

THE KATIKHIZIS
BY JACOB DUVAN (1890) –
A DOCUMENT
OF THE KARAIM
CREED* ◉ *Tapani Harviainen*

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It is an evident fact that the reforming and nationalistic movement of the Eastern European Turkic-speaking Karaims in the 19th and 20th centuries finally resulted – among other things – in the rise of an independent religion, often called Karaism¹. However, descriptions of this Karaim creed are not easily obtainable; this is true of Western European languages in particular. One of the principal factors behind this state of affairs derives from the Communist regimes which during the greater part of the 20th century prevented the discussion and publication of religious themes.

A number of years ago my friend Professor Henryk Jankowski (Poznań) directed my attention to a small textbook in Russian, by Jacob Benjaminovich Duvan; the book was entitled “Катехизис, основы караимского закона” (‘A Catechism, the Fundamental Principles of the Karaim Law’)². “Катехизис”, consisting of 107+12 pages, was published in St. Petersburg in 1890³.

JACOB DUVAN AND HIS KATIKHIZIS

Jacob (Jakov) Benjaminovich Duvan lived in the years 1842–1901. According to the biographical handbook by B. S. Elyashevich, Duvan spent most of his life in Eupatoria in the Crimea. In his youth he served for six years as a teacher (*melammed*) in Odessa, and in his mature years he was a teacher of the Karaim religion in St. Pe-

¹ Cf. *Harviainen T.* The Karaites in Contemporary Lithuania and the Former USSR // *Polliack M.* (gen. ed.) *Karaite Judaism. A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources.* (Handbook of Oriental Studies–Handbuch der Orientalistik. Section One: The Near and Middle East. Vol. 73). Leiden–Boston, 2003, p. 838–842 with notes; *Kobeckaitė H., Pilecki Sz.* *Religia // Adamczuk L., Kobeckaitė H., Pilecki Sz.* *Karaimi na Litwie i w Polsce.* Warszawa–Wilno, 2003, p. 7–8.

² The Hebrew title page designates the book *Seper Yesode dat haq-qara'im* – le-lammed le-na'are u-le-na'arot bene miqra' darke had-dat we-ha-'emuna.

³ This kind of educational literature was published by Eastern European Karaims rather extensively in the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, see the bibliography *Walfish B.D.* *Karaite Press and Printing // Karaite Judaism. A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (see above note 1), p. 939–940, 943.

tersburg⁴. On the front page of the catechism it is stated that Duvan had obtained the approval of the Karaim religious leadership for his book (*Одобен Караимским Гаханом*)⁵; on this basis it was recommended as a textbook in the educational institutes of the Karaims as well as for home use. By virtue of these qualities we may consider the catechism by Duvan as representative of the views appreciated at the end of the 20th century by the leaders of Karaism in Karaim congregations. As for Karaim emancipation in Eastern Europe, we must bear it in mind that the establishment of the Karaim Spiritual Consistory (*Караимское духовное правление*) in 1837 implied the recognition of the independent religious (and ethnic) status of the Karaims in the Russian Empire, and civil rights giving them legal equality with Christian subjects in Russia were granted them not later than 1863⁶.

The catechism by Duvan comprises ten chapters. The first chapter deals with introductory statements concerning man, his status (*назначение*) and his religion, the rise of religion, knowledge of God and the prophets. Then a long chapter (II) is dedicated to the Ten Commandments. The Holy Scriptures and the importance of the Torah and its original languages occupy chapters III and IV, followed by a description of divine rewards and punishments, and the Messiah (chapter V). The Ten Articles of Faith are presented in chapter VI. The following chapter (VII) concentrates on the biblical prohibitions and commandments, while the topics of the final part of the book are prayers (VIII), the Karaim calendar (IX) and the annual festive days (X); the most common prayers appear in an appendix in Hebrew and Russian. The statements in the chapters are supported by numerous biblical quotations in Hebrew and Russian.

Frequently the Ten Commandments are mentioned by the Karaims of today as constituting the very heart of their religion; the Ten Articles of Faith enjoy a similar status⁷. For this reason, I should like in my presentation of Duvan's catechism

⁴ The Hebrew counterpart of this statement reads: *has-seper haz-ze huggash lipne rosh ha-hakamim li-bne migra' we-nimša' tob we-nakon*.

⁵ Ельяшевич Б. С. Караимы. Кн. 2. Ч. 2. Матерьялы к серии „Народы и культуры“. Вып. XIV). Москва, 1993, с. 49.

