the first to establish the type of "derasha" that became most common during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the style and substance varied to some degree in the various countries where the sermon was in vogue (Spain, Italy, Poland, Austria, and Germany) and though we must allow for some individuality on the part of the many darshanim, the common model was followed closely by Figo and all the others of his time. The structure of the "derasha" is very evident. It can readily be noted in any of Figo's sermons.

#### The Structure of the "Derasha".

The sermon begins with a biblical verse or phrase, known as the "ma'amar", \* Figo generally employs a very brief "ma'amar", usually only three to six words; such as, אם שבויות "ma'amar", usually only three to six words; such as, אם שבויות אֵלֶּה or, כִּתְּבָהּ צִמְמוּ בְּרִית,<sup>2</sup> וְאֵלֶּיךָ לִמִּים וְאֵשׁוּבִים,<sup>3</sup> etc. However, in one third of his sermons Figo omits the "ma'amar" altogether.

Following this biblical verse is a Talmudic or Midrashic passage, "the nose ha-derush". Figo invariably begins his sermons with such a quotation, ranging from twenty words to a hundred and fifty. Usually the source from which the passage is quoted is given at the outset; eg., בְּרַק יֵשׁ בְּעֶרְכֵּן אֶ"ר יוֹחָנָן מֵשׁוֹם ד' יוֹסֵף בֶּן זַמְבֵּא מִד' מֵה יִתָּן לָךְ וְהֵם יוֹסֵף לָךְ לִשְׁמֹן etc.<sup>4</sup>. While Figo evidently assumes that the few words of the "ma'amar" will suggest to the hearer the remainder of the biblical passage he gives the Talmudic or Midrashic passage in full.

1. Sermon 46. 2. Sermon 55. 3. Sermon 54. 4. Sermon 65- BINAH LE'ITIM

\* We take our examples from Figo's writings. But the statements contained in this part of the introduction are quite equally true of all the other Darshanim.

Following this was an introduction to the sermon proper. Almost invariably the opening remarks of the introduction had no direct connection with the texts quoted in the ma'amar and in the nose ha-derush. The darshan seemed to leave his text completely and enter upon other lines of thought. It was not until the subject had been quite fully developed, and often not until the very end of the "derasha", that the text was again referred to and its connection with the rest of the discussion brought out. Eventually the entire sermon would prove to be an explanation of the ma'amar, or, more often, of the nose ha-derush, or of both.

It was quite common, especially with Figo to follow the opening quotations with a generalization of some sort. A typical instance of this is the 38th sermon of Binah Le'itim. Figo begins without a ma'amar. --

"Rabbi used to say, "Which is the right course that a man should choose for himself? That which he feels to be honorable for himself, and which also brings him honor from mankind".

(Following this text the sermon begins as follows:-)

"Words that proceed from the mouths of men are viewed and accepted by the hearers for one of two reasons either on account of the position and prominence of the speaker..... or because they are of themselves trustworthy and valuable statements.".....

Occasionally the Darshan might begin with a reference to the significance of the day on which the sermon was being delivered. Thus the 23rd sermon of Binah Le'itim after quoting as the ma'amar: "The festival of Passover, the season of our exodus

from Egypt," and as the nose ha-derush:

"(Tractate Fathers)-Rabbi Eleazar Ha-kappar used to

say, "Jealousy, greed and ambition shorten men's lives"

Figo continues, "This holy sabbath has acquired a better name than the other sacred assemblages, for it is called "Shabboth Hagadol".....

Thus the connection between the texts and the darshan's introduction to his sermon proper was at best vague and rarely immediate. Perhaps a few of his hearers could surmise what chain of thought the Darshan intended to pursue in order to return to the text. But the transition in this case as in many places throughout the sermon was so sudden and abrupt and the change of thought so complete that it is almost impossible to bridge the gap until the Darshan finally inserts the verses that give connection to the various strands.

The body of the derasha varies in length according to the occasion on which it was delivered. Thus Figo spoke at somewhat greater length on Rosh Hashonah than on the Sabbaths of minor importance. But whether long or short the sermon would always contain a number of Biblical, Midrashic and Talmudic passages woven together by the Darshan. Each new quotation was introduced in explanation of difficulties that had arisen in the explanation of passages that had been previously introduced, or with the specific purpose of raising such a problem, by pointing out an apparent contradiction between the new verse and the one already under consideration. That was for the most part the purpose and reason of the sermon, to point out difficulties and solve them, as we shall see later.

When the Darshan had developed a number of texts and by a final quotation and its interpretation had provided a solution of his problems he would close with a phrase expressing the Messianic hope or praying for God's favor and blessing on the people. "May he gather our scattered ones", or "May our souls rejoice in his salvation", or "May our hearts rejoice in the coming of our redemption" or similar expressions are employed by Figo and he generally adds "Speedily in our days. Amen. So may it be His will".

So much for the structure of the "derasha". In considering its subject-matter there are also a few general rules that can be laid down, although the thought did not adhere as closely to a single standard as did the form.

The interests of the Darshanim were almost entirely in the Midrashic field. They assumed that every word and letter of not only the Scriptures but also of the Midrash and Talmud is of extreme significance, that the study of these texts is man's highest good, that men must (or rather, Jews must) be interested in any discussion thereof, whether it have any connection with the practical problems of their own life or be a matter of remote history without any bearing whatsoever on their own affairs. Consequently they devoted their efforts to finding incongruities of text that might with a little ingenuity be harmonized and to explaining redundancies in the text by deriving additional meanings. They based their proof on texts rather than on direct reasoning or on appeal to accepted facts.



Yet, while the Darshanim were largely concerned with the mere exposition of biblical and rabbinic texts, and although some of the Darshanim (especially those of Poland in the eighteenth century) succumbed to a desire to display great skill in far-fetched casuistry, the better element among them served a more worthy purpose. They sought to strengthen the religious faith of the people and to console them in their sorrows of the "exile". Hence their favorite themes were God's love for Israel and the Messianic hope.

In Poland and in Germany sermons were delivered only three times a year (Sabbath ha-gadol, Sabbath Teshubah, and the eve of the Day of Atonement), though occasionally sermons were preached at other times by wandering preachers. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Poland and Germany gave little encouragement to the Darshan. In Italy, on the other hand, the derasha became popular much earlier than in any other country, excepting Spain. Sermons were preached on every Sabbath, holy-day and special occasion. There the Darshanim were as a rule the rabbis of prosperous congregations and their sermons were in great demand. They were encouraged in many ways to make the greatest possible effort in perfecting their sermons. Their sermons were delivered in the vernacular but by translating them into Hebrew and printing them in that language they were able to secure an audience for them abroad as well as at home. Consequently the Darshanim of Italy attained a very high standard. They were men of great learning, familiar with the secular knowledge of their day. Their derashoth excel those of the contemporary darshanim of other lands. Among

the Italian Darshananim whom we may consider on a plane with Figo are Judah Moscato, Samuel Judah Katzenellenbogen, Jacob Albo, Judah Leon di Modeno, Jacob Zahalon, Judah Perez, and Isaac Cavallero. <sup>1</sup>.

### The Life and Career of Azariah Figo.

Azariah ben R. Ephraim Figo was born in Venice in 1579. Little is known of his early life and of his family.\* His father is buried in Venice, and from the tombstone we learn that he was a זקן חכם וענין and that he died on the fifth of Kislev, 1605.

In 1607 Figo became rabbi in Pisa, (in the Province of Tuscany). There he began גדולי התרומה, a commentary to פסוקי תהלים of Rab. Samuel Hasardi. In 1627 Figo was called to Venice. There he finished גדולי התרומה and also wrote ליצנים בנין, a book of sermons which he preached in Venice. ליצנים בנין was not published during his lifetime but was printed one year after his death. In addition to his work as rabbi and teacher, Figo was employed as a scribe. The scrolls which he wrote indicate great proficiency in this art. He also produced another work known as אגרות ותשובות, consisting of letters and responsa.

Figo died at Rovigo on the first of Adar in the

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1. The general facts set forth in this introduction in regard to the form of the derasha and concerning the darshananim are based mainly on "Die Geschichte der Rabbinischen Litteratur", Winter und Wünsche, V.2, P.609-660. The article "Homiletics" in the Jewish Encyclopedia, (V.6, p.455) has a few paragraphs on the Darshananim, but this portion seems to be a very brief abstract of the first ten pages of the section in Winter und Wünsche on the Darshananim (V.2, p.609-618).

\* For the genealogy of Figo see Eisenstein פ'אד; אדא; ישראל <sup>sub.</sup>

year 1647.<sup>1</sup>

From the writings of Figo it is apparent that he was well learned in rabbinic as well as in secular learning. To quote Dr. S. Bäck (Winter und Wünsche V.2, p.653)- I translate-

"Figo's talmudic knowledge was by no means insignificant, as the commentary shows which he wrote to the Sefer Hatrumoth of R. Samuel ha-Sardi..... From Kabbala Figo in his sermons holds himself aloof, yet he was caught in the astrological fantasies which were receiving credence at that time through the renowned Tycho de Brahe. Also in secular knowledge Figo was not inexperienced; medicine and astronomy often provided him with examples for his sermons."

In his own sphere, as a Darshan, Azariah Figo holds quite a high place. His sermons "Binah Le'itim" have been very popular and are still widely read. As we shall see later they have gone through a number of editions and have been reprinted quite recently. He has undoubtedly done much to build up the spirit of his people during ages of persecution. But we may safely say that whatever his place may be in the literary world, in the field of history he has played no important role. Unlike his fellow-countrymen, Judah Menz, Joseph Kolon, and Messer Leon, he did not enter into bitter controversies, nor did he

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1. Figo is mentioned in Shem ha-Gedolim of Azulai, in Lukoth Abanim of Berliner, & Bib. Jud. of Fürst. But they give nothing more than a scant outline of his life (dates of his coming to Venice, death etc). The Jewish Encyclopedia has very little more (cf. Figo, Azariah). Graetz does not mention him.

Abba Applebaum in Eisenstein's שורשי אברהם gives a few more details than the others and I have included them above.

become the outstanding exponent of any great issue.

The Jewish community of Venice, in which Figo spent the last twenty years of his life as rabbi of the congregation, has been estimated by some writers as numbering as little as two thousand souls. Graetz places the Jewish population of Venice during the period 1593-1618 somewhere between one thousand and two thousand souls.\* From a comparison of the various available sources we may safely set the figure somewhat higher for the period of Figo's residence as rabbi there (1627-47). Possibly three thousand would be most accurate. Practically all of them were confined to the ghetto, which had been established in 1516. Yet, though the Jews of Venice were secluded from their non-Jewish neighbors by ghetto-walls and although they were restricted by various "condotta" from engaging in certain trades and professions, their fortunes were closely bound up with that of the other Venetians. The gambling that infested Venice in the sixteenth century spread also in the ghetto and Jews and Christians often played together. When the city government did not enforce a law, the Jewish authorities could accomplish very little with their weapon, excommunication. When the naval activities of Venice met with misfortune the Jews bore their share of the burden in greatly increased taxes. On the whole, the government of Venice (which was a republic in form, but an aristocracy in practice) did not discourage friendly relations between

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\* History of the Jews, Graetz, V,4, p. 653. Luzzatto, in his "Discorso Circa il Stato degli Hebrei di Venetia" places the Jewish population of Venice at 6,000, but this figure cannot be accepted, especially in view of the fact that an official census of 1659 places the number at 4,860, while Leon of Modena (d.Venice, 1648) estimates it as little over 2, 000.

Jews and gentiles in spite of the existence of the ghetto and other restrictions.

In the time of Figo VENICE was on the decline. It had reached the zenith of wealth and power a century before. The jealousy of the other maritime cities of Italy, especially Genoa, and the struggles with Spain, Turkey and the Vatican had gradually sapped the strength of Venice. The League of Cambrai in 1509 had brought the city of the doges almost to the verge of extinction. Plague had added its destruction. In 1575, forty thousand Venetians succumbed to disease. During the life of Figo another plague ravaged the city (1630). Figo speaks of it in his tenth sermon (Binah Le'itim).

