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Discourse

delivered in the Synagogue by G. Seixas

on Thursday the 10th of Tebet 5565

& Dec.^r 20th 1805

by appointment of the Direction of

the fund[s appro]priated to

Pri[vate] Charities.

being the same day recommended

by the Corporation of the

City of New York

at the Instance of the Rev.^d Clergy,

to be observed [as] a Day of Public

Thanksgiving & Prayer.

New York April 24th 1805 – examined by the Author

[...]any inaccuracies discovered, to consent

[...]it printed, until they shall

[have be]en corrected.¹

[*Hebrew*]

“But unto thee, Oh God!, pertaineth mercy, and thou dost render unto every man according to his works”

[In the 62^d Ps. & the 13th Verse you will find these words.]

Consonant to the principles of natural religion, we are led to believe that there is a God, who is all-powerful, and all-wise, and ever-present; worthy of being adored, & whose praises ought to be celebrated. This is founded both in reason & philosophy. Weak & fallible directors! Futile in their operations, & uncertain as to their ends;

¹ Fólio muito danificado, com vários rasgões.

without mode or form of worship, we depend on the vague imaginations of inconsistent mortals.

Where then are we to look for such doctrines, as are contained in the books of divine revelation? These only can be sure guide of Man, in his probationary state; in them will be discover the unerring paths of righteousness, by them he will acquire the true tenets of faith, which will necessarily obtain the reward of good-works.

In our natural state we think ourselves perfect, but when viewing ourselves in a spiritual light, we soon distinguish the distance we are placed in from divine perfection. Sensible of this difference we proceed slowly & regularly to the knowledge of God, by the works of His creation, and of ourselves by our own depravities. It is from this source we receive consolation, for the evils we encounter in life, and we become reconciled to the sufferings we endure, we pretend to see the right, and yet we act contrary, in opposition to the rules prescribed, by those who were inspired. We deny (by our actions) the power of Omnipotence & we boast of our own free-agency – but “shall he who planted the ear not hear? Shall he who formed the eye not see?”, as it said by King David.

This boasted freedom of will, oftener prompt us to vice, than lead us to the love and practice of virtue. In the earliest ages of the world, we find, by examining the pages [of] sacred history, the lapse of human nature [...] for, from the first transgression of Adam [until] all Men became sinners, and punishm[ents] and death speedly followed, in conseq[ue]nce of original sin, as it was denounced in the primary State of Man. But God, through His infinite mercies, subsequently declared, in extenuation for the frailties of the flesh – that “my spirit shall not forever contend in Man, in as much as he also is flesh.” and immediately after the deluge, He repeats that “the imagination of the heart of Man is prone to will from his youth.” Hence we discover the natural propensities to will, which are only to be corrected, by the exertion of reason in a moral sense, and by a due observance of God's holy law, by a spiritual application to those (preceptive) doctrines established for the benefit of the Sons of Man. [*Hebrew*] “for I have given unto you good doctrines – for sake ye not my Law”.

When we reflect on the various obligations we owe to our heavenly Father, we can not but be sensible of our demerits; and we become conscious of our imperfections, and of our dependence on the All-wise ruler of the universe, for his tender mercies towards us; who is ever ready to receive repentant sinners, when they call upon him with a

contrite heart. It is our duty at all times, to deprecate His wrath, to implore Him for his efficient Grace, to aid us in the pursuits of life, that we may merit the blessings we enjoy, and that we may be so disposed, as to imitate him, in acts of benevolence, charity and good-will to all men, that we may be enabled to cultivate the affections of our fellow creatures & to contribute, as far as lays in our power, to the harmony & union of Society; to search for (& discover) the causes of malignant discord that fatally subsist among us, and to do away such prejudices (whether political or civil) as have a tendency to (?) evil in the land, to promote peace & concord among our brethren; that we may dwell quietly in our habitations, and rejoice the blessings of an indulgent Providence, whose mercies are unbounded! For “the Lord is nigh unto all, who call upon him in truth”. But do our actions correspond with our professions? Do we deserve the bounties we are blessed with? Do we sufficiently examine our conduct, as recommended by the prophet Zephaniah? Surely not, or we should refrain from such deeds, as call down upon us the judgements of the Lord of hosts³. Look around you & see the finger of God, pointing out in the most awefull manner, the direfull effects of sin. Year after year, we have felt the scourging rod of infinite justice, & it seemeth as if the land⁴ was polluted with blood, & crieth out aloud for vengeance from on high, neither is it confined to the City we live in, but extends on both sides to the extremes of the Union. Cities & towns have experienced the most violent devastations that could be produced by storms & tempests, & great have been the conflagrations both here & elsewhere⁵. Individuals have sustained innumerable damages in their property, and many now lament the losses of their nearest & dearest relatives.