⁶ Harviainen T. The Karaites in Eastern..., p. 649–650.

⁷ E.g. *Abkowicz M.* Główne zasady doktrynalne religii karaimekiej // *Karaimi. Materiały z sesji naukowej, III Pieniężnińskie spotkania z religiami* (Materiały i Studia Księży Werbistów Nr 32). Pieniężno, 1987, s. 9–15; *Dubiński A.* Karaimica – Prace karaimoznawcze. Warszawa, 1994, s. 51–52; *Kobeckaitė H.* Lietuvos karaimai. Vilnius, 1997, p. 17–18. For the rather high figures indicating the status of religion among the Karaims, see *Adamczuk L.* Współczesne życie Karaimów na Litwie i w Polsce – raport z badań etnosocjologicznych // *Adamczuk L., Kobeckaitė H., Pilecki Sz.* Karaimi na Litwie i w Polsce, s. 59–61; (in brief, *Adamczuk L.* Rodzina, kultura i religia w życiu współczesnych Karaimów na Litwie i w Polsce: Problemy rozwoju turystyki wiejskiej na Wileńszczyźnie, Mazowszu i Podlasiu // *Roczniki Katedry Nauk Humanistycznych Szkoły Głównej Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego. Warszawa–Biała Waka*, 2005. T. VII, p. 43–45).

to concentrate on his commentaries on the Commandments and his version of the Ten Articles of Faith. I hope that this review may serve as a rediscovery of his former achievements – in English, in particular, on the one hand, – and as a stimulus for further reconsideration with regard to their implications for the Karaim creed, on the other. As I mentioned earlier, Duvan's views represent, because of the prolonged political stagnation, quite fresh and at least semi-official trends in Karaim theology.

THE EXPOSITION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Duvan's exposition of the Ten Commandments (chapter II) includes a commentary on each of them. He states that the first commandment (Ex. 20:2) implies that there exists a supreme being known as God, that is, a highly exalted spiritual being who has created everything that exists, who possesses the most perfect qualities and who rules the destinies of all creatures; further, the commandment implies that He is the one God, eternal, incorporeal, unchanging, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, wise, just (*правосудный*), holy and completely good (*всеблагой*); these fourteen qualities can be deduced from a number of biblical verses (taken from all parts of the Bible) which are quoted in the same paragraph (see below, note 8). Consequently, "if we want to please him, we need to imitate his qualities and, in particular, we need to respect and love him because of all his goodness and grace towards us – to love one another like the creatures and the children of one father" (cf. Mal. 2:10). Since God is gracious, merciful, long-suffering and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, "we are obliged to be just, gracious and righteous in judgement as well as to seek all that is good and to eschew evil."⁸

The second commandment (Ex. 20:3–6)⁹ exhorts us to believe that God alone is the Creator and Founder of all creation, and that it is only to him that we should

⁸ What is said about God in this presentation can be learned from numerous biblical verses which Duvan enumerates at the end of the paragraph: Gen. 1:1, Isa. 45:12; Deut. 6:4, Deut. 4:39; Ex. 15:11, 1 Chron. 17:20; Deut. 32:39, Isa. 45:7; Deut. 32:40, Isa. 44:6; Deut. 4:15, Isa. 46:5; Mal. 3:6; 1 Sam. 2:3, Ps. 33:15, Prov. 16:9; Jer. 23:23–24, Ps. 139:7–12; Gen. 17:1, Ps. 33:6, 9; Ps. 104:24, Jer. 10:12; Deut. 32:4, Ps. 9:9, Job 34:11, 12; Lev. 19:2, Isa. 6:3; Ex. 34:6–7 and Ps. 145: 9.

⁹ A note refers to the well-known passage "for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation ..." (Ex. 20:5); Hebrew *poqed* ('visiting' in the Revised Standard Version) is rendered into Russian by the word *вспоминающие* 'remembering', 'keeping in mind'. According to the note, "if the children were to be punished because of the sins of the fathers, it would be unjust. The prophet Ezekiel speaks clearly: Ezek. 18:20." The postponement of punishment offers the children an opportunity to repent.

direct our prayers, pouring out our feelings (*чувства*) to him. It forbids us to show divine honour to any creature, to make any picture of our God or to attach any corporal qualities to him, and it forbids every kind of superstition, e.g. the belief in secret powers or in varied methods to predict the future or destiny of human beings. Further, this commandment informs us that all evil will incur divine retribution and that all good will be rewarded¹⁰.