During the first four years of Figo's rabbinical career in Venice (1627-1631), the Republic was engaged in the War of the Mantuan Succession. Following this war, which resulted adversely for Venice, there was a period of unbroken peace for fourteen years (1631-1645). But following this the Venetians were engaged in a bitter war with Turkey that lasted for twenty-four years.

We must not fail to note that the cultural standing of Venice in literature and art had some effect on the Jews of the city. Although Figo unsparingly denounces the sham of his congregants,\* who were being enriched by the commercial prosperity of Venice (although they themselves were limited to banking etc.) they undoubtedly gained some of the finer things that could be had through wealth.

\* Sermon 10-Binah Le'itim.

BINAH LE'ITIM.

Various Editions.

Title of the Book.

Structure of the Book.

Compared with other Darshanic works.

B I N A H   L E ' I T I M .

The homiletical writings of Azraiah Figo are contained in one of his books, בִּינָה לְמִנְחָה. (Any references to page or sermon number that may occur hereafter will refer to the Lublin edition of Binah Le'itim, 1875, unless otherwise indicated).

Editions of Binah Le'itim.

The book was first printed in Venice in 1647-8, a few months after the death of Figo. Since then it has gone through a great number of editions, some in folio and some in quarto and some in octavo size. The most important editions of recent date are:

Berlin, 1741; Brünn, 1797; Lemberg, 1797; Lemberg, 1864; and Lublin 1875. \* The Lublin edition 422 pages (double-column) - (V.1-170; V.2-252)

The pagination of the various editions is not the same nor have the sermons been kept in the same order in all of the editions. Some of the sermons suffered from the pen of the censor, who eliminated portions that spoke disparagingly of the Christians. Figo, like the other Jewish writers of Mediaeval times referred to the gentiles as כּוֹכְבֵּי הַבָּשָׂם, which would seem to exclude the Christians, but a number of his statements were eliminated nevertheless by the censor. (Applebaum in תַּלְמוּד לְאַרְבָּע dwells upon this.) On the whole, however, the difference between the various editions is not very great, especially among the editions of the last two centuries.

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\* These editions are mentioned by Fuerst, Ben Jacob etc. Copies of them are contained in the Hebrew Union College Library.

All of the editions of Binah Le'itim have appeared in two volumes, though both volumes are very often bound together. In the editions of 1864 and 1875 the sermons are numbered consecutively to seventy-six. In the editions of 1741 and 1797 the sermons are also numbered consecutively, but the first volume closes with number 31 and the first sermon of the second volume is given the number 34, so that there are no sermons 32 and 33 in the earlier editions. Consequently, all of these editions contain the same seventy-six sermons, but while each sermon of the first volume appears under the same number in every edition, the sermons of the second volume are given different numbers (eg., 45 in the 1797 edition is 43 in the 1864 edition), and while the later editions close with number 76 the earlier editions number the sermons to 78.\*

THE TITLE of the BOOK, בִּינָה לְעִתִּים may best be translated "Timely instruction" or, more literally, "Instruction for Times". In accordance with the plan suggested by this title the sermons are arranged in sixteen groups under as many titles each of which begins with the word עַתָּה. The individual sermons have each a separate title but in every case it is merely "Sermon \_\_\_ on such and such holy-day or such and such occasion; eg. sermons 8-13 are headed דְּרוֹשׁ א' לַשַּׁבָּת תְּשׁוּבָה, (Sermon 1 for Sabbath Tshubah, דְּרוֹשׁ ב' לַשַּׁבָּת תְּשׁוּבָה, (Sermon 2 for Sabbath Tshubah) and so on to דְּרוֹשׁ ו' לַשַּׁבָּת תְּשׁוּבָה, (Sermon 6 for Sabbath Tshubah). All of these six sermons are grouped under

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\* The omission of the numbers 32 and 33 from the eighteenth century editions may indicate that two sermons which appeared in still earlier editions have been discarded (or possibly deleted by the censor). Being unable to secure copies of the editions previous to that of 1741, I could not investigate this.



the heading את תשובת השנה.

### Structure of the Book.

The first sixty sermons of Binah Le'itim were all delivered on certain holy-days or during certain seasons of the year. They are grouped accordingly in chronological sequence. Sermons 61 to 71 are on the subjects of prayer, silence and charity and are arranged in three groups accordingly. Then follow four eulogies (72-75). The last sermon is on circumcision. The arrangement is as follows:-

- את משפט sermons 1-7, delivered on Rosh Hashonah.
- את תשובת השנה sermons 8-13, delivered on Sabbath Tshubah.
- את האסף sermons 14-17, delivered on Succoth.
- את בית יהודה sermons 18-19, delivered on Chanukah.
- את נקמה sermons 20-22, on Purim and Sabbath Zchor.
- את צאת sermons 23-31, delivered on Pesach.
- את לדרוש sermon 32, on Figo's installation in Venice.
- את לעשות sermons 33-41, on the sabbaths of reading Pirke Aboth
- את דודים sermons 42-46, delivered on Shabu'ot.
- את צנה sermons 47-51, during the month of Ab.
- את קץ sermons 52-60, during the month of Elul.
- את הזמיר sermons 61-63, sermons on prayer.
- את לחשות sermons 64-67, on the value of silence.
- את לחנה sermons 68-71, sermons on charity.
- את לספור sermons 72-75, eulogies over four men.
- את שלום sermon 76, on the subject of circumcision.

It is possible that these subjects indicating the various "times" were suggested by biblical passages containing

these phrases. Certainly the third chapter of Ecclesiastes is suggestive of this scheme. But only three of Figo's subjects have a parallel in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, (time for silence, time for mourning, and time for peace). In fact, although the phrases used for subjects in Binah Le'itim are all to be found somewhere in Scriptures (except עת בית יהוה), it is most likely that this is merely a matter of chance rather than purpose, for the following reasons,

First, because one of the subjects (עת בית יהוה) does not appear anywhere in the Bible.

Secondly, these phrases are very common expressions (eg., time of trouble, time for silence etc.) and are likely to occur in any book as voluminous as the Bible.

Thirdly, Figo's use of these phrases is not always the same as that of their biblical context.\*

Fourthly, the subjects are very appropriate and the connection between the title and the sermons appearing under it is never forced, but rather apparent in every case.

Hence we may conclude that Figo did not look into the Bible for these subjects but rather that he coined the phrases

\* The phrase עת לצטות (Time for action) is used in the 119th Psalm, v. 126, in much the same sense as in Binah Le'itim. Similarly, עת משפט (time of judgement) in Eccl. 8, 6; עת צרה (time of trouble) in Psalm 37, 39, in Is. 33, 2 (and other places where "time of trouble appears) and a few others of these phrases have the same conotation in the text of the Bible that they have in Binah Le'itim.

But עת תשובת השנה in IChron. 20, 1, means "the time of the expiration of the year" while Figo uses it, as the subject of the Sabbath Tshubah sermons, to mean "the time of yearly repentance".

to suit his own purpose, influenced perhaps, but only indirectly by his extensive acquaintance with the Bible and its phrasings.

It is noteworthy that *Binah Le'itim* contains at least one sermon for every holy-day in the Jewish calendar, excepting the Day of Atonement. That no sermon for this occasion should be included in the collection is rather strange, especially since the Day of Atonement was considered an unusually opportune time for the Derasha, two or three sermons being delivered on that day. \* No explanation can be offered, however for the absence of a Yom Kippur sermon. It is unfortunate that *Binah Le'itim* was published after the death of Figo. Had he given the book to the press he might have supplied an introduction with a personal touch similar to the introduction of Judah Muscato to his book of sermons *נפוצות יהודה*. Even so, we might have expected some preface by one of his pupils (cf. *צרות זכר* by Jonathan Eybeschütz, Warsaw 1870, preface by Judah Loew Wadislów). But although an appendix appears in all of the editions examined by the present writer, the appendix includes only a tabular list of the biblical and talmudic quotations to be found in the book. The name of the man who compiled this list of *מפתחות* is not given (it is barely possible that Figo did so himself) nor is there any other material included other than the title-page, the sermons, the index of texts (*מפתחות*) and the publisher's note that the references to *צובדי כוכבים* do not apply to the Christians. A preface would have been of

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\* Cf. Muscato's "*נפוצות יהודה*"--in which the 38th, 42nd and 43th sermons are for the Day of Atonement.

aid in clearing up such problems as this (the absence of any Day of Atonement sermon in a collection containing sermons for all the other holy-days).

On COMPARING the STRUCTURE of BINAH LE'ITIM with the structure of other homiletical works of other darshanim of Figo's type we find that the arrangement of sermons used in Binah Le'itim is rather unique. The chronological scheme in the arrangement of sermon collections is less common than might be expected. Judah Muscato's גְּבוּלֵי הַיּוֹדָה, which contains fifty-two sermons delivered on holy-days, sabbaths and special occasions follows no definite system nor logical order in the sequence of the sermons, but they seem rather to be without special plan.

A favorite system of arranging sermons is according to the Pentateuch, a sermon being devoted to each Parashah (cf. אגל יצקב of Jacob Dubno). Another method is that pursued in גְּרֵשֶׁת דְּרָכִים (where the sermons are grouped according to subject, דֶּרֶךְ הַרְבֵּי, דֶּרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ etc.) The sermons of Is. Arama are divided into one hundred and fifty sections, יְקָדָה יִצְחָק.

Without giving further examples, we may say that Binah Le'itim does not follow any model in the general plan of the book, \* but is rather original and unique in this respect.

#### HOMILETICAL METHOD of AZARIAH FIGO.

We turn now to a closer study of the text of Binah

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\*Contrast this with philosophical books which did follow a model., eg., Saadiah.

HOMILETICAL METHOD  
OF AZARIAH FIGO.

Approach and Treatment of the Subject.

Analysis of 71st Sermon.

Introducing Quotations.

Hermeneutics.

Outlines of Typical Sermons.

Le'itim for a more comprehensive view of Figo's homiletical method.

### The APPROACH and TREATMENT of the SUBJECT.

As has already been pointed out (in the introduction), the sermons are not closely coherent compositions. Because of the method employed; i.e., the stringing together of otherwise disconnected texts from Bible, Midrash and Talmud, the sermon lacks in smoothness and the transitions are rather abrupt. Each idea is developed before it is clearly stated and the main thought is always withheld until its less important aspects have been discussed. The author rarely presents the kernel without first enveloping it in a husk and the removal of the husk must precede the discovery of the kernel. Any number of examples of this might be given for any sermon or any complete portion of a sermon would illustrate this. A careful analysis of Sermon 71 delivered on the first day of Pesach \*, included in the group לחגג אז, will serve our purpose here.

The real purpose of the sermon is to encourage charitable contributions for the people of Hebron on the ground that they "take care of the graves of our patriarchs from whose merit we profit throughout all generations". But this appeal is not made nor is Hebron mentioned until the very end of the sermon, in the very last part of it.

\* In what year each sermon was delivered we do not know; only the time of the year is given, but though six sermons may be given on a certain holy-day the year of each is not mentioned. Compare this with Eybeschütz דבש יערות where the exact date and place of the delivery of each sermon is given.

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The preceding four-fifths of the sermon is a discussion of charity in general, pointing out that the giver should be careful to distribute his charity where it is most appropriate. Hence there is no difficulty in making the transition to his final argument (the appeal for Hebron), although there has been no apparent leading up to the appeal for this specific charity. The climax sentence, in which the transition is made and by which the various strands are connected, is: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is to sow in a fitting and proper place! And what place has a superior appeal for charity than the city of the graves of our ancestors, Hebron, (may it be rebuilt speedily in our days), which God favored and appointed for our hands on this day of Passover." Note that in this same sentence the speaker also makes his first reference to the occasion on which the sermon was delivered (Passover) and in an indirect way indicates his reason for choosing this subject on this day.

