

**Naphtali Phillips, *An Eulogium to the Memory of the Rev. Gershom Mendes Seixas. Pronounced in the Synagogue in the city of New York, on Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1816, at the request of the Trustees of the Congregation, Shearith Israel, New York, J. H. Sherman, 1816.***

(*Nova Iorque, American Jewish Historical Society, Jacques Judah Lyons Collection, P-15*)

Eulogium, &c.

Our venerable friend is no more – He has left us – He has fled from this valley of tears, of troubles, of sickness, and of death; to find a resting place in the bosom of his God; in the bosom of that God who watches over the meanest of his creatures – The God of mercy – The God who watched over our ancestors as he does over us – The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

My friends, I stand on the same spot on which, so lately stood our venerable Pastor. Here it was that he used to deliver to you the sacred word, which never came from his lips, but with purity, which his heart, or his head never conceived but in adoration for the Supreme God, and with pity and indulgence for the errors and frailties of mortals.

Although he was our Pastor, although from his lips came conviction, although he was the highest among us, the minister of the great and adorable God, he did not forget he was but himself a mortal, fragible like all others; and that he must, one day, yield up this mortal and ephemeral existence into the hands of his Creator.

Here it was, my friends, here where I now stand, on this very spot, where you have so often heard him invoke upon you the blessing of the God of Israel – but he is now no more – that hand which was stretched out to heaven for you, now is cold; that mouth, which breathed forth prayers for your happiness, and expounded the Sacred Writings for your benefit and improvement, is to us for ever dumb; those eyes, which beamed with intellectual wisdom, with heavenly adoration and with love for you all, are sealed in silence – He is now no more – Our friend, our father is no more. No more did I say? Yes, to us, no more – but in the kingdom of our Holy Father, the God of ISRAEL, he lives again; he there is assembled with the *Seraphim* and *Ophanim*; with those of our nation who have lived and died in the lapse of ages, and who have, like him, returned to the bosom of Abraham.

My friends, you weep; but wherefore should you weep for the exaltation of your Pastor? While on earth you loved and revered him; when now in heaven returned to his Creator, you should rejoice. Has he left aught behind him, in the history of his life that you grieve at? No! then let us remember the language of the Holy Book, which says, “a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of ones death is better than the day of ones birth.” Has he not left behind him that which is more precious than the most precious ointment? Have you not, in your recollections and remembrances, his pious, cheerful and benevolent character? Is this not more precious and consolatory to you than although he had left behind him stores of gold? Your grief, at present, is but green; but when time shall ripen it, and cast over it that ameliorating anodyne, which leaves the mind calm for reflection, you will repeat over the stories of his many virtues with cheerfulness, and in your grief you shall find joy; and thus will you emphatically pronounce, “a good name is better than precious ointment.”

That you now grieve, that at this day you should feel the whole weight of the loss you have experienced, is but natural; did you do otherwise than grieve, you would be either more or less than mortals – for mortals are selfish – you mourn for yourselves – he is beyond the pale of human sorrow; he is beyond that boundary of space which mightiest monarchs, or the eye of philosophy can explore, and of which they are as ignorant as the lowliest peasant. He is in that haven, that asylum where the good find rest from care. *Grieve* then, my friends, that hereafter you may *rejoice* – *rejoice* in the deliverance of your Pastor from a world of wo, and a release from extreme bodily anguish which he bore, as all his friends can testify, with the resignation and fortitude of a man of strong mind, who yielded to his afflictions as the dispensations of the Creator, to which it was his duty, uncomplaining, to submit. He did submit, and yielded his breath into the hands from which he received it.

I now address myself to the elder part of the Congregation – Your sympathy, your feelings for the loss of our venerable Pastor, no doubt is great. It is but reasonable and natural that it should be so. – You have lost forever in this world, an old and dear acquaintance, one, whom many, if not all of you, well knew in your youth; and knowing him in that season when the blood mounts high, and the spirits, the affections, and sympathies are at their zenith, must retain *some fond* recollections of what he then was. He kept even pace with you in years, and grew old insensibly like yourselves. The fire of youth changed to the more reflecting prudence of maturity, and what is the greatest

blessing of God to man, it ripened in his old age into wisdom, tempered by the experience and reflection of the days he had spent.