In Duvan's Russian translation, the third commandment (Ex. 20:7) forbids mentioning (*не произноси*) the name of God in vain; in the commentary, this aspect of "useless and idle talk" appears in the first place. Curses invoking the name of God, blasphemy and false oaths sworn in his name are also included in the scope of this commandment. The name of God must be mentioned with the highest respect and only insofar as it is necessary in prayer, petition or blessing. Moreover, the third commandment obliges us to fulfil strictly all promises pronounced in God's name and similarly to fulfil any oaths and vows made to him; concentration and reverence during prayer are also required by this commandment¹¹.

The fourth commandment concerns the sanctity of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8–11). The Sabbath day must be remembered and no work is allowed on that day; in contrast, it must be treated as holy and dedicated to God. Its name means 'day of rest', derived from the Hebrew root *shabot* 'to finish' (*перестать*), 'to rest' (*отдыхать*), since God created everything in six days, but on the seventh day rested (*почил*) and finished doing any work (*и перестал от всякой работы*). The Sabbath reminds us of the creation of the world and the Creator, the One God, and they must be remembered during the Sabbath. The Sabbath day must be dedicated to physical rest, rational meditation, study of the (religious) Law and prayer. All work, without exception, is forbidden. However, in the event of imminent danger work is permitted; e.g. just as war was allowed in the days of the Kingdom of Israel, similarly it is permissible to wage a patriotic war (*вести войну отечественную*) in our time. Correspondingly, all work is permitted when faced with other dangers, e.g. in the event of flood or fire or to provide aid in times of great peril. "Our teachers of faith spoke: 'Danger of life puts away the Sabbath'." At the same time the teachers of faith have stressed the observance of the Sabbath. "The commandment of Sabbath outweighs all other commandments," they say. The Sabbath is intended to be celebrated by reciting longer prayers than customarily and especially those composed for the Sabbath. It is an obligation to read a portion from the Law (*parasha*) and a chapter from the Prophets (*haftara*). Food should be of a better quality

¹⁰ This explanation is corroborated by Deut. 4: 15–16 and Deut. 18:10–11.

¹¹ The biblical testimonies are Lev. 24:16, Lev. 19:12, and Deut. 23:24.

than usual, and one is required to wear festive dress. The celebration of all other feasts described in the Bible derives its origin from this commandment¹².

The fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12) requires that children love, honour and respect their parents and that they perform for them all services derived from these three duties. These duties include: treating parents with respect, obeying them, feeding them, taking care of their well-being, carrying out their will both during their lifetime and after their death, executing their last will and testament, praying daily for their health, and after their death praying for the peace of their souls (*упокоение их души / zekher*). Children must always strive to be worthy of their parents, bringing them joy while they are alive and, after their death, “yielding a good memory for them” (*служить им хорошей памятью*). In this commandment, the word ‘father’ also refers to rulers, superiors and teachers; hence it is (1) a duty to love and respect the Ruler, to submit to his will and law, to carry them out strictly, to be subservient and loyal to him in body and soul, and (2) it is a duty in general to adopt a respectful and obedient attitude towards one’s superiors, the guardians of law and order; thus we need to respect, honour and obey our superiors, teachers and seniors in general¹³.

The sixth commandment “You shall not kill” (Ex. 20:13) forbids killing, i.e. taking one’s own or another person’s life in any way. However, if a person’s life is taken by obligation, he is not killed illegally, e.g. this is the case of the death sentence pronounced on a criminal by a decree of a court or the killing of an enemy in an international war. Thus the commandment cannot be understood in its literal sense but must be taken in a broader sense: it involves not only killing but also every insult, offence, humiliation in word or deed as well as causing harm to one’s fellow in a material or moral respect. The help and support of one’s fellow in his or her need is derived from this commandment, and we are further obliged to offer aid to the dying and poor, to take care of widows and orphans without means, to support them and to nurse the sick; similarly a sympathetic attitude towards one’s fellow, humane treatment of animals, and forgiving and making peace with the enemy are included in this realm. Moreover, the duty to get married in due time is deduced from the sixth commandment, since a person who does not do so, kills his or her descendants, maintains Duvan¹⁴.

In the explanations of the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 29:14), the topics are divided into three categories: fornication (*блуд /*

¹² Isa. 58:13–14 is the only verse quoted as a testimony in this commentary.