Having at length arrived at his main theme, the speaker develops the thought expressed in his midrashic text (the nose ha-derush), which has no connection whatever with any of the thoughts introduced up unto this point. The midrashic text is as follows:

(Exodus Rabbah, 43). "Remember to Abraham". Rabbi Tanchuma bar Abba opened the discussion "Thou didst pluck up a vine out of Egypt." What is characteristic of the vine? It is alive and leans upon dead trees. So Israel is living but leans upon the dead. These are the patriarchs. So you will find: How many prayers did Elijah pray on mount Carmel that the fire might descend; as it is said, "Answer me, Oh Lord, answer me," but he was not answered. But when he mentioned the dead, and said, "Oh Lord, the God of

Abraham, Isaac and Israel", he was answered immediately. For what is written there? "And the fire of the Lord descended". And so Moses, when the Israelites did that wicked thing (i.e., made the golden calf) he arose and sought pardon for them forty days and forty nights and was not answered. But when he mentioned the dead he was immediately answered. As it is said, "Remember to Abraham, to Isaac and to Israel". What is written there? "And the Lord repented of the evil". Hence, just as this vine is alive and leans upon dead trees, so the Israelites are alive and support themselves (בְּיָדָם) upon the patriarchs, who are dead. Hence, "Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel."

It is not until the close of the sermon, when he has finally introduced the main point of his sermon that Figo shows his reason for choosing this passage as his text. The discussion of the subject is as follows:- There is no more fitting and deserving cause than the graves of the patriarchs at Hebron. He quotes the Talmudic passage, "Kindness that is performed toward the dead is true kindness, for there is no hope of receiving a reward." For generally the dead have no power to reward. "Hence David said, 'For Thy loving kindness is better than life; my lips shall praise Thee' (Psalm 63,<sup>4</sup>), meaning that I know that even after my death God's kindness to me will be great, but since 'The dead praise not the Lord' (Psalm 115,<sup>17</sup>), my lips shall praise the Lord while I am alive for the dead cannot do even that. But there is one form of giving to the dead for which we may expect a reward: Give to the people of Hebron, who take care of the graves of our patriarchs, from whose merit we profit throughout all generations.

This is the customary method of introducing the main theme and it is usually not until the end of the sermon,



as in this case, that the purpose and explanation of the text are brought out. The Biblical text in this case (the Ma'amar) is Exodus 12,<sup>25</sup>:—"The Lord will give you according as He hath promised, and ye shall keep this service."\* It has no special bearing on the subject and plays no role in the sermon. As a rule this is not the case; the ma'amar generally contains some special significance that is developed in the sermon.

Having examined the general plan of Sermon 71 and noted the treatment of the main issue, let us examine in detail the first part of the sermon, the discussion of charity in general, which is far lengthier than the portion of the Sermon dealing with Hebron and the "merit of the fathers".

After giving the texts, Figo begins, by way of introduction, that the Bible and the rabbis compare charity to the sowing of seed. He gives as examples זרעו לכם צדקה (Hosea 10,<sup>12</sup>); וזורע צדקה שכר אמת (Prov., 11,<sup>18</sup>), and "א"ל (I translate)"Happy are ye that sow beside all waters", (Is. 32, v. 20)-Happy is Israel when they busy themselves with the Torah and charitable deeds" (Talmud, Rosh ha-shannah).

He proceeds to point out that as the sower must find fertile ground for the seed so that his efforts be not wasted, so we too must give charity only where it will bring good results. Then he introduces a talmudical passage (from the end of the Perek "ד' אבות נוקין", which may be translated as follows:

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\* This verse is in the prescribed Scriptural reading for the first day of Passover.

Rabbah interpreted: What is the meaning of the verse,  
 "Let them be made to stumble before Thee; deal  
 with them in the time of Thy anger. (Jer. 18, 23)?"  
 Jeremiah said to the Holy One, blessed be He, "Even  
 in the hour that they are giving charity cause them  
 to stumble among men who are not worthy; so that  
 they may not receive reward for them." לפניך ((trans-  
 lated "before Thee" above)) indicates charity; as it  
 is said, "לפניך לפניך והלך" (and thy "charity"  
 shall go before thee - Is., 58, 8.)

The purpose of this quotation might be, in a way, to illustrate the necessity of giving charity only to the worthy. But Figo has a further purpose in introducing it. The passage serves to raise a question. He points out that the first part of Jeremiah's petition (that they stumble in giving charity and hence receive no reward) is only negative, the absence of reward; but the second part ("deal with them in the time of Thy anger") calls for punishment. "Why should they be punished", asks Figo, "for merely giving charity where it was not deserved?" This form of rhetoric is used very frequently by Figo (and the other darshanim):- raising a problem and then solving it.

Here Figo solves the problem in the usual way- by introducing a quotation and explaining its significance. He quotes from Talmud Baba Bathra:

"Greater is he that does charity in secret than Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him, for it is written "(Prov. 21, 14) He who giveth in secret turneth away anger."

As is usually the case with such quotations (that Figo brings in to explain a difficulty) this passage would hardly

\* Figo's exact wording of the question (translated, of course) is, "And is it such a grievous sin to give charity where it is not befitting? (or, to him who is not deserving), that it should cause such punishment as this, to act in anger and wrath?"

answer the question that has just been raised (Question:-why should one be punished in God's anger, when his stern justice is untempered by any mercy, for giving undeserved charity? Answer:-greater is he that giveth charity in secret than Moses for he who giveth in secret turneth away wrath.) But Figo shows that this second verse is the answer to the problem raised by the first: Since giving in secret would turn away God's wrath, evidently those against whom Jeremiah's prayer is directed are not to give secretly.

Now that he has undertaken a discussion of this verse of Jeremiah and has given a midrashic interpretation to each half of the verse ("Let them stumble before Thee" = may they give their charity to the undeserving. "Deal with them in Thy wrath" = may their charity be given publicly), he raises still another problem in regard to it:- Why does the text give first a specific penalty ("let them stumble") and then a general one ("deal with them in the time of Thy anger)? Should not the general precede the specific? His answer is that this order of the two statements indicates that their charity should, in the first place, be given to the undeserving; and secondly that it should be given openly. For then even if the second part of Jeremiah's request be unfulfilled (even though they give in secret) and God's wrath be averted, they would still have no reward due them.\*

\* That the religious and philosophic conceptions presented here are crude and rather objectionable and that the logic is (at least from a modern viewpoint) far-fetched and casuistic is quite apparent. We need not discuss it at this point however for we are considering the method of the speaker rather than the quality of his subject-matter.

Having explained these implications of the verse, Figo continues his discussion of the value of giving charity only to the deserving by introducing another talmudical reference. He says:

"Rabbenu, the holy, peace unto him, brings further proof of this. When he opened his storehouse and said, 'Let the students of the Bible, Mishnah and Gemara enter etc.' Rabbi Jonathan ben Amram rapped and entered and said, 'Rabbi, feed me.' He (Rabbenu) asked him, 'Have you studied the Bible?' 'No.' 'Have you studied Mishnah?' 'No.' Said he (Rabbenu), 'If that is the case how shall I feed you?' (He answered), 'Feed me as a dog, or as a raven.' After he had gone Rabbenu sat and complained, saying, 'Woe to me that I have given my morsel to the ignorant (מַי הָאֵרֶב)." הָאֵרֶב.

But, Figo points out, though he feared that in a way, he was sowing seed on unfertile soil, yet he had been merciful and fed him immediately. We should, however, seek to give our charity to the deserving and not to the undeserving, though we must not be cruel and let a man starve to death because he has not studied Torah. For we must be like God, "who giveth bread to all flesh", unlearned as well as learned.

At this point Figo introduces another biblical passage, which as it stands in its context, would hardly be suggestive of charity. The quotation is: (Psalm 73, 22):

"But I was brutish and ignorant;  
I was as a beast before Thee."

He introduces it with the phrase וְאֵלֵי עַל זֶה אָמַר הַמְשׁוֹרֵר \* (it was perhaps in regard to this that the Psalmist

\* Other phrases commonly used by Figo in introducing a new quotation are: 'וְזֶה הוּא הַמְכוּן לְ', 'וְכַמְאֵמַר הַחֲכָמִים עָלָה', 'וְעַל דְּמִין זֶה אָמַר הַנְּבִיא'. Note that the first of these introduces a talmudical quotation; the second, a passage from Proverbs; the third, a prophetic selection. But see p. 25.

said). Figo employs this verse as a parallel to Jonathan's request to Rabbenu (although the verse says nothing of feeding etc. and is used in the Psalm only to point out the vile humor of the writer, the comparison to the beast being equivalent to "brutish and ignorant"). Figo, however, declares the verse to be similar to Jonathan's request to be fed as a dog or as a raven, to which he now gives a metaphorical meaning, for Jonathan had really studied Bible and Mishnah, but uses "dog and "raven" in a metaphorical sense.

This concludes the discussion of the talmudic passage regarding Rabbenu and Jonathan but the speaker has not finished with the verse of Psalms. He explains each half of the verse to this effect:- If I belong in the class of the ignorant who do not deserve to be fed, consider me as the cattle, on whom Thy mercy rests. Figo also points out the lesson of modesty from the humble attitude assumed by the Psalmist.

It is at this point that he exclaims, "How good it is to give charity where it is due," and enters upon the plea for contributions for Hebron, which we have already discussed.

The 71st sermon, which we have examined, is one of the very shortest in the book. Yet its general plan of developing the subject is entirely similar to that of all the other sermons. It will not be necessary to analyze another whole sermon in this way but there are a number of items that should be considered separately.

### Introducing Quotations.

As a large part of each sermon in Binah Le-itim consists of quotations (ten or more appearing in the average sermon) the coherence of each sermon depends largely upon the skill with which the quotations are introduced. As has already been said, Figo's quotations do not as a rule fit themselves into the previous thought thoroughly, and very often they do not seem applicable to the subject under discussion until he gives them a metaphorical meaning, finds an analogy in them, or in some way or other calls attention to some relationship in thought that is not readily apparent.\* Yet he never fails eventually to show some connection between the quotation and the general thought. Still the transitions would seem more abrupt than they do were it not for the skillful use of introductory phrases.

Figo has a multitude of expressions with which to introduce quotations deftly. (A few are given in a footnote to page 23 above). Some of these phrases are used repeatedly (as, המשורר אמר זהו לפי), and some are merely variations of a stock phrase. But he distributes them very well so that they do not become monotonous, and the variation is quite commendable. Every such phrase introducing a

\* A number of examples of introducing quotations have been given in analyzing the structure of Sermon 71. Others will be found in the translations of sermons at the end of this thesis. We point out one more here (from Sermon 32:)

He has said that we should imitate the good deeds of others---"and we should learn from them and act in like manner. And that to my mind was the meaning of Saul, the chosen of Gdd, when he said to David, peace be upon him, "And thou hast declared this day how that thou hast dealt with me; forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thy hand thou didst not kill me. For if a

quotation indicates, at least in a general way, the source from which the quotation is drawn:

- Pentateuch: וזהו הוא שאמר אצל נוח  
והוא מאמר יוסף ע"ה לאחיו
- E  
X Prophets: ואם אני מפרש מה שאמר הנביא  
A וסוף הדבר הורגתי לפרש ע"ז דברי ירמיהו ע"ה  
M כאשר בא בנבואת זכריה ע"ה שאמו  
P Hagiographa:  
L Psalms: מה שאמר המזמור ע"ה  
E Proverbs: כדברי החכם ע"ה במשלי  
S Job: כי בנבוא ציון אבות הממון והנביא אומר  
Daniel: ולנו לפיכך ונראה ע"ה באומרו  
O Ecclesiastes: ונחננו בדברי החכם קהילות ע"ה באומרו  
F יש קצת התעוררות לפירושנו זה בירושלמי שאמרו  
Talmud: הלא נראה מה שאז"ל בפ' וואלי נתכוון בזה במה שאז"ל בפ' וואלי  
P ואז"ל מביין זה בדבריהם ז"ל כ'  
H  
R Post-talmudic authors: כאשר קמוזנו הרמב"ם ז"ל  
A ופירש בו הרשב"א ז"ל  
S וזה שלא כשיטת רש"י ז"ל שפירש  
E והרב בפ' יפה תואר ז"ל כחוק בו  
S {These are only a few examples of the introductory

phrases employed by Figo. They are by no means the only ones employed in connection with passages from each of the above sources, nor are these his only sources.)