Notwithstanding, we have cause to mourn for our national transgressions, yet we can not but be grateful for the abundant favors of an overruling power, who stayed the hand of the destroying Angel & made him sheathe his all-devouring sword, let us be thankful, that we were not visited the last season, with the raging epidemic that prevailed in this City the preceeding year.

To form a just estimate of the blessing we possess, it will be necessary to take a retrospective view of the former season, & place it in a comparative State with the latter. Then, it was piteous to behold the countenances of each other, the gloomy apprehensions seated on the brow, were certain indications of a mind, oppressed with horror & dismay – how different the latter season – the Citizens enjoying health,

3 1ª versão: “all spirits”.

4 1ª versão: “earth”.

5 Esta última parte foi acrescentada posteriormente, à margem.

uninterrupted in their lawful occupations, settled securely in their habitations, not compelled to flee to the adjacent towns & villages to avoid the ravages & desolation of epidemic disease, Agriculture & Commerce flourishing & prosperous, Seminaries of education continuing their rotinas of duty, Arts & Sciences attended to as usual and every public place resorted to, without the fear of danger.

For all those blessings, let us now rejoice and humbly beseech the throne of Grace for a continuance of his all-powerful protection, that we may not “be afraid of the pestilence that stalketh in darkness, from the poisonous vapor that wasteth at noon-day.” Let us endeavor to show forth our gratitude, for the benefits we have received, for those manifestations of divine godness, which we have experienced.

In what manner shall we demonstrate our feelings? Or how shall we express our sentiments, to comply with our duty to our heavenly Father? For all His kindness & mercy, it can not be by practising the same bad habits, we have been addicted to, by following the evil bent of our inclinations; by pursuing the allurements or the blandishments of vice, by securrility and abuse by back-biting & railings – by slandering & calumniating the characters of those we associate with; which are real causes of dreadful effects, and if not immediately ensuing, will ultimately prove so. We have seen the dismal events of such malicious proceedings, and it is our duty to avoid them in future. A total reformation of manners is absolutely necessary, and it is high time to correct the evil, or it be too late, we know not where the mischief may terminate, if we do not strive to check it in its progress, the real ills of life are enough of themselves, & do not let us add to them those that are artificial.

Observe a steadfast adherence to truth – shew to the world an example worthy to be imitated, obey the law of God as handed down to us, by our divine Legislator the Man Moses – we shall then be better Men & better Citizens, we may then hope to be wiser & happier, to ensure peace in this life, & in the world to come, we shall find “that all her ways are ways of pleasentness and all her paths are peace”, where life everlasting is the reward of the virtuous, & the Just, & shame & reproach, the portion of those who persist in their wickedness. [*Hebrew*] according to the Sacred Text “& thow renderest unto every man according to his works.”

As a mean of averting those dismal consequences of sin, the Almighty God of Israel had already prepared, from the earliest period of the creation, His divine & immutable law, which would guard us against, the evils of this sublunary state, and lead us to the salvation of our souls; the writings of the sacred pensmen abound with lessons

of instruction; & are filled with every social, moral & religious duty⁶, and were ye inclined to practise virtue, you would find examples sufficient to imitate by perusing the sacred pages, which were formed for the knowledge, & the wants of Man.

Among the various duties we owe to our heavenly Father, there are none (perhaps) more important than attending to the poor, the widow, & the orphan, & throughout the S. S.⁷ you will not meet with any moral or social law so often repeated. Moses ordained a law specifically for them, & his successors followed his steps; the blessings of those who considereth the poor are pointed out in the 41st Ps. and when that the house of Israel had transgressed, in the time of the latter Prophets, the neglect of those duties to the poor, the widow and the fatherless, were among the chief causes of reprehension, as may be seen in Malachi.