¹³ These explanations are based on Lev. 19:3, Deut. 27:16, Prov. 1:8, Prov. 24:21, Prov. 16:13, and Lev. 19:32.

¹⁴ The biblical verses quoted as testimonies of these interpretations are Lev. 19:17, Lev. 19:33, 34, Deut. 15:7–10, Deut. 24:21, Ex. 23:5, Deut. 25:4, and Prov. 25:21. However, none of these quotations deal with marriage!

zenut), adultery (*прелюбодейство* / *ne'uf*) and incest (*кровосмешение* / *'arayot*). Fornication is concerned with carnal relations between the sexes except within marriage, adultery refers to married persons who illegally misdirect conjugal love towards outsiders, and incest takes place when close relatives are joined in a union of a marital type. How is one to avoid erring and committing these sins? According to Duvan, one must shun everything which may introduce to the heart impure thoughts, e.g. lascivious songs, dance, evil talk, immodest plays and jokes, indecent performances and reading books which describe impure love. Similarly one must avoid drinking, bad company, idle solitude and the exposure of such parts of the body which as a matter of decency should be covered¹⁵.

"You shall not steal", the eighth commandment (Ex. 20:15), forbids stealing in general; however, stealing must be understood in its widest sense. Seven main prohibitions may be derived from it: (1) robbery (*грабеж* / *gezela*), i.e. openly seizing another person's property by force; (2) theft (*воровство* / *geneba*), i.e. seizing another person's property in secret; (3) fraud (*обман* / *'awel*), i.e. usurping something that is not one's own by stealth, e.g. giving fake money instead of the real currency or bad goods instead of proper ones, using false weights or measures, concealing one's own name in order to avoid paying debts, leaving conditions or wills unimplemented, or concealing a theft that deprives the victim of compensation; (4) blasphemy, i.e. usurping that which belongs to God or appertains to his sanctuary; (5) bribery (*мздоимство*) takes place when one accepts a bribe from a subordinate or the accused or when for selfish reasons one supports an unmerited promotion or reward, declares the guilty not guilty or oppresses the innocent; (6) it is a case of idling (*тунеядство*) when a person receives a salary for an office or wages for a job, although the office or task has not been completed; thus he steals the salary or wages paid to him; further, the case when one is able to make a living by working, but nevertheless lives at the expense of communal charity; (7) extortion (*лихоимство*) takes place when on the grounds of a certain legal right one diverts someone else's property or work to one's own use, thus violating justice and humanity, i.e., for example, when moneylenders burden creditors with excessive interest or when proprietors exhaust their dependants with immoderate taxes or labour. The following virtues are absolute: (1) hatred of cupidity (*бескорыстие*), (2) fidelity, (3) righteous judgement, and (4) conscientious fulfilment of duties and diligence; all acts against them are forbidden on the basis of the eighth commandment¹⁶.

¹⁵ Biblical testimonies are Lev. 20:10, Deut. 23:18, Lev. 18:6, and Prov. 6:28, 29.

¹⁶ The presentation is corroborated by quotations of Lev. 19:11, 13, Lev. 19:35, 36, Deut. 16:19, and Deut. 23:20.

The ninth commandment forbids false witness against one's fellow (Ex. 20:16) and also forbids every lie. The notion of false witness prohibits perjury, be it false testimony, a lawsuit or complaint. Similarly, false witness outside the court (*ложное свидетельство кроме суда / malshin*) is forbidden; this case concerns slander of another person in his / her absence or accusing another person to his / her face without cause. A "white" lie which is not intended to hurt one's fellow is prohibited for two reasons: (1) it is inconsistent with love and respect for one's fellow and is unworthy of a human being, (2) if a man allows himself lies in such cases where there is no harm to his fellow but profit for himself, he becomes accustomed to lying and such lies become a habit¹⁷.

The tenth commandment (Ex. 20:17) prohibits (1) the desire and lust for that which pertains to one's fellow, (2) speculation on everything which pertains to one's fellow, because speculation draws a person into bad acts and vice, and (3) it prohibits the envy of one's fellow for his good luck. The best method of repelling these impure desires is being content with one's own lot, being diligent and hard-working in order to achieve more, and placing one's hope and trust in God. In order to strengthen this hope and to purify the heart, it is useful (*ночауце*) to read the Holy Scriptures and other ethical books. Moreover this commandment demands purity of thought and contentment with one's portion¹⁸.