In citing verses of the Bible Figo does not limit himself to the Sidra and Haftara of the day nor does he show any marked preference for such passages, except in the selection of the text (maamar). Yet occasionally he says (eg. V. 2, p. 85) הלא זה הדבר אשר דבר הנביא בהפטרות היום.

man find his enemy and let him go away well (Figo's interpretation) the Lord will reward thee good for that which thou hast done unto me this day. (I Sam. 24, 19-20). Figo, after quoting this verse gives several rabbinical interpretations of it and rejects them as too self-evident and apparent, "is it not clear that for such a superior act as this God would reward him? But to me it seems that the purpose of this matter is (as follows:) As has already been pointed out, one of the elevating conditions of an act is that it be done for its own sake, not for any ulterior motive, such as fame etc." Then why should Saul have praised David for declaring his good deed that day? From this we learn something new. David did rightly in forfeiting the advantage of keeping this secret for it would serve as a good example for others to imitate, and if they did so God would reward David for it.

In presenting material from Bible, Midrash or Talmud, Figo almost invariably quotes verbatim. In giving the view of post-talmudical authors he generally paraphrases. His favorite authors are: Rashi, Maimonides, Albo, Baachya, Bertinoro, Jacob Gerondi, J. Habib, Samuel Jaffe, Ibn Ezra etc

**HERMENEUTICS.**

Figo is in all respects a product of talmudic learning. His secular knowledge, though not insignificant, is thoroughly colored by his interest in Jewish learning. Hence, not only his thought and style but also the type of logic he employs are largely echoes of the Amoraic, Tanaitic and Gaonic literature. Much that is to be said of Figo is <sup>equally</sup> applicable to the Jewish scholars who preceded him. Every page of Binah Le'itim reflects strongly the antecedents of Azariah Figo. Consequently the hermeneutics employed in these sermons are practically the same as those of the Talmud. We shall point out only the preferences of our darshan for some methods and principles of interpretation and exegesis and his antipathy toward others.

Naturally, in the quotations made from other sources all methods of Scriptural interpretation are employed, and although Figo always indicates in some way where the quotation ends,\* his own continuation of the thought is so similar to the source that there is hardly a perceptible change of style in the transition. In this way every manner of

\* In closing the quotation and beginning its discussion, Figó never says "Here ends the quotation" nor does he use any similar phrase, as other authors do. But he begins his own discussion with וידאָה ל' , ודבריהם ז"ל קשים , נראים דברים, אם כן , והקושי מואר כי , ודבריהם ז"ל קשים , נראים דברים etc.



Scriptural interpretation that is employed in Midrash and Talmud finds its way (in at least some small degree) into Figo's sermons. Yet Figo has very decided preferences:

(1). He pays little heed to פשוט. Rarely does he introduce a verse for its literal meaning.\* And even when the text that he quotes would bear out his previous thought without necessitating midrashic interpretation, he does not pass on without elaborating the verse with midrashic embellishments. \*\*

(2). Not only does he confine himself to פשוט, neglecting the פשוט פשוט (plain meaning) almost entirely, but he also limits his field still further to Midrash Agada, rarely, if ever, considering Midrash Halacha.\*\*\*

Hence, the hermeneutics of Midrash Halacha

\* There are a few marked exceptions to this; eg. in Ser. 26.

\*\* We turn to sermon 13, (V.1, p. 93-end), for an illustration of this:

He says: "It is necessary in praying to realize who one is and before Whom one is standing, that his own lowness may be in his thought and reckoning. Should not his heart be abashed and humbled before the greatness and eminence of God? As I have explained the statement of the rabbis (פשוט), "He who prays must incline his eyes downward and his heart upward etc." And what further proof do we need of this than what the Psalmist has said,

"The sacrifice of the Lord is a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51, 19).

This verse of Psalms surely bears out Figo's thought very well. Without any Midrashic interpretation it might have served as a simple porroboation of his view. But this is not sufficient for the Darshan.

He proceeds immediately to find further significance in the verse. He continues:—"Beside the evident redundancy the passage presents a difficulty. For if he has said that the broken spirit is considered like any sacrifice what significance has his statement that a broken and contrite heart the Lord will not despise?" Then he proceeds to elucidate this.

\*\*\* One of the rare exceptions to this is in Sermon 7, (V.1, p. 44)- on the question of blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashonah when it falls on the Sabbath.

and the terminology commonly used therein do not enter into the sermons of Binah Le'itim, except insofar as they have elements in common with Midrash Agada. The reader will look in vain for such terms as מקור <sup>(except in the case of)</sup> פירוש although Figo occasionally calls attention to a case of מורה שורה by its technical name. In fact his reasoning generally finds its basis in an analogy of words, the explanation of superfluous letters or words in a text (deriving further meanings thereby) and by inferences that seem necessary to avoid an apparent contradiction or inconsistency; while the generalization of special provisions from general ones, inference from major and minor and the like, hardly enter into his type of reasoning.

In accordance with the tastes and interests suggested by these facts it is obvious that Figo's talmudic quotations are practically all Agadic, although they are drawn from many Perakim. \*

We may also point out here that Figo does not use anecdotes, stories and tales of daily life to illustrate his point as did other darshanim, (especially the Poles in the following centuries.) He is fond of analogies from medicine and astronomy and also of incidents and events depicted in Bible and Talmud, but he rarely uses stories of his own times or his own personal experiences.

A marked characteristic of Figo's sermons is the systematic arrangement in enumerated order of any group of ideas

\* See index of quotations (מקורות in Binah Le'itim). Let us note that this Agadic preference is limited only to Figo's sermons; his Responsa etc. are naturally Halachic.

that can be given in serial arrangement. Two examples of this can be seen in Sermon 27 outlined below. Similarly, in Sermon 1 he states that three considerations enter into God's judgment of a man; then he enumerates them, discussing each one before mentioning the next;- 1st, his age..... 2nd, his temperament....., 3rd, his environment..... In Sermon 2, he says that when a man feels his time of judgment approaching he should prepare himself in three ways: 1st, know all his virtues and good acts to state them before the heavenly court in his own defense..... 2nd, prepare defending attorneys (i.e., every time a Jew commits a good act an angel is created thereby who will defend him in heaven)..... 3rd, give a gift to the Judge (God). But since we cannot give Him anything we must give it to His relatives in whose enjoyment He takes pleasure; i.e., the poor... Such a numerical scheme of arranging thoughts can be found in almost any sermon of Figo's (at least to the extent of "first and second").

For a more concise view of Figo's homiletical style we outline a few of his sermons:

(The texts are given in full).

#### OUTLINE of SERMON No. 27.

Time of Exodus.

-2nd Day of Passover.

"The feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord." (Lev.23,<sup>6</sup>).

" Said R. Joshua ben Levi, 'Come and see how great are the humble. For in Temple-times if a man brought an Olah the reward of an Olah was his; if a man brought a Minchah, the reward of a Minchah was his. But he who is lowly is as if he had brought all the sacrifices; as it is said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit"-and not only this, but his prayer is never rejected, as it is said, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." (Ps.51<sup>19</sup>).

ANIMALIC NATURE is the LEAVEN in the dough. It must be expelled, but why especially at Passover? Why not Rosh Hashannah?

PRIDE is equivalent to, and the basis of seven vices.

## (Outline of Sermon 27 et'd.)

Prov. 6, 16-19 "Haughty eyes etc.." and Prov. 21, 24.

Nabal typifies pride. Job, humility.

לֹא לְבַד (Isam. 25, 2) compared with לְבַד לְבַד (Job 1, 3).  
Job shared his; not all for himself.

- TO BE HUMBLE is better than sacrifice; 4 advantages:  
(indicated in the statement of R. Joshua ben Levi-text)
1. sacrifice could be brought only in the Temple.
  2. sacrifice-bringer rewarded only for that sacrifice.
  3. sacrifice rewarded only in this world.
  4. humility is never rejected by God.

PROVIDENCE UPHOLDS the HUMBLE and casts down the haughty.  
(Prov. 14, 6).

MOSES, the model of humility (Numbers 12, 3) defended  
by God against the accusations of Miriam.

## 5 SIGNS of HUMILITY (quotes Bachya):

1. keeping one's temper when provoked, and showing mercy.  
Example, Isam. 19, 23 (David's mercy to Shimi). Also,  
God's longsuffering toward Pharaoh. (Quotes Joshua ben  
Levi, "Why were they called לֹא לְבַד etc.")
2. meeting misfortune with faith in God's justice (Job 1, 20)
3. spurning praise, (realizing insignificance compared  
with God; interprets Prov. 27, 21, accordingly). Not  
hiding fault; eg., Judah takes the blame in regard to  
Tamar.
4. becoming more and more humble with increased prosper-  
ity. Contrast Mordecai and Haman, (Esther 10, 3).
5. fear, reverence and gratitude; lead men to serve the  
humble man (eg. Mordecai) and not merely fear (eg. Haman)

AT TIME of EXODUS ISRAELITES were very haughty.

Subjected to slavery, hardship etc. to destroy their  
pride. Under Pharaoh, the haughty, (Ezek. 29, 3, & 17, 14)  
Pharaoh himself shall be brought low (Ezek. 29, 16).

JEWS LEARNED HAUGHTINESS from the Egyptians, who shall be  
punished accordingly.

Exodus 2, 14 (who made thee ruler over us)= haughtiness.

JEWS HAD TO SHOW HUMILITY before they could be redeemed, by  
ridding themselves of the Leaven (symbolical of puffing  
and vaunting) and accept the לֶחֶם מִצֵּה (לֶחֶם מִצֵּה)

As pointed out by the "Rambam" Jews had to go from ex-  
treme pride to extreme humility.

OUTLINE of SERMON No. 26.  
Time of Exodus. 1st Day of Passover.

"As in the days of thy coming forth out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things." (Micah 7, 15).

(Genesis Rabba, 70:) "So that I come back to my father's house in peace." (Gen. 28, 21) Said R. Hoshaiiah of Ziknin, in the name of R. Levi, "God took the thoughts of the patriarchs and made of them a key for the redemption of their descendants, God said, 'Thou hast said, "and He shall be (והיה) my God". By thy life, all the good things and blessings and consolations which I shall give to thy children, I shall give only in this language, as it is said, "And it shall come to pass (והיה) in that day that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem." (-Zech. 14, 8) "And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people". (Is. 11, 11) "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down sweet wine." (-Joel 4, 18). "And it shall come to pass on that day that a great horn shall be blown." (-Is. 27, 13).

There are FOUR SEDAR CUPS:

1. Sanctification of the day.
2. The Hagadah.
3. Grace after meals.
4. Hallel.

They also correspond to the 4 expressions of redemption:

והוצאתי והוצאתי והוצאתי והוצאתי.

There are FOUR CLASSES of TROUBLES INFLICTED upon ISRAEL by their enemies:

1. Deprivation of material sustenance. (Cf. Deut. 28, 48)\*  
Cf. also Hosea 2, 10, deprivation a punishment.
2. Bodily injuries (in war etc.) - Lamentations 5, 5
3. Contempt and disgrace. - Psalms 44, 14, (which he explains further, in connection with Prov. 18, 3).
4. Lack of mental ease, preventing our keeping the Laws of Judaism, cf. the idea שגלן שכיבה צמח.

All Four of THESE AFFLICTIONS were visited upon the Jews in Egypt:-

1. Ex. 1, 11.
2. Ex. 1, 13.
3. --Slavery.
4. --the rabbinical explanation of גלן שכיבה צמח

\* The quotations used in this sermon are taken in their literal meaning far more than is usually the case with Figo's Biblical quotations. Hence we refer to them by Book, chapter and Verse (which, by the way, is never given in the sermons of Binah Le'itim). All the quotations are indicated in this outline, but only by book, chapter and verse.

