

1802 [s.d.], Nova Iorque. Sermão de Gershom Mendes Seixas.

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

To declare the Providence of an all mercifull Creator, to glorify his holy name, to render praises & thanksgiving for the benefìts we receive, are amongst the most important duties of Man.

It is for this purpose we are assembled this day that we may express our gratefull thanks for the many & various blessings that have been graciously bestowed on us during the last season, & for the more special care of divine Providence, in withholding from us, the visitation of an epidemic disease, which of late years has proved so fatal to our fellow-citizens, and that the evil arising from the malignity of its influence, has been considerably lessened in a neighbouring City. Although the horror of mind, & the many inconveniencies in consequence thereof, have been experienced by the inhabitants, so as to have driven them from their respective dwellings, to seek for shelter among the more remote Villages of the State, that the evil is now subsided, and they are again re-established in their former places of residence, enjoying domestic happiness in health & peace, we sincerely thank thee Oh God! and we are truly sensible that it is not from any merit of ours, but altogether proceeding from thy mercies & thy truth, as it is said by king David in Ps [*Hebrew*] “Not unto us Oh Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory, for thy mercy & thy truth.”

In this verse you will observe it begins with a declaration, & concludes with an acknowledgement. King David, whose piety & zeal is well known, by the nature of his writings, filled with a perfect knowledge of infinite goodness, confesses that every action & disposition of Man, proceeds from an all powerfull and all-wise Ruler and readily acknowledges the dependant state of man, upon His mercies & truth, when we reflect on this subject, it awakens in our minds, the necessity of humbling ourselves before Him, to show forth His praises among the nations of the earth, & by practical duties; exemplifying our gratitude not merely by professions, but by action; exercising ourselves conformably to the preceptive & moral doctrines of holy writ; observing the Law of Moses, as it was delivered to him on Mount Sinai, and by him handed to the Priests & the Prophets who succeeded him; believing strictly in the divine revelation, and acting from a conviction of right, founded on the principles of true religion.

In examining the words of our text, you will find the desinterested benevolence of our Creator, that is ever extended towards us, and by endeavoring to imitate Him, we attain that peace of mind, which is the sure result of Virtue. This naturally leads in the road of perfection, & fits us to meet the rewards of a future State, when our immortal, souls shall be freed from this unstable tenement of flesh, and were it not for the hopes, and promises of an hereafter, who would desire to be a creature of this transitory existence, where troubles & disasters continuall arise, unsought for & unexpected, the best among us are not exempt from pains, and none can expect to pass through life, without encountering its vicissitudes, the aged & the young, the rich & the poor, are alike subject to sickness & mortality, & we often see those who abound in all wordly good, suffering the agonies incident to human-nature, whose relatives are oppressed with anxiety, and in continual apprehension of a greater evil – from whom then can we receive consolation? Can it flow from any other source, than from the fountain of all perfection? Whose everlasting mercies alone can give comfort to the afflicted mourner, or administer relief to the helpless Invalid, it is to Him we must look for fortitude to support us under our trials, and it is He alone who tempers our minds with resignation, when we ask it of Him in truth, it is by His efficient grace that we conquer the ills of life, and obtain the blessings we possess – to His will we become submissive, and cheerfully acquiesce with His dispensations.

It is more common for Men under these trials to call upon His maker for aid, than when enjoying the luxuries of this world, not considering that the same Providence who grants, can withhold, and unless we are thankfull for the benefits we possess, they can be withdrawn, in the most sudden manner, and when least expected.

Let us then unite in celebrating the praises of our glorious Creator, & rendering thanksgivings unto Him for His divine favors, exercising our selves in the principles of benevolence & Charity, that we may become better & happier, that we may reap the promised blessing of Salvation, and Oh Lord! grant us grace to perform thy holy Law, that we may not be put to shame, either here or hereafter, and let us join in declaring that it is not unto us Oh Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory, for thy mercy, & thy truth. It is through thy mercy that we live, and are enabled to pursue the line of life allotted to us. Thou supportest us, & suppliest us with all good, and it is thy power that directest us in all things, we humbly acknowledge ourselves dependent on thy bounties, and we sincerely pray unto thee, to continue unto us thy infinite protection, that we may know thy ways, and obey thy commandments, that we be assured of Salvation,

whenever it seemeth fit unto thee to call us unto thy self – remember not our transgressions, but grant us thy heavenly grace, to effect our redemption from sin, can any thing be more acceptable in the sight of God, than a nation gratefully offering up the incense of their hearts? Uttering forth His praises in union with each other, like so many children looking up to one common Father, who delighteth in the works of His creation. Do not the Sacred Scriptures repeatedly assure us, that a purity of heart, and a sincerity of worship is more acceptable, than myriads of fattened rams? Let us then endeavour to purify ourselves from sin, by a steady adherence to the precepts of our holy Law, & by confession & amendment, render ourselves deserving of the divine blessings, that we may say, “happy is the people to whom it is thus, happy the nation that the Lord is their God.”

