



A Crown for the King

Solomon Ibn Gabirol

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Solomon ibn Gabirol (*ca.* 1021--*ca.* 1058) was the greatest of the Spanish Jewish poets and an important neoplatonist philosopher. Translated into Latin in the mid-twelfth century, his philosophical work became influential among scholars who were unaware that Avicbron (as his last name was Latinized) was a Jew and a celebrated writer of religious hymns. The *Royal Crown* (or, "A Crown for the King" in Slavitt's translation) is the greatest of Gabirol's poems. Bernard Lewis has called it one of the major works of Hebrew literature since the completion of the Old Testament. Its theme is the problem of the human predicament: the frailty of man and his proclivity to sin, in tension with a benign providence that must leave room for the operation of man's free will and also make available to him the means of penitence. The *Royal Crown* is still printed in prayerbooks of the Sephardic rite for the Day of Atonement, and among North African Jewish communities (and their offshoots in Israel and elsewhere) it is read communally before the morning service of the Day. In northern Europe and the West this custom has lapsed, however the *Royal Crown* is still used for private penitential reading.

David Slavitt's inspired translation of this classic poem into contemporary English--printed with the Hebrew text on facing pages--will make the *Royal Crown* newly available and accessible to students and scholars of medieval Jewish literature and philosophy and to the general public as well.

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