# OUTLINE of SERMON No. 26 (c't'd).

From all four GOD DELIVERED THEM through Moses. & Cf. Ex. 6, 6, which he shows contains references to each of the FOUR.

PSALM 107 also indicates God's deliverance from each of these FOUR AFFLICTIONS, mentioning each and its removal:

- |     |                  |     |                     |
|-----|------------------|-----|---------------------|
| 1.- | V.6 --&-- V.8-9. | 2.- | V.10 --&-- V.14.    |
| 3.- | V.23 --&-- V.29. | 4.- | V.17 --&-- V.20-21. |

EACH of the CUPS indicates the REMOVAL of an AFFLICTION:

- (a). SANCTIFICATION of the DAY, in which we say, "In that He chose us from amongst all people", indicates the removal of the 4th affliction.
- (b). The HAGADAH, in which we say, "We were slaves to Pharaoh but God delivered us, = removal of the 3rd
- (c). GRACE after MEALS indicates that God has granted us our material needs (removal of the 1st).
- (d). HALLEL, beginning with "Pour out Thy wrath upon the gentiles, for they have consumed Jacob" --the 2nd

OUR FINAL REDEMPTION, like the first, shall end all these.

But why the four expressions concerning benefits given in the text (from Genesis Rabba) ?

Must be explained with Jacob's declaration (Gen. 28, 21) after God had promised that he would bless him etc. Did he mean that if God did not he would not accept Him as his God?

Jacob's statement must not be accepted literally, for

GOD had PROMISED JACOB the FIRST THREE BENEFITS:

- (a) "I shall guard thee (against bodily injury).
- (b) "return thee to this land (not be enslaved or disgraced)-cf. "This year we are slaves-here; next year, free men -in the land of Israel."
- (c) "shall not forsake thee" -no lack of food- cf. "I have never seen a righteous man forsaken and his seed lacking bread."

But JACOB ASKED for the FOURTH TOO:

- (a) "If he will guard me" -no bodily injury;
- (b) "and give me bread and clothing" -no want;
- (c) "and return me to my father's house -in honor;
- (d) "and let me serve Him as my God" -give me tranquility and teach me His ways;

Then I vow that "THIS STONE which I set up for etc."

וְהָיָה לְאִשְׁתִּי לְבֵית עֹלָם is a request on the part of Jacob, to be able to serve God was more important to him than the other three conditions.

# OUTLINE of SERMON No. 26 (C't'd)

In OUR BITTER EXILE we have suffered ALL FOUR deprivations.

But, AS STATED in the TEXT from GENESIS RABBA Jacob's request has become the KEY for our release. He asked as the fourth benefit to serve God. Israel shall receive also the other 3:

Indicated by ד'ר'ל:

1. The benefit of wealth, - Joel 4, 18.
2. The blessing of honor, -Is. 27, 13; cf. trumpets of king.
3. Consolations over dead of the exile and bodily suffering, -Zech. 14, 8. (& Is. 25, 8)
4. Service of God and keeping His laws, being His people -Is. 11, 11.

Thus MICAH 7, 15, the BIBLICAL TEXT, shall be fulfilled: We shall be redeemed "as in the days of thy coming forth out of Egypt, with marvellous things".

But OUR SINS delay the redemption.

Dan. 12, 6 refers to our enemies' saying that God's performing miracles for us has long since ceased. Daniel meant:

HOW LONG will it be ere YOU WILL AGAIN PERFORM MIRACLES for us?  
HASTEN THY MARVELOUS DELIVERY.

Amen. If such be His will.

## ----- OUTLINE of SERMON No. 30. Time of EXODUS. 2nd Sermon on the "Song at the Sea".

"Fearful in praises" (-Ex. 15, 11.)

(Midrash Psalms:) "Forever is mercy built- Ps. 89, 3 (the usually accepted translation; but here evidently taken:- "world built in kindness"). Analogy: to what is the world comparable and the glory of the Holy One Blessed be He? To a king who had courts full of goods, and said "Why should these lie idle? I shall take servants and let them eat and drink and they shall praise me". Thus the world was void and unformed; He arose and created the world and created man and gave him dominion over all the good in order that he might praise Him. And as for us, what are we to do? Praise and bless (God), and thus he says, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord" (Ps. 150, 6); and he says, "Blessed be the Lord forever and ever. Amen. (Ps. 89, 53).

Philosophers have ridiculed the belief that MAN is the ULTIMATE CAUSE for the UNIVERSE being created, for

1. What profit had God in creating man? He cannot add to God's perfection. Therein they are correct.

Ps. 86, 10 (note the superfluous "לך") indicates that God's kingship -unlike human- does not depend on his subjects.

# OUTLINE of SERMON 30 (C't'd).

2. Human power becomes active instead of potential when used and is thus perfected. But not so, God. Ex. 15, 6 (interpreted). His power is equally perfect when in potentia.

CREATURES ADD NOTHING to GOD'S PERFECTION. He had no self-ish motive in creating; only kindness.

OTHERS ADMIT that God had a purpose in creating, but that MAN is NOT the GOAL of CREATION.

MAN is INFERIOR to the HEAVENLY BODIES:

1. Man's substance decays and he is short-lived-significance of נפול נפול (Ps. 144, 4).
2. The heavenly bodies are luminous bodies.
3. The heavenly bodies are higher in space.

But these advantages are all in regard to matter.

In comprehending God man is the superior. They cannot.

Explains the talmudic saying: "The heel of Adam outshone the sun."

MAN was created last; but the first in GOD's planning. (Interprets- Psalm 139, 5 accordingly.)

GENESIS 1, 1, shows that man was the goal of creation. Cf. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. (Proy. 1, 7) The goal of wisdom is REPENTANCE & GOOD DEEDS. (Berachoth) GOD did have a PURPOSE in CREATION. In beginning anything one always has a purpose.

The sublunar earth was:

1. נחל נחל (decomposable), 2. "dark" & 3. "an abyss".
- BUT, the spirit of GOD moved on the face of the water. This spirit of God, put into MAN, most significant.

DEDUCES from the Talmudic Statement that "in the hour that Moses ascended on high to receive the Torah the angels said to God, "What is this son of woman doing between us? He said to them, "He came to receive the Torah" etc." :-

Moses was superior to the angels because he came to accept the Torah for Israel, which was the purpose of creation

Mankind is superior to the angels because they are subject to temptation and sin while angels are created pure.

Job 4, 17 implies that man is not kept righteous by God, (as angels are) but deserves credit for his goodness. (interprets Job 3, 17; Job 4, 18; Job 4, 19).

MAN'S SERVICE of God is the purpose underlying creation.

For when men did not serve God, in the time of Noah, God decided to destroy the earth. Gen. 6, 13 (47 = purpose)



# OUTLINE of SERMON No. 30 (C't'd).

Takes exception to an interpretation of Samuel ben Isaac Jaffe.

NOAH was saved because he did serve God; while others were planting vineyards he begat children. (Gen. 6, 9 וַיִּתְּנָה)

NOW let us CONSIDER our TEXT from the MIDRASH:

Since the earth was void and without form, how can they compare it to storehouses full of goods?

Evidently they meant to imply that even before creation the universe was in potentia and its non-existence no shortcoming in God, nor its creation an addition. But

God desired the pleasure of having servants praising Him; they are the real gainers; he receives nothing but praise

ALL PEOPLES are to PRAISE GOD (Ps. 150, 6) - but especially Israel the CHOSEN PEOPLE.

Ps. 145, 10 All shall praise Thee; Thy saints bless Thee. Only Israel asked to bless God. Especially at Passover. (Song of Songs 2, 14 refers to Passover praises).

But OUR PRAISES are NOT ACCEPTABLE unless we act properly, "fearing God, walk in all His ways, to love and serve Him with all Thy heart and soul."  
All of which is NOT DIFFICULT.

Importance of fearing God - Psalm 2, 11; -Prov. 14, 2; -Deut. 10, 12.  
This fear acquired by

1. Studying Torah -fearing lest he misunderstand.
2. (Talmud:) "Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his knowledge, his knowledge endures."
2. Carrying out the commandments -lest he blunder in the details. Prov. 13, 13.
3. Extolling God. Cf.

תורה אלה : THE BIBLICAL TEXT.

## BRIEF OUTLINE of SERMON 31.

Time of EXODUS.

For the 8th Day  
of Passover.

"In haste didst thou come forth out of Egypt." (Deut. 16, 3)

"Thy two breasts; these are Moses and Aaron. What of these two breasts? One is no larger than the other....so, Moses and Aaron.....like a king who had two good pearls and put them in ear-rings....blessed be God, who chose these two brothers, who were created only for the Torah and the glory of Israel.

# OUTLINE of SERMON 31 (C't'd).

GOD INTERFERE'S with MAN'S freewill ONLY in aiding men to remain good, when they have chosen to be so. -Ps. 119, 35.

NEVER ENCOURAGES EVIL in men. -Prov. 24, 8. IKings 18, 37 explained: ("Thou hast turned their hearts backward").

PASSOVER story presents GREAT DIFFICULTY in this regard:

Q.If God hardened the heart of Pharoah (Ex. 7, 3; 9, 12; 10, 1) why should Pharoah be punished?

Explanation: (Cf. Ex. 7, 2-3): I am the cause of Pharoah's hardening his heart. He will believe I am not a powerful God since I send messengers instead of using force.

But God did NOT COERCE him to be stubborn.

Verified by Pharoah's saying "Who is the Lord that I should hearken to Him etc?" (Ex. 5, 2).

Q. & Why were hail and locust sent on the next day (9, 18; 10, 4, etc.) while other plagues came immediately?

(Locusts came on 3rd day, since they only began to come on the 2nd. - Ex. 10, 13).

Explanation: because servants were beginning to repent. - Ex. 10, 7.

Hence we see how much GOD WISHES MEN to repent and to choose the PROPER WAY, wherefor

HE SELECTED THESE TWO PERFECT BROTHERS for the mission.

MIDRASHIC TEXT: Neither one of them greater than other.

THEIR greatness lay in HUMILITY etc.

Ps. 119, 105 - evil man walks in the dark (tripping on stones; stumbling into pits) But

NEITHER TRIUMPH NOR DISASTER INJURES the RIGHTEOUS; eg., Joseph. (Cf. also Ps. 130, 1).

MOSES and AARON compared to two breasts-equal in size etc.

Moses excelled in prophecy; Aaron in power of speech.

But neither felt superior to the other.

Considered themselves as TWO GRAINS of DUST.

LIKE PEARLS in a pair of ear-rings they were exactly EQUAL

Therefor they were deemed worthy to lead the EXODUS, although the four hundred years had not yet expired:

BIBLICAL TEXT: In haste ye went out from Egypt - indicates that the great future REDEMPTION will also come SPEEDILY. Amen.

PHILOSOPHY

and

VIEWS.

Object of His Preaching.

Emotional effect, encouraging.  
Inconsistencies.

Premises of Figo's Theology.

His Interests and Point of View.

Israel's suffering "in exile".

Discussions of ethical questions.

Tone of Sermons.

Poetic and dramatic tendencies etc.

Interest in Medicine and Astronomy.

Eulogies and Appeals for Charity.

P H I L O S O P H Y   A N D   V I E W S .

Naturally, a book of sermons like Binah Le'itim does not build up a deliberate system of philosophy. As might be expected, each sermon has no connection whatever with the other sermons, and various subjects are introduced and treated without an orderly plan of development. \* In fact, the same sermon often treats various phases of different problems without developing any one of them fully. \*\*

Yet one might expect to find some series of consistent ideas advanced by the preacher that would form an orderly harmonious system of thought. First, there should be a back-ground of ideas and beliefs peculiar to the people of his religious faith, influenced by the conceptions of his own age; and secondly, there should be some original or individual outlook and opinions peculiar to his own personality, temperament and the like.

In Figo's case, the first of these elements is very marked. Very little can be found in Binah Le'itim that cannot be traced to earlier Jewish writings. Except for his own knowledge of medicine and a little astronomy, hardly any thoughts or opinions enter into Figo's sermons that are not taken almost in toto from Bible, Midrash,

\* Although he occasionally says, "As I have already explained in connection with that verse." Eg.V.1, p.44, col.1.

