

1799, 28 Novembro e 19 Dezembro, Nova Iorque. Ordem do serviço de Acção de Graças na sinagoga Shearith Israel e sermão de Gershom Mendes Seixas.

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Nov.^r 28th 1799, New York

At a meeting of a great Majority of the Clergy of this City it was unanimously agreed to recommend to their respective Congregations to observe Thursday the 19th Dec.^r as a Day of public Thanksgiving & prayer, which corresponded with the 21st of Kislieu 5560, upon which occasion the K. K. Shearith Israel was convened & the following order of service performed.

The 3 first verses of Ps. 95th

[Hebrew: Praise ye the Lord, call on]

Chaunted as on the Festivals,

then the following Psalms according

to their respective tunes

30th, 33^d, 34th, 90th & 91st,

the following discourse

by the Hazan.

Prayer for the Government

& the Administrators &

Rulers &c. &c.

prayer for the Congre.ⁿ,

a short introductory discourse on the subject of free will,

Offerings to the Fund

appropriated for the private Charities

& after the offerings

then the Psalms 67th, 122^d, 124th & 150th

Chaunted by the Hazan & Kahal,

concluded as on a festival day

from [Hebrew: All Israel] - Veshalom

To have a firm & perfect faith in the Unity of God, to render praises & thanksgivings to Him for the Mercies we continually experience; to pray with sincerity & truth for a continuance of His protection; & to worship Him both in public & private, are all necessary and important obligations, which we are bounden to perform.

In order to illustrate these assertions I have selected the last Verse of the 84th Psalm, which is “O Lord of hosts, blessed is the Man that trusteth in Thee”. Here we find how naturally the cause & effect are connected & we are prophetically assured that a thorough confidence in God will secure to us a perpetual Blessing, & though we should be surrounded with every species of evil to which human-nature is exposed in this sublimary state, still by placing our hopes & trust in God, we have every reason to believe that He will in His own good time relieve us, let us therefore impress our minds with a due sense of divine Goodness, that we may know that our Creator is both omnipotent & omnipresent; to search out our imperfections, and when discovered to amend them, that we may be entitled to the Blessing which results from a belief in the supreme disposer of all events.

In considering the words of our Text, we perceive how closely allied is the hope (or Confidence) with the belief of God, and by that belief flows every principle of righteousness, as it is mentioned in Gen. ch. 15th v. 6th, “And he [Abram] believed in the Lord, & he counted it to him for righteousness”, and King David says in the Psalm 32^d v. 10th, “he who trusts in the Lord mercy shall compass him about”; hence proceeds the efficient Grace of God, & from this source flows the power of volition, so that by a regular series of good principles, which seem to diffuse themselves spontaneously, we are led to acquire the most refined pleasures that exist in the Soul and which of all things ought to be the first considered for knowing that to be the immortal part of our composition, and that she must give an account for her actions when divested of bodily affections, & existing in a Separate State, prepared from aforetime as a receptacle for Spirit we should be particularly carefull to conduct our selves in such manner, as to become worthy of providencial interference (Divine Goodness).

We may here ask how are we obtain the knowledge requisite for our guidance? The answer is plain & simple, for we find when King David charged his son Solⁿ. to observe the Law of God and to walk in his ways as it is written in the Law of Moses, he enjoined him in these words thou, “know the God of thy Father & serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind”. We must therefore infer that if the knowledge of God was not attainable so great a personage as King David would never recommend at to his

Son; by studying the powers & attributes of God, we acquire the knowledge of his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, consequently we become more sensible of our dependance on Him, and more acquainted with our own imperfections; for all the knowledge that we finite mortals can have is through the medium of our senses, by a thorough conviction of our being called into existence from Nothing, endued with faculties & powers, which no other part of the visible creation possesses, enjoying the pleasures of viewing things, so as to form a judgement, to distinguish between good & evil, with the freedom of cheering such things as appear suitable to our inclinations, & rejecting those things that appear disagreeable, were it not for any other reason that we should prefer the Good & refuse the Evil. This alone should induce us that God is all powerful, just & benevolent, and we ought to exert ourselves to imitate Him in acts of Benevolence, charity, Justice & mercy, and Solⁿ. wisely observe that: [Hebrew] “A righteous man regardeth the life of his Beast” (Pro. 12. c.10 verse).