The practice of charitable & benevolent Institutions have obtained, from the earliest ages of Society & civilization; & there is not an instance of history, either sacred or profane, wherein the poor are not mentioned & provided for – the pleasures of the soul flow from such deeds⁸, & the advantages resulting, are of a nature, far superior, to any sensual gratification. To assist the aged & infirm the helpless widow, & the unprotected orphan, are actions truly commendable – similar to the beneficent attributes of ineffable Goodness!

Who, but the most obdurate of heart, could withhold his mite, from so exemplary Virtue? If men would only consider, & act according to sense & reason, they would enjoy much more satisfaction in the event of things. How happy must he feel, who on reflection discerns the good he has done to his fellow-man.

View a family destitute of the necessaries of life, & say, if you can refrain from pitying their forlorn condition; the natural affection of the humane mind, prompts you to offer assistance, but unable to effect a total relief, you are deterred. Were you to meet a single deserving object, of such description, how would you commiserate his sufferings? Relieve him, & see the workings of his soul – see him attempting to speak his gratefull feelings, his heart so overpowered, denies him the utterance of language⁹, how does he express his sense of benign goodness, or manifest his acknowledgments? His full fraught bosom swells with sensations of joy – he pours out his soul in extacy – and worships in silence, an all gracious Providence! Though, perhaps a moment before,

6 1^a versão: “obligation”.

7 Sacred Scriptures

8 1^a versão: “actions”

9 1^a versão: “words”.

through a state of despondency, he had doubted of infinite mercy; and despairing of worldly succor, was contemplating relief by the horrid act of suicidism, wretched being! Driven, by the baleful effects of poverty to such an atrocious enormity, when a trifling exertion from the man of affluence, would mitigate the pangs that he endured, & save him from the gulph of perdition – think of your having snatched him from so terrificable a state that you have restored him to his family, & his friends, that he has become a new man, and finally a worthy member of society. Such instances occur in historic life, & such incidents are known in the memory of Man.

Consider these things, Oh Israel! and let it not be said, that ye have not acted as faithful stewards, in the house of your Lord – for ye know full well, that poverty is not a crime, nor is it inflicted as a punishment, any more than riches – neither is riches a proof of goodness, unless applied to beneficent purposes, for “why is the way of the wicked prosperous” was a Question asked by Jeremiah the Prophet – and we find by observation, that the poor is as necessary in the scale of creation as the rich; and that their existence is as requisite at times in a community as the greatest richest & best of Men.

There are duties also incumbent on the indigent & impoverished, that actuate & incite the hearts of their benefactors to kindness, charity, & benevolence, such as demonstrative gratitude, a disposition to oblige, & a willingness to render such services as lay within their power to accomplish, and when attended to with diffidence, & a suitable return for favors conferred, prove of the greatest advantage, & engages the attention of those who are inclined to consider objects of distress, & to afford them such aid as may be necessary – of a surety, nothing can be more acceptable to our maker, than to see the good & the generous, according to the abundance they possess of worldly riches, bestowing alms on the afflicted poor – the widow, & the orphan, whose prayers & benedictions, flow spontaneously from the well affected heart, for blessings on their Benefactors, & no doubt ascend to the throne of Glory¹⁰, to be registered by the recording Angel, and when it pleases God to call them to Himself, they will find that their good works are gone before them, and secured a repository in the world of souls among the pious and the just – the benevolent & the Charitable as it is said in the S. S. [Hebrew] “and thy righteousness is gone before thee.”

10 1ª versão: “Grace”.

Such are the sentiments that arise in the human mind, when considered in a moral & social sense, and are strictly conformable to reason, abstracted from the principles of true religion.