\*\* This fact can be readily noted in examining the outlines of sermons on the preceding pages, especially Nos.30 and 31.

Talmud etc. The personal element is almost completely submerged in the great bulk of Jewish lore. Figo would never have contemplated for a moment the idea of a sermon that did not begin with a text from the sources (quoted verbatim), that did not introduce a few other quotations every few minutes and in which the characters of the Bible did not enter. Moreover he does not reveal a consistent philosophy that might differ in just a few essentials from that of other Jewish philosophers and theologians, nor does he adhere consistently to any one school of thought. His is an eclectic philosophy drawn from all the sources.

Although a keen dialectic mind he picks out a thought here and a thought there, as best suits the subject at issue, caring little whether or not it harmonizes completely with what has been said in a previous sermons. Thus his style differs radically from that of Sadia, Maimonides and philosophers of their type; it might best be compared to Rashi. Accepting everything in the sources, contradictions mean nothing to him. With a little further ingenuity any two opposite opinions can be made to harmonize completely. If he were confronted with his own contradictions he could with facile tongue surely have made them appear to coincide, at least to the satisfaction of his well-disposed congregants. He was, indeed, a "darshan".

His object was not primarily the development of a true, logical, philosophy of facts. He sought rather to give his people a pleasing Jewish theology, a realm of thought

beyond the cold materialism of every-day life, that they might turn from the sordid things of earth to thoughts of pure idealism, to angels and to God. He wished to fill their minds with some characters supremely good, patriarchs and prophets, judges and kings. He sought to console them in the hardships of the "exile" with pictures of a life hereafter and the Messianic age to come.

What matters it that in Sermon 26 he says, \* "Also their (the Israelites') contumely and lack of honor is apparent for it indeed shows their low estate that they were called <sup>שניג'א'ם</sup> "עבדים", for there is no degradation greater than this עבדים, שאין להם שכלות גדול מזה, and then in Sermon 44, \*\* after stating that it is better to be a servant to the worthy than master in one's own home, (wherefor Pharaoh gave his daughter Hagar to Sarah as a handmaid) he arrives at the climax of his thought and, forgetting what stigma he has attached to the word עבדים, he says, referring to serving God, "לא נזכר להשיג שום מעלה גדולה יותר מהיותו עבדים לו". In fact he is very fond of superlatives and they often lead him into such innocuous contradictions as this. But what matters it if he is guilty of such inconsistencies if he inspire his people with the realization of the dire plight of their ancestors in Egypt and with the value of serving God?

Indeed it is nothing to him if he be found guilty of grosser contradictions. Possibly he was not aware when he said in Sermon 27, \*\*\* that when Moses came to his

\* V. 1, p. 147, 1st column.

\*\* V. 2, p. 56, 2nd column.

\*\*\* V. 1, p. 153, 1st column.

brethren after their long bondage he found them haughty, "because Israel learned from their (Egyptian) ways and were haughty like them and that is (the reason for) his saying "And it shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance, when they turn after them etc." (Ezek.29, 16). For we see that they were learning to be haughty like them. And Dathan and Abiram show this, for when Moses wished to reprove them, they showed ~~the show-~~ed the evil of their insolence and their unwillingness to bear any direction or governing over them when they said, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" (Ex.2, 14) - possibly in giving this view Figo did not realize that he had said in a previous sermon, \*"עניוּת" that came to them because of their severe trials" God said he would deliver them. In Sermon 27 we find the Jews of Egypt proud and haughty in the time of Moses. In Sermon 26 the same Jews at the same time are pictured as abject and humiliated. But in either case they are used as an example to show that pride is wicked and humility right. Such opposing statements and incongruity are evidently not distasteful to the darshan. Within the same sermon he invariably seeks to remove the semblance of any contradiction; although he accepts ideas so fundamentally different, that they can never be really harmonized, his art lies in giving them the appearance of similitude.

Thus\* he takes the statement of Ben Azai "A man is duty-bound to teach his daughter Torah," and R.Eliezer's statement "Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah is as if he

had taught her prostitution". He puts these two statements together and seeks to show that they accord nicely with each other. Evidently, however, Ben Azai and R. Eliezer held very different views in the matter. Their opinions on woman were certainly at variance. But Figo would not believe that any statement found in Bible, Midrash or Talmud was the very reverse of another. He felt it incumbent upon himself and his hearers to believe implicitly every word in those documents. They might need a little explanation but they were all correct and authentic, all of them in full accord with each other. In seeking to hold on to all of these strands and show consistency in them all his own philosophy and theology suffered the worst inconsistencies. He did have certain fundamental doctrines (which we shall point out later) which he always postulated without any deviation. But in addition to the types of incongruity of which examples have been given some much graver theological falacies entered into his sermons.

It would be utterly impossible to give even a partial list of the inconsistencies in theological views to be found in Binah Le'itim. A few will serve as example:

At the very outset of Sermon 31 he states clearly that God does not interfere with the free-will of any man except to aid him when he has of his own accord chosen to do the good. But in Sermon 40 \* "Therefor annul thy will, which is the leaven in the dough, and humble it before His will, blessed be He, for then He will annul the will of others and free (you) of those who pursue thee and hinder thee and this because of your good will in order to put it

\* Vol. 2, p. 36, 1st column.



into action without any hindrance." It is hardly necessary to remark that the first of these statements invalidates the second and vice versa.

Again, in Sermon 42 \* he pictures Israel as the bride of the Lord. Among the ten responsibilities that he declares a man must assume toward his bride is furnishing her with food. In this connection he says, "אֲכָל" (Ex. 21, <sup>10</sup>) means food.. God says, "Thy lips, O my bride, drop honey; honey and milk are under thy tongue." (Song of S. 4, <sup>11</sup>) for when scriptures wishes to express in strong terms plenty of food and abundance of substance it says "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Josh. 5, <sup>6</sup>). Hence God said that Israel would never lack good food, but that their lips would always drip with milk and honey and that the milk and honey would be under their tongue in an abundance of all good". (Then he passes on to a discussion of the next obligation-clothing.)

But in Sermon 26 \*\* he says that there are four classes of deprivation inflicted upon Israel . One of them is lack of food:- "The first is to deprive them of their money and to keep them hungry in nakedness and in lack of everything. For this is one of the greatest of the curses according to the statement of Moses our master, "Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things; therefor shalt thou serve thy enemy whom the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness and in want of all things; and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee." (Leut. 28, <sup>47-48</sup>).

\* V. 2, p. 44, col. 2.

\*\* V. 1, p. 146, col. 1.

And the plain meaning of the text "in hunger," and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all good things is directed against Israel, that they are to be hungry and also thirsty." The rest of the sermon in each case bears out these widely divergent views; but when thus brought together it becomes clear immediately that Figo is not interested primarily in actual historical fact nor in pure philosophical reasoning, but in emotional effect.

He loves to dwell on the glorious past of Israel, its sad plight in the present "exile" from the Holy Land, and the glorious future when Israel shall again be redeemed. Almost all of the sermons portray in contrasted colors the vicissitudes and turns of fortune that lie behind and ahead along the path of the Chosen People.

#### PREMISES OF FIGO'S THEOLOGY.

Underlying all of Figo's thinking there are a number of postulates which he accepts implicitly without any attempt to prove them. They are the key-stones in all of his structures. They are the key-notes in all of his sermons. Whatever the subject under discussion may be, those postulates are always present in some degree or in some form. If for a moment they be thrust into the background they soon reappear in some connection or other.

These premises, we may even say axioms, are the commonly accepted ideas of Jewish tradition and still remain the tenets of the bulk of Orthodox Jewry. They are so well known that it would seem almost unnecessary to relate them.

But for the sake of completeness, since they play so great a part in the preaching of Azariah Figo, and in order to give some concrete expression of Figo's own attitude in regard to each of them we enumerate the most important of them.

(We do not consider here the basic principles of his faith. Figo of course accepts without any reservation all of the thirteen principles laid down by Maimonides: God's existence, unity, incorporeality, eternity, and worship; the truth of prophecy, superiority of Moses, immutability of the Torah, God's omniscience, reward and punishment, Messiah and resurrection. He further postulates:)

1. Israel is the avored and beloved people of God.

\* "And the basis of all this is that by reason of the holy Torah, Israel is elevated above all the "idolaters", to be a valued and treasured property from among all the nations as is borne out to us by four things that distinguish this people, which can never pass over from them to any other people, for they do not apply except to Israel alone:

(1). "The Torah; for to Israel and to them alone it has been given forever and ever....

(also cf. Sermon 36, V.2, p.20, col.2).  
(2). "The abundance of prophecy; for there has never been any prophet whatsoever whose prophecy has been confirmed except in Israel....

(3). "The Holy Land; for because of its precious character it has never been called anything except "the Land of Israel....

(4). "The name Israel, for it is it alone that is the chosen people of God and forever he will not exchange them for another people....

He emphasizes the fact that it is בְּאֵרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל the descendants of Israel. \*\*

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\* Sermon 42, V.2, pages 46-47. See also Sermon 54 and Sermon 55 for discussion of God's special providence and love for Israel. But this thought is treated at length in a number of other sermons also, but in different aspects.

\*\* This specially emphatic statement of this tenet (quoted here) is probably in answer to Christian claims. See also Sermon 54, V.2, p.112, 2nd col.

2. The study of the Torah (by Israel) is the summum bonum of all existence:

\* "We find that God condoned idolatry, incest and blood-shed; but he did not condone the rejection of the Torah; as it is said, "Wherefor is the land perished?...Because they have forsaken my Torah." Of idolatry, incest and blood-shed nothing is written here, but "because they have forsaken my Torah". And the difficulty is explained in that the sin of rejecting the Torah is a more severe sin than these three transgressions."

\*\* "Know that the wisdom of the Torah does not need any introduction nor propping from without to sustain it. But everything is in it and it is self-sustaining."

The ORAL LAW is equally binding. (Sermon 34, Vol.2, p.12)

3. Palestine is eternally sacred:

\*\*\* "Therefor he said, "Anyone who is buried in Palestine is as if buried under the altar," i.e., that if he is not of the class to whom no sin can be charged, the weight of his transgression is diminished; his sin is covered."

4. "The merit of the fathers" extends throughout all generations and brings benefit to all the Israelites:

†† "...our holy fathers, may they repose in their resting places, they who through their righteousness and the strength of their merit before God, obtain for us and our children and future generations an abundance of good-will, to remove our injuries and hasten our healing."

- 5.. Belief in angelology.

††† "but the purpose according to my opinion is, that Jacob, peace be unto him, never lacked for angels, מלאכים, to surround him constantly guarding him

\* Sermon 44, V.2, p.58, col.1.

\*\* Sermon 43, V.2, p.53, col.2-end. Cf. also Ser. 34, V.2, p.10

\*\*\* Sermon 10, V.1, p.62. col.1

†† Sermon 71, V.2, p.217.

††† Sermon 2, V.1, p. 15.

in every place, whether in the Land (of Palestine) or whether outside the Land. And they were the angels who were created through his good characteristics and good deeds, who were to him like those born in his household or purchased with his money; and they were called the "angels of Jacob", for they were really his, as he had created them. However, when he set out on his way God wished to honor him and sent to him a group of angels of God, of those who stand (ready) to serve Him; and they were not Jacob's.

And when Jacob saw them he recognized readily that they were not like those that were with him, and he said, "These are the camp of God which has come recently" and not like the others who were with him previous to this and who were not of the camp of God but of his own camp. Therefor this place was appropriately named ו'ינו, i.e., "of two camps".

#### 6. Belief in Miracles:

\* "And show Thy greatness, by giving the beginning and start of the renewal of Thy wonders in our behalf; let our enemies see and be put to shame, for Thy kindness does not cease. Show us miracles as formerly. And may our eyes behold Thy return to Zion."

Sermon 29 treats throughout of the miracles of Egypt.