Amidst the various dispensations of Almighty Providence the late melancholly visitation of an epidemic malady in the City we dwell in may be considered as the greatest evil (ill) of life excepting famine, and is certainly a manifestation of his displeasure, and too surely indicates that we are not altogether worthy of his divine interposition. Let us take a retrospective view of a few years past & we shall quickly see “the finger of God” pointing out to us in a special manner the atrocities of our sins, & the absolute necessity of repentance and amendment; for if national punishments are in consequence of national sin, we can not but be sensible of these truths.

At one time we were visited with alarming fires that threatened the consumption of our metropolis, at another a species of pestilence prevailed, which deprived us of many valuable members of Society, then the apprehensions of a dreadful War, again the visitation of an epidemic which though it has not been attended with the same degree of fatality as formerly, still it has carried with it the same formidable apperance, compelled the citizens to quit their usual places of residence, & to flee for refuge to the country towns & villages, where they have been obliged to put up with many inconveniencies, and attended with great expense. The Man of business relinquishes the advantages of trade, & the poorer class of people must inevitably suffer in their pecuniary circumstances, so that we may truly say that every individual (either in a greater or lesser degree) have felt the bad effects of this direfull malady, these sufferings call loudly on us for a strict reformation, and we ought to humble ourselves before God, to implore Him to grant us his divine Grace, that we may be made sensible of our

transgressions, that we may acknowledge his mercy in having removed the evil from among us, that we may manifest our gratitude by thanksgiving & praises, and though we have felt the visitation of Justice.

Let it be remembered it was still blended with mercy: and above all things let us rejoice that He has saved us alive, that we may have time to repent us of our manifold sins, & to become regenerated; let us be grateful for all the benefits we have received, both before, & even, during the time of our distress, and since then, that we are now again embodied & assembled, to celebrate His praises, & to glorify His holy name; let us also keep in mind that tho' our small congregation was driven from our public place of worship, and dispersed in various parts of the country, there was yet an opportunity for the greater number of them to assemble together in union to observe the appointed times & festivals instituted by divine authority, agreeably to the rites & ceremonies of our forefathers, to pretend to specify all the particular blessings we enjoyed amidst the terrific evil of the late epidemic would be descending too much in the minutia of things; suffice it to say in general terms, that we had a regular supply of the real necessities of life, though attended with somewhat more difficulty than common in the procuring of them.

For all those blessings, Oh God! omnipotent & omnipresent we most humbly return thanks unto thee, look down from thine holy habitation and accept of the offerings of our hearts, as an acknowledgement of thy providential favors, teach us to be subservient to thy divine Will, that we may adore thee both through Fear & Love, according to the precepts of our inspired legislation of blessed memory, that we may instruct our Children in the duties they owe to their Creator, teach us to know thee through thy mercies, & show us the paths of righteousness that we may walk therein, remove far from us the spirit of profaneness, the evil spirit of Infidelity which with hasty strides is striving to step over the bounds of religion & truth; let those who are on the "Lord's side" unite and cheerfully associate to suppress this hideous monster who has reared his gigantic head with unwearied pains is endeavoring to tread down and trample on every thing that is holy.

Methinks I see some of your smiling at the Idea of me introducing this subject in a public discourse, but should I pass it over at this opportunity, I may not have it in my power to repovate the practices that too many are accustomed to. The many enormities that are occasioned by a neglect of Duty towards our heavenly Father are in themselves highly reprehensible, and unless an amendment soon takes place, we know

not how quickly we may be swallowed up in the gulph of everlasting perdition, for though the ineffable Lord of Hosts is a God of long suffering, he does not utterly acquit, and our Rabenu Moshe affirm that the Sins of the Fathers shall be visited on the children even the third and fourth generations, but you will likewise observe the conditions held out to induce us to obey the Law of God, for He has in the 1st instance graciously promised to extend this mercy to thousands of generations of those who love & obey Him.