Were it for no other reason that we join in celebrating this day with the other inhabitants of this city, it would be of itself sufficient, but as we are so peculiarly situated in our captivity, that I conceive we are more specially called upon to return thanks to benign Goodness, in placing us in such a country, where we are free to act, according to the dictates of conscience, & where no exception is taken from following the principles of our religion – a religion founded on the very nature of our existence, & whose laws are uniformly calculated to make us wiser, better & happier. These are circumstances that should always be considered, & it rests with every individual to examine his own conduct, & to discard such propensities as would lead him to err – to subdue the passions of his carnal appetite, and to be governed by the spirit of truth, which is an emanation of eternal Wisdom. The Sacred Scriptures abound with Lessons of morality, & it is but looking, to find them, we therein see the duty of Man of God, the obligations we are under to obey His commandments, & the respective mutual duties that subsist in a state of Society, connected with the various blessings we have experienced in the course of the present year, we may be thankful for the establishment of a Seminary, which is yet in its infancy, wherein our children may be instructed in the holy language, & in process of time may become acquainted with the literary writings¹ of our ancient Sages, whose works are altogether corroborating proofs of divine revelation, as handed down to us in a regular succession, from our great & wise legislator, though the Prophets to the great Sanhedrim, & conveyed by them to the hands of the great Synagogue, the exposition & explanation of our holy Law, is only to be found in their writings, & many passages that appear to be contradictory to each

1 1ª versão: “abilities”

other, in the written Law, are in the oral Law thoroughly reconciled & made to agree. May the supporters of the Institution live to see the good effects resulting from so excellent establishment – beside this, another institution is erected, for the benefit of our Society, whose services have been already experienced, & the promoters thereof are in hopes of its becoming more extensively usefull. Surely then, we have every reason to be thankfull for the benefits we have received from an indulgent Providence in common with the people of the country, in preserving us in health, and for the special blessings attending this small congregation, in procuring the means of defraying the additional expences incurred, in consequence of establishing such commendable Institutions, the satisfaction arising from a consciousness of having performed our duties in the several stations, to which we have been called, is an happiness of itself, for which we should be truly gratefull, and we should be forcibly impressed with the Idea, that we are only instruments in the hands of Providence, to answer His designs, & to fullfill His purposes, let us now implore His divine succor to perfect the work we have began, that our Youths may know that the Omnipotent God of Israel, is ever ready to assist them, when called up on in truth, let us prostrate ourselves before Him, our God, with sincere hearts, that He will gather us again from all corners of the earth, wherein we shall be scattered, and reinstate us in our former possessions, in our own Land, & under our own government, where every man shall sit under his own vine, & under his own fig-tree, & none shall make him afraid. Who would not desire to enjoy those blessings? Why not use the means of obtaining them? It is not a work of great difficulty, it only requires a determined resolution to set about it. Let our actions be consistent with justice, lay aside the pride of your hearts, & relinquish your thirst for wordly riches, for they are as nothing, when put in a competition to the promised state of happiness.

We will here take a comparative view of the past season, & the former, when the epidemic disease prevailed throughout the city, when every mind was filled with anxiety & terror, when numbers were constrained to leave their peacefull abodes, to seek an asylum from contagion, to have seen the distressed situation of families, weeping & mourning over their sick & dying relatives, unable to afford relief or consolation, & see them now abounding in health, blessed with the fruitfull productions of the earth, enjoying the pleasures of peace, exercising the priviledges of religious worship, without restraint, & under the auspices of a lenient administration of government – for all these benefits we are indebted to the Omniscient Creator of the universe, whose “tender mercies are over all His works” and we his creatures are

bounden to adore Him for His divine goodness, “& to serve Him with all our Hearts, & with all our Souls” according to the monition of Moshe Rabenu, who ordained it to the Children of Israel, to be observed for ever. Is it not then a duty incumbent on us, to assemble & return thanks for the mercies we have experienced? And to render praises for the unbounded goodness of our God, most devoutly do we pray unto thee Oh Lord, that thou wouldst hear us, and grant us a continuance of thy holy providence, that we may be endued with the precious blessings of peace & health, plenty & prosperity both national & individual, we humbly thank thee for placing us under such a Magistracy, who are disposed to sanction every religious mode of worship, & who so readily conform to the recommendation of those whose duty it is to watch over the cure of Souls, & who no doubt were actuated by the most disinterested motives, seeking only the welfare of their fellow citizens, rejoicing for their temporal advantage², & earnestly endeavouring to promote their spiritual happiness.