These are the major principles underlying Figo's attitude on all the problems that he treats. He accepts these beliefs whole-heartedly and assumes that his hearers hold the same views with perfect faith.

#### FIGO'S INTERESTS & POINT OF VIEW.

The subjects treated by Figo and the position he holds in regard to them will be quite evident from what has already been said. But a number of points call for further attention and some additional facts must be presented that have not yet been mentioned.

We have emphasized the fact that the greater part of Figo's preaching is devoted to theological speculation in

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\*Sermon 26, V. 1, p. 149- last verse.

academic fashion, based on Jewish lore, in an encouraging hopeful tone. He has no doubts nor fears. God is constantly providing for the welfare of His chosen people and will eventually bring all to right. Under the circumstances there is quite a difficult problem constantly confronting him. How then were the Jews in his own time and during the preceding centuries in such universal distress (although those in Venice were somewhat more prosperous than their brethren in other localities)? If Palestine were so sacred and so much the property of Israel how were they now in exile and the Land occupied by others? \*

Ofcourse his principle answer to all this is: "because of our sins". When discussing the problem of Israel's present distress, and the sufferings of the race, his reasoning is generally as follows:

\*\* "Our ancestors, even though they have sinned only in those things which were small sins and trivial, were punished with the punishment of non-existence, that they are no longer in the world; for that is the meaning of "אֵין" (Lam.8,7). But we have stiffened our necks in spite of this; we beheld and did not take instruction. For we are bearing our burdens and do not prevent their coming among us; and we perpetrate among us even their greatest sins."

To this solution of the difficulty Figo refers often. He constantly advances the idea that Israel has sinned and must bear punishment. But he cannot carry out this view with thorough consistency, for it conflicts with another of his pet ideas- God's boundless love for Israel.

\*Sermon 15 (V.1, p.101, col.2) makes one of these exaggerated claims that can hardly be borne out by realities:

"And we see thus in our investigation that God desires to give Israel complete rulership and entire dominion over all created things, the hosts above and below that all be subservient to them." \*\*Ser.49, p.85.

See how the force of the above statement is offset and the value of this explanation lessened if we are to accept as equally true such passages as the following:

\* "God's intense love for His chosen people is manifested not only in the time that they are innocent and worthy to receive his bounty and beneficent providence, but He magnifies it by showing this love even in the time of their rebellion, when they are in a state provoking anger and in a position to arouse justice to bring upon them severe afflictions. Behold, then He displays His great love for them. For immediately He seeks an opportunity and occasion to discover merit in them that they may not remain permanently in the grief and distress of troubles."

Figo does manage, in a way, to maintain some consistency in his exposition of these contrary theories; i.e., that Israel's suffering is a punishment for their sins and at the same time God's love for Israel is so great that He readily pardons all their transgressions. The difficulty in this case and in similar doctrines is that they are fundamentally dissimilar. And yet he could never give up any of them. That Israel's iniquities are responsible for the tribulations that befall the Jews is the most appropriate reason that can be presented to explain the actual fact that the "chosen people" were in great difficulties and it is also the most potent argument for more ethical conduct on the part of the Jews. God's great love for Israel and providential care for them, as well as His readiness to forgive their failings (Chauvinistic as this attitude may seem to some) was a necessary feature of Figo's preaching, as it gave the greatest possible encouragement and strength to a people who might well have fallen victim to despair under the distressing

conditions that had marked their existence throughout the Diaspora.

"The Exile" could not be taken lightly nor be endured without suitable explanation. It might almost have seemed that the claims of Christian theologians, that God had rejected the Israelites and abandoned them to persecution and affliction were true. But to offset such a disheartening view there were sufficient assurances in Scriptures that God would never forsake the seed of Abraham. This promise, more than any thing else, kept alive the faith and hope of the Jews and sustained the racial consciousness. Figo dwelt on it continually, and the Messianic redemption forms one of the main themes of his preaching. But to justify God's subjecting His people to constant misery in hostile lands in spite of His unbounded love for them, "punishment for their sins" had to be emphasized.

As additional reasons for the dispersion throughout the world Figo advanced the well known theories that Israel's faith was thus tried and tested by dwelling among peoples of different faith (who might seduce them) and also that other nations might also be brought to worship the one true God, though the gentiles were never to have the Torah.\* But these reasons are seldom mentioned in his sermons while the doctrine of "atonement for Israel's sins" through the present suffering is referred to in almost <sup>an</sup> ~~a~~ third of his sermons.

While the vicissitudes of Israel through the glorious

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\* These are set forth in Sermon 54.



days of its early history (when it was wedded to God), through the period of its proud position as a powerful nation, and on through the later years of dispersion and hardship, together with the brilliant morrow of serene triumph, form a considerable part of Figo's preaching, other strands of thought are also closely interwoven into the warp of many of his sermons.

Among the other elements that pervade his sermons, the discussions on the error of sin and the value of virtue stand out prominently. He does not indulge to any great extent in direct exhortations or attacks. He presents the problems of good and evil in a rather impersonal manner, only occasionally addressing himself to his hearers in a direct appeal.\*

Although he believes that all the laws of the Torah and oral tradition, both תעשרה and תשנה אל, must be rigidly carried out, no matter how trivial,\*\* he is not concerned in his sermons with the ritual and ceremonial laws, but devotes his attention to matters of true ethical import; denouncing pride, immorality, usury, drunkenness and the like.

Thus in spite of his keen interest in purely academic matters and his devotion to subjects of pure speculation,

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\* See the outline of Sermon no. 27, p. 30, of this thesis, which contains a typical discussion of this subject.

One of the direct appeals, of which there are but a very limited number is in Sermon 39, V. 2, p. 33, 2nd Col., beginning, "Hence, my brethren and friends, blessed of the Lord, look unto Abraham your father to be like him."

Others are in Sermon 10 (V. 1, p. 71, col. 1) & Ser. 12, p. 89.

\*\* "Verily, all this was in order to do all the commands of the Torah; in order that we should do equally all the commands of the Torah, all of them, and that we should not perform a part of them and neglect a part of them etc." Sermon 12, V. 1, p. 83.

and although his dissertations on the keeping and neglect of the moral and religious laws are rather philosophical than immediately applicable, he does present a few strong and open attacks on vice. The most notable of them is his attack on adultery in Sermon 10:

\* "He that commiteth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding; he that doeth it would destroy his own soul. Wounds and dishonour shall he get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away." (Prov. 6, 32-33). The interpretation of these words is based on what we learn in Perek Kol Chayavim:—R. Simon ben Manasia says, "What perversion is it that cannot be straightened? The one who cohabits incestuously and begets a bastard. If you would say, "a man who steals or robs"—he may restore the stolen or robbed property. But he who cohabits with a man's wife and makes her forbidden to her husband is exterminated from the world and must betake himself. We see clearly that in the other transgressions there is room for a man to rectify what is crooked and to save his soul from perdition. But in the sin of incest there is no possible rectification, whether he beget from her a child or not. But he is exterminated from the world and his soul mourns for him. Therefore he says that he who commits adultery with a woman, it is clear and revealed that he is lacking of understanding and his mind is lost for he destroys his own soul. It is usual and customary that he who injures his soul through any transgression whatsoever does so himself but has a remedy and can attain new purity without any destruction. But he who commits adultery, how many evils attach to him? For here in this world his punishment is fixed in that plagues and dire diseases overtake him constantly with destruction. And, what is more severe than these, his blemish will not be wiped out. It cannot be remedied and he is exterminated from the world; and even then his reproach is not wiped out." (He continues with stating that the sign of circumcision disappears and a new foreskin is formed.)"

But such point-blank scathing denunciations are very rare in Figo's sermons, although in Sermon 44, he attacks drunkenness quite bitterly "יין ארבי אמת וקין". \*\*

\* V. 1, p. 65, col. 1.

\*\* V. 2, p. 58, col. 1.

Occasionally too, he gives some sound advice for overcoming temptation and adhering to virtue. \* But here again he is influenced by his peculiar turn of mind and a love for dramatizing, from which he is hardly ever free. He seems to visualize the good and evil forces, especially the אנני אנני, so vividly that he considers them rather as actual concrete beings than as mental attitudes. On the other hand, his conception of Abraham, Moses and other Biblical characters would more befit angels or spirits than men, for they are in constant communication with the deity and heavenly hosts, and seem quite free of time and space.

In like manner he manifests his fondness for fantastic conceptions by personifying the Land of Israel, Mount Sinai and similar inanimate objects. In Sermon 36 we see the mountains running about while Mt. Sinai stands modestly aside. \*\*

This poetic inclination manifests itself further

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\* See Sermon 40; also (in Sermon 13): p.93, V.1.

\*\* (God speaking): "Furthermore you shall <sup>that when I come</sup> see to the great and awe-inspiring occasion to give the Torah to Israel, that they may serve God, it will not be on a high and lofty mountain whose head reaches to heaven, but on that mountain, Mount Sinai, the lowliest of all the mountains.. (Similarity of אנני and אנני).. For the other mountains in their pride were moving about and would not be still, for every one of them ran and leaped about and ascended aloft, saying, "I shall be king for it will be given on me," But Mt. Sinai, because of its humility and lowliness did not think itself worthy and fit for it, and therefore did not move from its place, but was sitting quietly without any movement. Therefore God said, "Why do you run hither and thither, lofty mountains? Do you not know that on the other hand the mountain that God chose to dwell in, that is MT. Sinai..etc.,"

-Sermon 36, p.19, col.2.

in Figo's tendency to put speeches into the mouths of God, persons, and inanimate objects. \*

This love of extreme and vivid ideas is reflected also in his characterization of men and generations as altogether good or altogether bad. The generation of the flood\*\* and the generation of the tower of Babal typify for him every possible vice and crime. No terms seem too harsh or severe to apply to them. On the other hand, such characters as Abraham and Jacob are all good, and all wise.\*\* Anything that they have done can be traced to the best possible motives. David was guilty of one great sin (that could hardly be denied) but otherwise he too was perfect.\*\*\* Esau, on the other hand, was utterly wicked. All of his motives were evil. Although the Bible does not tell us so, Figo finds sufficient ground for believing that Esau meant to kill his own father. ††

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\* Note God's speech to the mountains, footnote preceding page. Any number of other examples might be given of this use of direct discourse to portray the thought of a character, generation, inanimate object, or the deity. Instead of saying, "Jacob thought that..." Figo says, "Said Jacob to God:..." giving the speech in the words Jacob might have used. Or instead of saying, "A good man might think that," he often says, "A good man might say, "I would etc."

\*\* Eg., Sermon 13, V.1, p.91, 2nd col.

\*\*\* Cf. Sermon 10, V.1, p.72, 1st col.

†† Sermon 60, V.2, p.145, 2nd col.

Figo's heroes and villains are of course the same as throughout all Jewish tradition. Nor is even the emphasis he puts on certain characters original with him or peculiar to himself:

Sodom and Gemara = extreme wickedness.

Moses = extreme virtue and piety.

Solomon = extreme wisdom, and also virtue.

Even the Amoraim and Tanaim are types of virtue.  
Etc.

To the poetic tendency we may also attribute the descriptions of heavenly scenes and the court of God that appear quite often in Binah Le'itim. \* They are ofcourse very anthropomorphic and occasionally seem like a fairy-tale; especially when he pictures Father Abraham, the good genius and protecting spirit of his descendants, appealing to God on behalf of his children who are in distress. \*\* Figo does not halt before any anthropomorphism, although he generally prefaces it with "כביכול", and he pictures Moses or Abraham arguing with God on very friendly and equal terms with the deity. \*\*

On the whole, Figo is quite free with hyperboles and exaggerations. His statements are very bold and fanciful. He is limited by fact and reason only when he wishes to be. Although he seems to have escaped the influence of Kabbalah there is something of a mystic strain in his preaching. He accepts glibly the talmudic statement that כש'שראף עושים רצונן של מקום מוס'בין כח בגבורה של מעלה. \*\*\* He is a firm believer in immortality, although he does not lay stress on resurrection. Naturally, when one believes that "We know in truth that the world to come is the real home established for the dwelling house, and this world is only an outer court of it, from which we enter the house" †† and when one accepts as binding truth any number of supernatural beliefs, such as

\* As in Sermon 30:—Moses enters heaven to receive the Torah

\*\* Eg. Sermon 10, V.1, p.64, Abraham "seizes God's right hand," and argues with Him concerning the Exile.