These are assurances given to us by the most indubitable authority, and such are the infallible rules by which we ought to be governed, for does not the same Law warrant to us a perpetual flow of happiness by a perfect obedience to the divine Will; and by rejecting the revealed Law we must necessarily expect to suffer the punishments, annexed to the non-performance of the positive precepts, and all the evil consequences that ensue from committing such actions as are forbidden by the negative precepts; in either case of omission or commission, we incur the displeasure of our Creator; and make ourselves subject to such punishments as an eternal judge may think adequate to the offences committed against infinite goodness.

The many moral doctrines contained in the Sacred Scripture are sufficient evidences of its having been written by divine ordination, and we only comply with our duty when we implicitly adhere to the monitions, therein contained, how many cautionary rules are given to us in the Sacred Law that (?) in with beware, take heed, observe, keep, which though they imply several senses stilt they originate from with the same root such as Shamor et yom [hebraico] and particularly where it is said in the [hebraico] “Take heed to yourselves that your hearts be not deceived, & ye turn aside, & serve other gods, & worship them” – and by a due observance of such lessons we may rationally expect to know our God, the God of Israel, and by obeying his Law, they will gradually lead us to that perfect knowledge of his Omnipotence, which is essential to our happiness both here & hereafter; it is only though these means and by a thorough confidence, which naturally results from a firm belief in God we may truly hope for salvation, and we may them safely exclaim with king David: “Oh Lord of Hosts! Blessed is the Man who trusteth in thee”. Among the many prophetic reprehensions contained in Scripture, I know of none more applicable to the degeneracy of the present day, than that contained in the 23^d C. of Jeremiah where after he had reprimanded the children of Israel for their evil doings he asked in the Name of the Lord, “Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, & not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?, saith

the Lord, do not I fill heaven & earth?', saith the Lord". These are questions of the most serious & important nature, and plainly teaches us the knowledge of the omnipresence of the Deity whom we adore, and if Men would always keep this truth in remembrance, it would uniformly operate on their minds, in such manner as to restrain them from committing sinfull actions, reflecting at the same time on the power of free agency, that first & greatest advantage we possess in this sublinary state, and were it not that we enjoy this glorious prerogative, above all other Creatures there would be no necessity of believing in a state of retribution, and what can be more consonant to the feelings of humanity, than the hopes of an hereafter? And to attain so precious a blessing, who would not forego the transient pleasures of this precarious life? Where if we do not suffer in our own poor corruptible¹ bodies, we see sufficient in the wants and miseries of othera - look only to the distresses of those who now lament the losses of their nearest & dearest relatives & connections, see there the furrowed cheeck of age, streaming with the bring tears of affliction, moaning over a dear departing child, unable to afford him the least assistance, to see him laboring under a direfull disease, which baffles every effort of human skill – to see the tender husband weeping over a beloved wife, whilst the infant children are hovering around and anxiously enquiring if any change has taken place for the better; to see a boring wife assiduously attentive and administering every thought of remedy that can be suggested to an affectionate husband and amidst her grief endeavoring to console her tender² offspring, who perhaps depend enterily for their support on the existence of their dyin' Parent, while they with tearfull eyes are fervently³ praying for his recovery and waiting to see the issue, views only the last sad awefull scene of dissolution – how many have fallen victims to the late epidemic and many have been in suffering of those who recovered from that doleful malady, perhaps deprived of their rational faculties, unfit to give any directions to their attending relatives & scarcely sensible of their approaching end, and were it not for the hopes founded on the authority of divine inspiration, we might be deterred from seeking happiness either here or hereafter – for Death in itself is not of so terrific a nature as many imagine, it is the just Man's hope, and only the dead of the wicked. The just Man looks for it as the goal of his pursuits and though suffering all the Ills of Life, he remains firm & unshaken in his belief in God, he is possessed of fortitude to support his trials & trusts in his maker only, to be relieve at a future day – to hear him speaking to