You, my elder friends, who can trace him for fifty years in your remembrance, who can pourtray in your own minds, the young, the lively, and the enthusiastic HAZZAN, and who can follow him step by step, in all the changes and variations which tend unto the last great change which you have lately witnessed and wept at. Yes! indeed, *you* must feel his loss; he was your brother – Nay! more, he was your friend and contemporary. He was an actor, a partaker, or a witness of many of the varied scenes which the world has produced and presented to you in this period. There are but few in this Congregation, old or young, that his revered, but now clay cold lips have not prayed for or blessed; – you who are older than myself, and can better vouch for it, will I am convinced say, that there are but few in this Temple, over whom our reverend Pastor has not been called to exercise his devotions, or to aid by his instruction. How many of your children has he initiated into the COVENANT? How many of our nation has he united in the holy bands of wedlock, with CHUPA and KEDUSHEN, according to the ordinances of Moses and Israel? And how many of our dear and beloved friends has he consigned to the silent grave with his prayers, after having closed their eyes, with the earth of the Holy Land? Are there not fathers, nay! grandfathers present, whom his pious hands have blessed? what a consolatory reflection, he lived to bless three generations, and sunk composedly, into the grave with the blessings and tears of all who knew him.

And is he gone? yes, my friends, gone to a happier and better world than you inhabit. He is gone to *dwell* with the fathers of our nation; to unite again with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and with them to adore the ONLY TRUE AND LIVING GOD, the dispenser of all events, the great sublime architect of worlds, who from his throne, which looks beyond space and eternity; in his inexpressible mercy, grants his protection to the lowest of the human race, and guards and protects the smallest and most insignificant of his Creation.

I should be led from the pleasing subject in which I am engaged, that of pronouncing a just Eulogium to the memory of our dear and lamented friend, were I to enter into a view of the attributes or goodness of the MOST HIGH. On Him, the GREAT CREATOR, my friends, you must reflect, solemnly reflect – He lives before you in every thing that has life - “He rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.” Yet it is He, in whose capacious bosom of mercy, you must all find a haven and rest.

I address myself now to the younger part of the Congregation.– To you over whose heads he has played, to you whom he has initiated into the Covenant and blessed you as the “CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.”

And you too, have lost your Pastor. Your years are too green to recollect him in his youth, you have only a remembrance and a reverence for him in his age, in the decline of his life, and a tear withal to bedew his grave.

I must tell you of him – He was not, as you well know, always an old man – He was like yourselves, buoyed up with spirit, full of cheerfulness, of mirth, of hilarity, his pulse beat as strong as yours, and his imagination bounded with the rising sun to the pleasures and enjoyments of the day. I am not old enough myself to say, that I knew him in his youth, but I have known him, as you all know, intimately for many years, and the years of his youth I have often heard repeated by himself and others. If then, I speak of the days of his earlier years, it is not from the desire I have to make known my intimacy with them, but to mark them on the minds of my younger hearers; as although, the days in which the fever of youth is strong, that correctness was his pilot, and he its pupil – How happy those, who can descend to the grave at nearly four score years and have this sentence pronounced over them. Is then not a “good name, better than precious ointment,” and is not “the day of ones death better than the day of ones birth?” Wealth – Titles – Pomp – Hosts of parasites, a world of visitors – Death bed acquaintances and mourners, would not give us a good name: strive, struggle, as he did, until you have acquired it. The bad deeds of men live at least within their generation after they are no more; if he is a royal sinner, if he wear a diadem and the purple, they may live for centuries; the crimes of a Tarquin, a Cataline, a Nero, yet live, and will most likely in history, as fresh as ever, when we may have been one thousand years mouldering in the dust, and the very ground on which this temple is built, may disappear from the eyes of men, owing to some great convulsion of nature. Yet, shall the names of a WASHINGTON, of a FRANKLIN, of a JEFFERSON, and other great and patriotic characters live in the chronicles of those days, not memorable for their crimes, but for their virtuous efforts in the cause of liberty and the human race. And while the history of our eminent political men are transmitted to posterity, there are also niches reserved for those who have been eminently good or great in another sphere of action; nor is it probable, that the name of our venerable Pastor, will even then be forgotten. His fifty years of industrious duty will be remembered and handed to our descendants from generation to generation, when we, who now weep over his ashes, shall have been wept over ourselves, and the last sad