In conclusion Duvan divides the commandments into two categories, viz. 1–4 which concern the relation of man to God, while commandments 5–10 define the relation of man to mankind and to himself as well.

The Ten Commandments were given by God in written form on two stone tablets, five commandments on each; they were inscribed on both sides. The tablets are called "the tablets of testimony" because they served as a testimony to the covenant concluded between God and his people. According to Duvan, an important final conclusion derives its origin from this covenant: „Religion is a covenant between God and man“¹⁹.

THE ARTICLES OF FAITH OF THE KARAIMS

In chapter VI (paragraph 24) Duvan offers the Ten Articles of Faith of the Karaims in Hebrew and Russian. While similar lists were defined from the 12th cen-

¹⁷ Biblical testimonies are as follows: Ex. 23:7, Lev. 19:16, Lev. 19:14, Zech. 8:19, Zech. 8:16, 17, Ps. 101:5, and Ps. 101:7.

¹⁸ The biblical testimonies quoted are Mic. 2:1–2, Prov. 16:8, and Prov. 26:22.

¹⁹ What is said here is corroborated by the following verses of Holy Scripture: Ex. 34:28, Ex. 32:15, Ex. 24:7,8, and Deut. 29:3–14.

tury on²⁰, it is worth describing them in the form in which “every Karaim shall know them accurately and believe in them completely” (p. 62). The articles (*‘ašara ‘iqere ha-‘emuna*) are as follows – the preamble of each article “I believe with full faith” (*‘ani ma‘amin be-‘emuna shelema*) is identical with that of Maimonides’ 13 articles of faith recited in the Rabbanite liturgy:

I believe with full faith

1. that the Creator – may his name be blessed – has created out of nothing (*из ничего / me-‘ayin*) the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.
2. that the Creator has no beginning nor end, he is the first and last, has been, is and will be.
3. that the Creator has no similarity (*нет подобия / ‘en kol-demut*), he is absolutely one in every respect and there is no oneness like his oneness, he is not a body and the qualities of a body do not apply to him.
4. that the Creator sent our teacher Moses – peace be upon him – and that he is the father and head of all the prophets.
5. that by the hands of Moses the Creator has given his complete Teaching (*Tora*) which is now in our hands.
6. that every son of Israel who believes in God and in his teaching (*Tora*) is obliged to know the language of the Torah and its explanation (*и ей объяснение / perushah*).
7. that God poured out the spirit of prophecy also on the prophets who were to come after our teacher Moses and that he sent them to tell the future and to exhort (*увещевать / le-ha‘id*) his people Israel.
8. that God will resurrect (*воскресить / yeḥayye*) dead human beings (*мертвых [людей] / mete bene ‘adam*) on the day of his Great Judgement.
9. that God carries out a righteous judgement on human beings (*людям / bene ‘adam*) and gives to everyone according to his ways and his deserts (*по его заслугам / we-ki-pri ma‘alalaw*).
10. that God has not disparaged us who live in the diaspora (*людей плена / ‘an-she ha-galut*), although at this moment we are under his punishments. Every son of Israel who believes in God is always obliged to wish and wait for His salvation, which is to take place by the hands of his Messiah from the House of David, and the restoration of His Temple.

²⁰ For the role of Judah Hadassi (12th century), Elijah Bashyachi (15th century) and Caleb Afendopolo (early 16th century) in the development of the Ten Articles (Principles), see *Lasker D. J. Byzantine Karaite Thought // Karaite Judaism, A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources* (see above, note 1), p. 506–508, 521–528.

After the presentation of the articles Duvan concludes (pp. 65–66): “The Ten Articles of Faith, in which our religion is contained, demand full faith in them and conduct accordingly. Only this kind of rational belief (*осмысленное верование*) can be considered to be true faith (*верую истинною*). Just as a man directs his life only according to the truths of which he is convinced, similarly our teachers of the Law obligated us that every believer shall know these Ten Articles of Faith and solemnly (*свято*) believe in them, not only as a tradition but everyone shall endeavour to perceive their truth by his own intelligence (*своим умом постигнуть*). For this purpose there are explanations through which they, submitted to rational analysis (*подвергая умственному анализу*), are demonstrated to be true.”

However, due to the lack of space in his book, the demonstrations may constitute topics for future studies by students, Duvan concludes the chapter.