1 Corrigido "mortal".

2 Corrigido "beloved".

3 Corrigido / Colocado como hipótese para substituir "anxiously" e "earnestly".

his surrounding children and friends that are assembled at this solemn time, to hear and to obey his last injunctions in his mind, though laboring under the most excruciating pain and bodily infirmities, painting out the follies and vicissitudes of worldly desires, endeavoring to reconcile them to the dispensations of a kind indulgent Providence, consoling them for the loss, which they are likely to sustain, perfectly resigned to the supreme Will, he remains immoveable in his principles of faith, and thoroughly exemplifies his hope in God and without a groan expires. In such manner is father Jacob represented in Scripture, who when he was on his dying bed, called all his children around him, and addressing each by name he blessed them, according to their respective future stations in life, and gave them in charge to observe the unerring rule of Justice, and in the midst of his benedictions, he earnestly and piously explained, "I have waited for thy salvation, Oh Lord!" [Hebrew].

Such is the life of the pious & the faithful, who put their trust in God, and so is their happiness ensured both here and hereafter. Let us now examine on what foundation the wicked stand in respect to a State of retribution, can he ever look forward with any degree of hope, without repentance and amendment? His life becomes a burthen to him, although possessed of worldly riches, if he denies the Providence of his Maker, what can he be compared to? But to "the brutish man who knoweth not or to the fool who doth not understand." See him on the bed of sickness, what is he? Hear him calling for mercy in his last moments, lamenting over the follies of a mispent life, then it is he looks for a God at hand, but alas! While he was wallowing in the slough of dissipation, he only viewed Him as a God afar off, perhaps suffering the pains and miseries of a ruined constitution, the anguish naturally attending the separation of Soul & Body, the gloomy apprehension of not finding mercy, and without a prospect of recovery, quits this transient abode with regret & reluctance, filled with doubts and dismay at entering into the presence of infinite justice, he views with horror the moment of his dissolution, and in the paroxysms of phrenzy, despairs of mercy: and with a dreadful consciousness of his abominations, he is overwhelmed in the abyss of destruction, such is the miserable end of sinners, and such are the real evils that necessarily ensue to those who persist in wickedness and consequently in error.

At the time of real (or imaginary) danger, how earnestly do we solicit the interference of Providence to avert the evils that are pending over our heads, or hovering round us, it is then we consider Him as a God at hand, but so soon as the danger is removed, we are too apt to forget ourselves that is we forget our dependance

on Him and we neglect Him as “a God afar off”. But were we only to consider for a moment how impossible it is for us to hide ourselves in secret places as expressed by the Prophet. We should always remember His Omnipresence and at all times prostrate ourselves before Him and implore His divine protection, that He may shield us under His powerful influence that we may “not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day.” Ps 91.

In these reflections I mean not to insinuate any impropriety of leaving the City at the time the epidemic prevailed, for we have many instances in the S. S. to confirm the necessity of such procedure, I shall just mention a few cases, where Men of the Strongest faith and greatest piety fled from the appearance of danger & sought a place of security. Jacob when threatened with death by Esau, quitted his family & country and went to another place where he resided many years. Moses fled from Egypt & did not return untill expressly ordered by the Almighty God of Israel, and King David fled from his son Absalom, when he seduced the people to revolt against him. Sure no one can doubt the integrity of those characters, Men who were actually directed by the Holy Spirit, yet submitting cheerfully to the necessity of the times, it may not be amiss to remark here, that supernatural means are never used upon any occasion, where natural means can be effect any particular purpose, and our learned Sages say, that when a Man sets about to do good, Providence is ever ready to assist him, but when he designs to do evil, he precludes himself from the protection of Providence and is suffered to proceed of himself.