But when we view this subject, in a religious point of light, according to holy writ, we find many injunctions, to induce us to the practice of Charity. It would be a poor compliment to your knowledge & understanding, to enumerate the many passages in Scripture, relative to this duty. I shall therefore only select such instances occasionally, as to remind you of the high estimation the principle of [*Hebrew*] (charity) was held in by the Sacred Prophets, who affirmed it to be of so excellent a nature, that it was a mean to be used, for the deliverance from death – from destruction! [*Hebrew*]

I have on a former occasion explained the term [*Hebrew*], with etymology & true definition of its complex signification, i. e. Charity, Justice, & Righteousness, & that in the act of dispensing charity, we execute justice, and are exercised in works of righteousness – actions that dispose the mind, to bear with the awful dispensations of holy Providence – and renders us more fit instruments to perform His divine Will. Thereby acquiring a greater share of humility, & becoming more deserving of His care & protection – to hear the word of God, & to be obedient thereto, is our chief duty, & he who neglects, or disobeys His Law, can not but expect to meet with such punishment, as is adequate to the offense against infinite Majesty. For although we are assured that “God is slow to anger, & aboudeth with mercy,” yet, we must not presume, that His divine mercy, will always supersede the strict attributes of justice, for He declares, “He will not utterly acquit those who trespass against Him, visiting the sins of the Parents upon the children, even on the 3^d & 4th generation” – a Declaration of the most weighty & serious nature & ought to be continually reflected on, by all who have an affection for their offspring; thereby obviating in some measure, the visitation & inflictions attending sinners, & which the sons of Adam are all liable to be, in consequence of original sin. It is true the mercies of the Almighty God often prevail through mediation & prayer, as it is exemplified by Moses, when he sought pardon for the children of Israel, after they had made a molten Calf & worshiped it, that the Lord forgave them as it is said, “I have pardoned according as thou hast spoken” [*Hebrew*]. In this instance we see the efficacy of prayer, when offered at the shrine of mercy with fervency & devotion, and every rational mind must inevitably be convinced, that it is a mean, through ineffable Grace, of working out the salvation of our souls. For what avails our earthly possessions of the

good things of this transitory abode in the flesh, if we neglect laying up a treasure, for the everlasting happiness, we are promised to enjoy (hereafter) in the world to come?

Allas! It is too much the case, & the more it is to be lamented, that we aim at aggrandizing ourselves here, & we strive not to become Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, which by observing the lessons of our holy law, would insure to us a real blessing whilst in this tabernacle of Elay, and eternal felicity in the world of Spirits. If we are sensible of the pleasures of the Soul, while confined in the body, how much greater must they be when in a separate state? Capable of viewing things as they are in a more percipient manner, than when encumbered with the bodily affections, which have a natural tendency to destroy their intellectual faculties, were we to resolve these things oftener in our minds, we should readily discover the superior advantages, that arise from the performance of the practical duties of our religion, and which universally lead us to Virtue – to Happiness? And we may truly say with King David, Ps. 13th v. last, “Unto thee, Oh Lord, pertaineth mercy, and thou dost render unto every Man, according to his works.”

The verses preceeding this sacred text, expressly declares, the confidence which the divine Psalmist, had in his glorious maker; & he earnestly exhorts the children of the faithfull to place their trust in Him – and not to depend on worldly riches & grandeur, which are things of vanity and of no durability – but in God we shall find both power & mercy, & according to our actions, so shall we be recompensed. Who then that believes in the mercy & power of God, would hesitate to follow such precious advice? When the effects of obedience to His holy law, is of so heavenly a nature, as to reward us with eternal blessings – Blessings in this life and happiness hereafter – [*Hebrew*] [...] ¹¹ you are induced to relieve him at the instant, to gratify yourself – you are affected at the time – and are pleased that it was in your power, to soften the pangs of poverty – Justice requires more – you are blessed with the means of procuring every comfort of life, you pursue every specie of amusement, and think not at the time, how many of your fellow creatures are pining under the iron hand of poverty – justice, demands a pittance of the ¹² abundance, God hath endowed you with, for the express purpose of aiding those who are in distress, you comply with this duty, for the sake of your own peace of mind. – Righteousness, proceeds in a more commendable manner – you seek for objects that deserve your bounty, among the inferior Classes of Society. You find the aged &

11 Página em falta.

12 1ª versão: “your”.

debilitated – the poor & the infirm – the helpless widow – & the unprotected orphan – the wandering traveller & the forlorn stranger – to these you give according to their wants – your hearts are elated – you examine your motives – you perceive your disinterestedness – you pour out your adulations to God with joy & thanksgiving, for the power you possess – and you practise righteousness – from a true principle of benevolence – as well as manifestating your gratitude to your Creator, for his unbounded mercies, who will reward you according to your works.