ceremonies, which mortals pay each other, has forever obscured us from this busy scene in which we now take so deep an interest in the various parts assigned us.

The Rev. GERSHOM MENDES SEIXAS was a native of this city. At a very early period of his life he entered into the duties of his profession, and aware that he had imposed upon himself an arduous task, with a laudable modesty, he did not overrate his abilities, but applied himself to study and inform himself of those subjects which he was called upon to develop. He, therefore, deliberately, and with studious care, instructed himself in the Sacred Writings; and by close application, acquired that knowledge which you, all of you, my friends, have so much revered and admired. Not having, myself, the advantages of a Hebrew education, I cannot do justice to the acquirements of our lamented friend – it is not necessary, however, that I should. You all knew him – You all partook, in common with me, of his knowledge and instruction – and you altogether, with myself, will long lament its removal – But as regards himself, it is for ever gone, the instruction which he has given us will not, however, be forgotten; and if his clay-cold lips could yet speak, they would impress upon us to preserve the instruction which he had power to afford us, and recommended to us *unanimity* in the choice of a successor, and transferring to him that regard, support and affection which we found it our pride and happiness to yield to our venerable and departed friend. This city, I have said, was the place of his birth – and it has also been that of his death and burial, but he departed in the ripeness of his age, and “like a mellow shock he ascendeth in his season.” This city was not only his birth place, but his favorite spot, and he spent the whole of his virtuous life within it, excepting those years, when during the revolution, he fled from the enemies of his country while they held it in occupancy. – For America was the country of his love – and reason enough he had, as all of you have to love it. – Is it not the only earthly bosom which receives and acknowledges our nation? Here we are really free to follow our religion, our ceremonies, our *DUTIES* according to our laws. In what other country are we not watched, imposed on, or insulted? These reflections fixed our Pastor in his love for America, and for her cause; and who among us but must feel an affection and a love for a government which stands alone in its protection of religious opinions, giving equal liberty to all societies and sects, but granting exclusive privilege to none.

My feelings now enjoin upon me a painful duty. I am called upon to speak comfort to the most afflicted in this assembly. I am prompted to speak comfort to the widow, the children, and the mourning relatives of the deceased – Where shall I find words for this

occasion? To what shall I direct you for consolation? to what, did I say? to what, but the Holy Book which he has so often rehearsed to us? My weeping friends, he has but gone before you. You must follow him in that silent path from which there is no retreat – he has but entered into the stage a few days sooner – He is but a few fleeting hours before you in his course. Your stage is preparing, and those fleet coursers are in readiness which shall convey you on the same route our lamented friend has travelled.

Dry up, therefore, my friends, those tears – For whom are they shed? They cannot be shed for him who is in the bosom of ABRAMAM, who is, as we all must conclude from his well-spent life, in the presence of the MOST HIGH. – No! not for him are they shed, but for yourselves, for the momentary loss and absence of your friend. And why, for yourselves – are ye not making ready to follow him? The stage is not far distant which shall stop at your door, and it may be for the youngest of you.

Weep not then longer, my friends, but be in readiness, in readiness to meet again your Pastor, your husband, your parent, your relative, and to be introduced into the kingdom of the ever living and adorable GOD, and which Heaven grant, may be the case with all of you.

AMEN