From what has been adduced, you will observe how necessary it is for us to pray for our Salvation, but of what avail is Prayer if not accompanied with devotion and attention? How many repeat the set forms composed for our use, without adverting to the subject of the intercession. We pray for Peace, for Wisdom, for Happiness, but do we use the procuring mean to obtain these invaluable blessings? Do we seek the peace & welfare of our fellow-creatures? Do we appropriate particular times to study our divine Law, have we the “fear of God” (which is the beginning of Wisdom) continually in our minds? Are we actuated by the Spirit of Holiness? Which lead us, both to temporal & eternal happiness? Believe me, my dear Brethren, these principles are essentially requisite to our existence, either in time or eternity, and the privation of them subserves every evil purpose that arises in the imagination of (mere) Man. Examine well yourselves and you will speedily discover wherein you have deviated from the path of

rectitude. See that you have not defrauded the Widow & the Orphan, that you have acted honestly in your dealings with each other. Have you distributed Charity to the Poor? Have you been ready to assist your brother in the time of his distress? Have you visited the sick, or supplied them with suitable necessaries to promote their recovery & establish their health? Have you administered consolation to the mourners? These are all duties obligatory on us to exercise, and happy must he be, who can say with truth, “I have performed them”. For herein is comprehended the four great Duties of Man: 1.st our Duty to God, 2.^{dly} our Duty to the ties of consanguinity, 3.^{dly} our Duty to Society, & 4.^{thly} our duty to each & every Individual; and by a firm & perfect faith in God, by an obedience to his Laws, and by a thorough confidence in his Omnipotence we may depend rely upon the confirmation of his Blessing, and say in the Words of our text, “Oh Lord of Hosts! Blessed is the Man who trusteth in thee.”

The many recent events events that have regularly preceeded each other, both in moral & physical world, are sure & certain evidences of the authenticity of divine revelation: and to a reflective mind, must necessarily appear as corroborating circumstances to wince the near approach of that great & glorious day, when that we shall be purged of our Sins and again be restored from this long & gloomy captivity, to inherit the land which was promised to our Fathers Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob, for them & for their seed for ever provided we obeyed the divine Law, but through the multitude of our Sins, and the Sins of our Progenitors, we have been driven from our right of possession and are now wandering exiles throughout the habitable Globe; and as these Prophecies have been regularly and literally fulfilled hitherto, we have sufficient reason to believe, that every other divine prediction will sooner or later be accomplished, that we shall again be gathered together from all “corners of the Earth” and be reinstated in our own land, wherein we shall dwell in safety, in Peace, in Happiness. “Then shall all the trees of the Wood rejoice before the Lord; for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth”, then shall we truly exult in the Spirit of holiness, and say “this is the day which the Lord hath made, we will be glad & rejoice therein.”

Before I conclude, my D^r Brethren, I have to return you thanks, for your kind attention in Sanctifying this day, instituted for the particular purpose of worshipping the God of our Fathers, for the many mercies we have been (and are now) blessed with, and I can not better express myself on this occasion, than in the words of the Sacred text, delivered to us by our faithful Legislation, “O that there were such an heart in them, that

they would fear me & keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.”

Unto thee, O gracious and everlasting Father of mercies, do I humbly pray, that thou wouldst grant us an emanation of thy divine essence, and insure into us thy holy Spirit, that we may know thy ways, impart thy divine wisdom to the Rulers & Administrators of Government, bless & preserve them in their respective departments, and graciously extend thy protection & direction to the good people of this State, and to the United States of America in general, with their representatives in the Legislature, either in council or in the Field, guard them from all evil and danger, secure them in their just rights and possessions, remove far from them the Spirit of envy & jealousy, let no discord prevail in their councils or in their armies, unite them in the bonds of brotherly and social love, and let peace and harmony reside perpetually among them, that they may act in such manner as to command approbation of their constituents. In their day and ours, may Judah be saved & Israel dwell in safety. Prepare us, O Lord, through thine infinite perfection, to appear in thy presence, make us sensible of our follies and our weaknesses, that we may walk in the paths of humility & righteousness, and not be led astray through pride & haughtiness. Let the presumptuous sinner turn from his wickedness & live, & they that sin through Ignorance learn that “with thee, is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we light.” So let it be thy Will & we will say

Amen