The several duties here spoken of, & enjoined on us by your divine law, are the most material & important, towards obtaining salvation (for our souls) and although they are accounted in the sight of God as the best of (good) works, yet, without a thorough faith in His eternal Providence, they may be deemed as actions, resulting from momentary inclination – in the order to bestowing Charity, pointed out in the most excellent manner by our inspired Legislator, assures us “that the poor will never cease to be in the land”, as we find by experience – and there are many other rules relative to the providing for the poor & necessitous, throughout the writings of the sacred pensmen – and the wisest of Men continuedly recommends the practice of Charity, under several considerations, exactly corresponding with the idea of Moshe Rabence, when he says, [*Hebrew*], which is generally understood to mean, “for the sake of this thing the Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all thy works” but the real interpretation should be rendered agreeably to the knowledge they possessed of the revolutionary affairs of Man, the changes & vicissitudes of this temporary existence – where we may observe that nothing is durable, except the goodness and virtue, accompanied by Faith, Hope & Charity.

Instances of this nature occur daily, and is one of the many proofs of the authenticity of the S. S. for there is no one so ignorant, but must have witnessed¹³ these truths, either in person, or by observation, how necessary is it then for the sons¹⁴ of Adam to be circumspect in their conduct, when rewards attend the good, & punishment the evil actions we commit. There is contained in the holy law of Moses, no less than 613 precepts – [*Hebrew*] 248 affirmative and 365 negative – the former in number to the members of the human body, & the latter corresponding with the veins, arteries & sinews, & every one has either its reward or punishment annexed, according to obedience, or refractoriness, and therefore it is said in holy writ – [*Hebrew*] – here let it

13 1ª versão: “experienced”

14 1ª versão: “children”.

be understood that the letters of [*Hebrew*] numerically taken, are 611 & the two first commands of the decalogue, of [*Hebrew*] & [*Hebrew*] were received¹⁵ by the Omnipotent God of Israel, which completes 613, not that it is expected any individual could comply with an ordinance so comprehensive, and of such magnitude – but the performance of all moral obligations is calculated according to the distinct circumstances attending us in the different stages & departments of Life, whether as Rulers or private members of Society. There is no state or condition of Man, that exempts him from obeying the moral & social law, but the religious law was only given to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, under the appellation of the Children of Israel, and it is well known that on¹⁶ our Law many others have been founded, which do not correspond with the doctrines we profess to believe in – but we are assured by the writings of our holy prophets, that the time will come for the ingathering of the nations, when there shall be but one God & one King, as may be seen at large in the writings of Ezekl.

But previously to such a desired event, much must be attended to by us, we must lay aside our pride & our follies, our longing after the vanities & pursuit of idle pleasures, which only involve us in the dissipations & extravagancies of sensual gratifications which oftener produce pain & vexation in the event, than promoting anyone good purpose whatever.

Contrast the expences of such a mode of life, with a small pittance necessary to ameliorate the condition of the unhappy, & see the extreme difference, between the profusion of luxuries, and the real wants of the distressed. Say, if you would not enjoy more pleasure, by reflecting on the good you might have done, with the superfluous expence? In aiding the objects of Charity, by supplying them at this inclement season (os the year) with Fuel, with cloathing, with bread! All necessary to the preservation of life.

There are many deserving characters, who stand in need of help, but know not where or to whom they can apply. Can there be a more meritorious action on earth than to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, to afford the poor a place of shelter, to furnish them with means to procure warmth & comfort in their impoverished state? Consider & know, that no prayer or benediction, can be more fervent & sincere, than when proceeding from the heart “of those who were ready to perish.”

15 1ª versão: “delivered”.

16 1ª versão: “from”.