\*\*\* Sermon 3, V.1, p.18, col.1.

†† Sermon 13, p.94, 1st col. This idea is treated at greater length in Sermon 34.

have been mentioned above, he is quite likely to lose sight of the distinction that should exist between prose and poetry, between fact and fancy. Consequently, Figo takes his most fantastic ideas quite seriously, and it is hard to say where he draws the line between whole-hearted belief in the literal truth of what he was saying and intentional exaggeration for the sake of effect. It is hard to believe that Figo meant the following passage (for example) to be taken as a simple statement of an actual fact; yet it is more than likely that he did:

\* "And in regard to multiplying he said, "What of these stars? They have no limit and no number. So Israel etc." For He assured our sainted fathers, peace be unto them, of His love by multiplying their seed as the dust of the world. And in regard to permanence he said, "What of the stars? They extend from one end of the universe to the other. So Israel etc." But verily "the heavens will be dispersed in fragments like smoke", and these stars which we now see are destined to be annihilated. But in any case, God has assured (us) and said, "Like the new heavens etc." so your seed and your name shall endure." For there will be new heavens continually, and they will be full of stars which will endure forever; and so the name of Israel and their seed shall endure forever. Therefore he said, "What of the stars?" without modification; and did not say "these." But without doubt we may say of the stars we may say that their extent will be from one end of the heavens until the ~~the~~ other, which will be from the beginning of creation until the end of time, that stars will never be lacking in heaven, either these or others in their stead. So of Israel there shall be in them permanence and establishment..."etc. etc...(Israel's dominion over all the universe to outlast the present stars etc.)

Such passages as this are quite common in Figo's

-- \* Sermon 50, V.2, p.93, 2nd Col. --

sermons. There is something too fantastic and irrational about them for statements of actual fact. Yet, as in the above quotation, the tone is more prosaic than poetical. At least he seems to argue and draw conclusions rather than present metaphors and similes as mere figures of speech.

Occasionally he does present a fine simile or analogy. For example, he describes three kinds of darkness: ignorance, evil and death.\* He also presents a number of splendid thoughts (although they are rarely original). For example, he says:

\*\* "And now that Solomon sought of the Lord that he give him exceptional wisdom, as would be necessary to judge this mighty nation, God answered him, "There is occasion to give you great wisdom as you have requested. For without doubt I shall be justified in giving wisdom to him who has wisdom. For since you have framed your words thus with understanding and sense, that you have known in choosing in thy request wisdom and not material prosperity, this shows clearly that wisdom and understanding should be given to you. etc."

Yet, quite often, especially when speaking of the gentiles, he makes statements that are rather unkind, unjust and even untrue. \*\*\*

We should also note here that the tone of the sermons is throughout dignified and serious. The nearest approach to humor is in passages such as the following:

†† "For they were fighting with each other, in that their speech was destroyed there and their language confused. This one would ask for a brick and he would be brought mortar. etc."

††† In telling why a man who is anxious to reform

\*Sermon 18, V.1, p.113 b. \*\*Sermon 53, V.2, p.105, a.

\*\*\*Sermon 34 p.11, paragraph beginning ojox is an example.

††Sermon 39, V.2, p.32, end of 1st col. ††† Ser.40, p.34.

should go away from his native land, he says:  
 "First of all, because of the tongue lashing of  
 the scornful ones and the scoffers of the gen-  
 eration who would recognize him and say of him,  
 "Have you seen this low fellow who yesterday  
 was with us in the circle of companionship, eat-  
 ing and drinking like an animal, and now he is  
 extremely sanctimonious and cleanses himself  
 in asceticism and holiness?"

Figo's attitude on war is reflected in such  
 statements as:

\* "For although David's nature was inclined to  
 violence to shed blood and obtain vengeance,  
 he did not do this except against the en-  
 emies of the Lord who were making themselves  
 deserving of it."

In spite of his unfriendly attitude toward  
 non-Jews he did favor proselytism. His view is given in  
 Sermon 39 (V.2, p.30) in connection with Abraham's activities  
 in proselytizing.

As has already been said, the main source of  
 the great bulk of Figo's ideas is the Bible and rabbinic  
 literature. He draws significant conclusions from every  
 jot and tittle in these writings. It is amazing what sig-  
 nificant conclusions he can draw from (or rather put into)  
 such lines as Bilam's conversation with his ass. \*\* Equal-  
 ly remarkable are the interpretations he derives <sup>from</sup> simple  
 statements in rabbinic literature. In fact he can draw the  
 opposite meaning out of a passage from what was intended by  
 the original author. \*\*\*

\* Sermon 39, p.32, b, V.2.

\*\* Sermon 12, p.87, end of 2nd Col. (V.1) & 1st col. p.88.

\*\*\* Sermon 39 (p.34) is a good example of this. He takes  
 the Talmudic statement that "if a man see that his  
 evil-inclination is overpowering him let him go to  
 a place where he is unknown and put on black garments  
 etc." and concludes the opposite of what the passage  
 actually says.



As has also been already noted, his chief method of developing the thought of a text is carefully analyzing each detail of it. Yet, he does not use grammatical terms as much as might be expected. Occasionally he refers to רַבִּין לִשְׁוֹן\*, לִשְׁוֹן זָוִי\*\* , or similar terms. With the philology of other languages he seems to be unacquainted, especially with Greek and Latin. As pointed out by Buchholz \*' Figo's only attempt to explain the derivation of a word from Latin (מְלִצְקָא from "procurator") is a failure. On the other hand he is quite conversant with Aramaic and refers to the Targum quite often. \*\*\*'

The one important element in Figo's preaching that cannot be traced directly to biblical or rabbinic literature and that forms his own contribution, his own personal viewpoint, is his knowledge of medicine and astronomy. These furnish him with a great deal of material for his sermons.

\* Eg. Sermon 38, V.2, p.29 b.

\*\*Eg. Sermon 12, V.1, p.83 b.

\*' Buchholz, R. ASARIA FIGO und seine Predigtsammlung Bina-le-Ittim, in the Literarische Beilage zur Israelitische Wochenschrift, 1872- a serial article.

This article is a popular discussion of Figo's sermons. Only the last three articles were accessible to the present writer, as the previous numbers are missing in the volume at the Hebrew Union College. An attempt to obtain them from another library was unsuccessful. At the most, however, there could be only three more such articles in the series, as only three earlier numbers of the Beilage appeared.

The greater part of what appears in these articles is contained in this thesis, though in different order and manner. A few additional points brought out by Buchholz are: Figo's acquaintance with the philosophy against skepticism; his sympathy with the Maranos; and his complimenting his congregants on their generosity in giving charity.

\*\*\*' One of the references to "Targum Onkelos" is on p.86 of Volume 1.

Many of his analogies and arguments are drawn from medicine. He often refers to the "humors". Sermon 10 begins with a description of the four things that must enter into a doctor's diagnosis of a case. Sermon 1 (p.5) treats of men's temperaments according to dryness, liquidity, red and white. Matters of medicine enter into many of his sermons in small or large measure.

He is greatly interested in astronomy also and advises all men to study it. \* He believed that the astral bodies influence the lives of men according to their horoscopes (Cf. Sermon 3). He is proud of the fact that the Jews learned their knowledge of astronomy and the calendar without the aid of Euclid or Ptolmey, whom he mentions by name. \*\* Yet in Sermon 34 he seems to advise against the study of secular learning. \*\*\*

So much for the philosophy, theology, beliefs and view of Azariah Figo. We have now to consider only two groups of sermons: the eulogies (Sermons 72-75) and the appeals for charity (Sermons 68-71).

#### THE EULOGIES.

The eulogies are on ~~well~~ known persons. Their names are given at the head of each eulogy, but in abbreviated form. We give the names in full as they are found in

\* Sermon 46, V.2, p.65, a.

\*\* Sermon 46, V.2, p.65, b.

\*\*\* Sermon 34, V.2, p.11, 2nd half of 2nd column.

the article of Buchholz on "Asaria Figo":

Sermon 72 - Aaron ibn Chajim, author of אורח חיים,  
a commentary to the Sifra.

Sermon 73 - R. Jacob Halevi, author of a bibliography of selected Responsa.

Sermon 74 - R. Joseph ben Moses de Trani, died in Constantinople - 1639.

Sermon 75 - R. Abraham Abohab; otherwise unknown, not found in bibliographies.

The eulogies are written in the same style as the other sermons. The texts are handled and developed in the same manner. A number of general subjects are treated in the same way, and there is the same tendency to introduce analogies and discussions from the field of medicine. The object of the eulogy is considered in only a part of the sermon. Although the man in each case receives high praise only a portion of the eulogy treats directly of him.

#### APPEALS FOR CHARITY.

Sermon 68- a general appeal. (Incidentally he treats at great length the circumcision of Abraham).

Sermons 69 & 70- annual occasion for gifts for poor students attending the seminary in Venice.

Sermon 71- an appeal for gifts for Hebron.

Also- Sermon 4- to raise donations for Jerusalem.

The eulogies and appeals for charities appropriate to the occasion that called them forth, just as the other sermons are appropriate for the holy-day or Sabbath on which they were delivered. But it is only in Sermon 10 \* and Sermon 12 \*\* that he refers to events of importance that have

\* See the beginning of the Sermon. \*\* V.1, p.89, a.

recently occurred. In the first case, it is a plague that was raging in Venice; the second, the destruction of many buildings in the ghetto by fire that was kindled by lightning. Figo considers these catastrophes divine messengers to warn the people that they have incurred God's wrath thru the evil of their ways, and he exhorts them to amend their lives. But he holds that it was a sign of God's mercy that only one life was lost in the conflagration that destroyed a large part of the ghetto.

One thing more should be added; this to the credit of Figo and his audience. Unless he was speaking "above the heads" of his hearers, which is unlikely, he must have had a highly intelligent audience, well acquainted with the Bible and rabbinical learnings. Furthermore Figo appreciated the fact, for he did not hesitate to refer to Biblical incidents without going into detail, but assumed that his hearers knew the whole story. Also he refers to authors, tanaim etc. in a way that indicates his supposition that his congregants were familiar with those names and enjoyed hearing of them. He always tries to make his meaning clear but assumes that the elementary concepts are already known to his audience. And above all, his constant motive was to enlighten and encourage.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY.

There are very few books that treat directly of Azariah Figo or his works. BINAH LE'ITIM furnished the greater part of the material for this thesis. The following books were also consulted:

Winter und Wünsche, Geschichte der Rabbinischen Litteratur, Volume 2:

- Pages 652-653 - a brief sketch of Figo.
- " 654-660 - translations of excerpts from Sermons 35 & 66 (our ed.; theirs: 36 & 68)
- " 609-618 - on the Darshanim in general.
- " 619-696 - on individual Darshanim.

Buchholz, R. Asaria Figo und seine Predigtsammlung Binah-le-itim, in Literarische Beilage zur Israelitische Wochenschrift, 1872. See footnote, p. 59, above.

Karpeles, Geschichte der Jüdische Litteratur; but only four lines on Figo, p. 236.

Eisenstein, אזריאל פֿיגו, article on Figo, (p. 220), by Applebaum (a little more than one column). The bibliography in this article refers to a book or pamphlet, evidently in Hebrew, by Applebaum, which was unobtainable.

Jewish Encyclopedia, V. 5, p. 383, (about ten lines) article on Figo; also a few paragraphs on Darshanim in the article "Homiletics" (V. 6, pp. 454-457) - but see footnote to p. 7, above.

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אזריאל פֿיגו, p. 133, edition of 1873, Vilna.

אזריאל פֿיגו, Ben Jacob.

For matters of history (concerning Italy in the time of Figo), Graetz' History of the Jews" (V. 4) was used; although no reference is made therein to Figo.