

## Solomon Ibn Gabirol

Perhaps no medieval thinker so completely personified the interweaving of Judaism and Islam, as did the Spanish Jew, Solomon Ibn Gabirol (b.1020). As scholar Michael McGaha has noted: “Central to Ibn Gabirol’s thought was the notion that truth and righteousness are not the exclusive purview of the Jewish people, and that one should acknowledge and embrace words of wisdom regardless of their source.” Ibn Gabirol assimilated ideas from the Islamic mystical tract *Ikhwan as-Safa*, to such an extent that after the Bible, it was his primary source of inspiration! Additionally, Ibn Gabirol followed the teachings of the great Sufi mystic Muhammad Ibn Masarra (883-931), who had introduced Sufism to Spain.

His personal masterpiece *Ani ha’Ish*, a sort of spiritual biography, was almost completely based in Sufi themes, from the two central ideas down to the smallest image and concept in it. And the *Choice of Pearls*, an ethical/philosophical text, shared so much with Sufi philosopher al-Ghazali’s (1058-1111) *Ethics* that the two authors almost assuredly drew on the same Islamic sources. Ibn Gabirol ingested other Arabic/Sufi writers, so much so that other of his writings were often unrecognizable as necessarily Jewish. His ethical treatise, *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities*, written in Arabic when the poet was 24, was modeled on Arab ethical handbooks such as Abu Bakhr al-Raazi’s ninth century *Book of the Treatment of the Soul*.

Although his contemporaries eschewed his work as bordering on heresy, today he is known as his works are vital in the rites of the contemporary synagogue. One of the most important of Ibn Gabirol’s liturgical works, *Adon Olam*, is still chanted the world over during Sabbath services.

And his legacy within the greater Jewish community has hardly been compromised by his Sufi leanings – an important downtown Tel Aviv Avenue bears his name!