What can I say to those, whose hearts are callous to the feelings of humanity, who worship their worldly treasure, & value themselves on the vanities & glory of riches; such can have no regard for their poor souls, when abstracted from the body, and are called before the high tribunal of eternal Justice, to render an account of their transactions in the flesh, there, they will find neither favour or affection, but if found wanting, must inevitably endure the punishment, denounced against incorrigible sinners, misery, shame & disgrace.

If we depend on¹⁷ the mercies of our Creator, we ought to know also that infinite justice must (& will) be satisfied.

Let us hasten then & repent us of our errors, for we not how soon we may be called hence, and if we be not prepared for so awful an event, how shall we act, when we find it too late? Lay these things to heart & ruminate thereon for it is said by the Prophet, “As I live, saith the Lord, I do not delight in the death of the wicked, but let the wicked turn from his way & live – turn ye, turn ye unto me, for why will ye die, oh house of Israel!”

Can there be a more special call for repentance? Can any words be more impressive & persuasive? Than are here made use of? With what earnestness, what anxiety, the universal Father of mankind, expresses himself towards you, Oh ye house of Israel.

Let us humble ourselves before Him & acknowledge his ineffable Goodness, implore Him to grant us Grace, that we may be sincerely penitent – that we may become regenerate – Oh heavenly Father! Hear our prayer. «Hearken, & do, delay not, for thy own sake, Oh my God!”

We will here recapitulate the different subjects discussed of the preceeding pages – you will no doubt have observed the tender mercies of our heavenly Father, in having exempted us from the destructive epidemic, that prevailed the preceeding year – the blessings we possess in common with the other Inhabitants of this City, the obligation we are under to manifest our gratitude, with Thanksgiving & Prayer – and to exercise ourselves in work of piety, Charity & benevolence, agreeably to the words of our sacred text [*Hebrew*] “But unto thee, O God! Pertaineth mercy, & thou renderest unto every man according to his works.”

The whole of the 62 Psalm alludes particularly to the appropriations of this day, & its general applications, will, I trust, tend to promote the usefulness of the [*Hebrew*: Kalfé Sedaka], which was instituted 6 years ago, when few of our brethren resided in

17 1ª versão: “believe in”

the City, and many of those fell victims to the direfull epidemic – some others felt the malignant influence of the disease, but through the goodness of Providence, are enabled to attend us at this day – at that time our contributions were small, still they were found to be of great service to our distressed friends – many have been benefitted since, in proportion to the insufficiency of the Fund, which could not extend in a more ample manner to supply all who stand in need of assistance at this dreary season of the year - much will depend on the offerings of this day, and it is to be hoped that every man will be recompensed according to the goodness of his works.

Let us now unite in prayer, and with awfull tremblings, render praise & thanksgiving to our God, the God of Israel, to whom all power & mercy pertaineth – join with me in supplication & let us mutually pray for each other – we humbly beseech thee, Oh Lord! to look down upon us from thine holy habitation & grant us thy all-powerful protection, shield us under the wings of thy holy Providence, & preserve us from all evil; direct us in the pursuits of life, & guard us from the reproaches of Man. Bless & protect the President of the Union, with the administrators of the general Government, in their respective departments – the Governor & Rulers of this State – Judges & Counsellors – & the Magistrates of this City – Impart to them an emanation of thy divine wisdom, that they may know & judge distinctly between that which would prove beneficial to the United States, & that which might be injurious. Let no party schisms in State affairs prevail, so as to destroy the principles of the Constitution, which is for the Security of person & property, & sworn to be observed by the administrators of Government.

May the Congress assembled, act in unison with each other to promote the welfare of all – and may they be able to deliberate and decide on all laws proposed for the advantage of their Constituents. May Agriculture flourish & Commerce be prosperous; may the seminaries of education be continued under the direction of able Teachers & Professors, that the succeeding generations may gain the knowledge of freedom without licentiousness, & the usefulness of power without tyranny.

May the people be convinced of the fidelity of their representatives and may no cause of jealousy subsist among the different states of the Union – may the blessing of Peace attend their Councils; & finally may “the land¹⁸ be filled with knowledge as waters covereth the seas.”

[*Hebrew*]

18 1ª versão: “earth”.

So be it this will & we will say

Amen.