Such are the general blessings in a free government, & such advantages, we should strenuously maintain by conforming to all Rules & recommendations, that do not interfere with the precepts of our religion, and let it not be said that we, the Children of Abraham, were wanting in our duty to God, for as we are the chosen & peculiar people of the most high, much more is expected from us, than from others, for the House of Jacob is called to walk in the light of the Lord, & of all the people, each Man shall walk in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever & ever.” This is one of the many assurances, given to us by the Prophets, that the worship of the ever living God, should never cease to be observed, even untill time should be no more, & on these assurances we rely, for as the evils predicted to fall upon us, in consequence of sin, have hitherto prevailed, & have been entirely fulfilled, we have no reason to doubt the completion of the prophecies, in respect to our restoration, which God in His own good time will establish, and altho' we are so happily situated in this country, so much preferable to our Brethren, dispersed in other parts of the world, yet, we can not perform the rites & ceremonies of our temple service, which was only given to be observed in the holy land, and untill we are again embodied, & settled as a Nation, we can not comply with that part of our holy Law & seeing that God hath given us a law to be kept for ever, we may necessarily expect, that He will (yet) enable us to return, when we shall be purified from our sins, & the sins of our fathers, by a sincere repentance & amendment, hasten them to set about it whilst yet we have time, that we

2 1ª versão: “interest”.

may not be cut off, from seeing & enjoying this glorious advent, when the Redeemer shall come to Zion, & turn the transgressors of Jacob saith the Lord! much very depends on this circumstance, to bring forward the restoration of Israel, & know ye of a truth that without repentance & amendment, we can not expect to reap the promised blessing, I speak not personally, but generally, that many of our actions testify against us, and call loudly for a reformation, there are many, too many omissions of public duty, & it grieves me to the heart, to see with what indifference, and negligence our public service is carried on, the spirit of licentiousness seems to prevail too forcibly among the younger branches of our society, and must I add, that many of the elder members, are too inconsiderate of the consequences, that ensue for want of example. It is time to look about & think before it be too late, for we know not how soon we may be taken hence, & at our last moments, regret, that we have not done our duty, by instructing our children, in the mild & gentle accents of persuasion, to follow the example set before them, by those who are sincere in their professions, & whose actions correspond with the principles of Humanity, of Justice.

The many evils we have to encounter in this sublunary state renders it highly necessary, for us to be prepared to meet them with becoming fortitude, and the only way to be reconciled to the dispensation of eternal Wisdom, is to be perfectly resigned to His divine Will, and to consider & know, that “happy is the Man whom the Lord chasteneth” as it is said by the royal pensman, it is by this mode we are made sensible of our dependent state, & we are naturally led to consider the ways of God to man, we become more actuated by the spirit of benevolence, & more affected with the sufferings of our fellow-creatures, it is more particularly at such times, that we feel ourselves possessed of the principles of humanity, & we are more prone to sympathy & commiseration, we then advert to the ties that bind us to each other in a Social State, and we exert ourselves to administer comfort & assistance to the oppressed, and in the performance of those tender duties, our minds become elated with the knowledge of having acted up to the Designs of our Creator, in relieving those who are in want, it is altogether by such actions, that Man is endeared to Man, & thereby acquire additional dignity to the nature of his composition, for seeing that God hath endowed us with the faculty & power of reasoning, we should always in return, act conformably (there to) it is by reason we arrive to the knowledge of infinite Goodness, as it is expressed in the Psalm of David [*Hebrew*] “Reason ye & see that the Lord is good, blessed is the Man who trusts in Him”, it is by this Trust, & confidence in God, that Man becomes happy,

for amidst all the evils surrounding him, he suffers not his mind, to be disturbed or oppressed, view this Man upon a bed of sickness, & see with what cheerfulness, he submits to the Divine dispensation, he argues from a consciousness of having pursued the rule of right, and he is enabled to support himself under ever infliction, he repines³ not at his present suffering, but comforts himself with the hope of eternal happiness, how different the situation of the profligate sinner, in his last moments, while confined with sickness and a apprehension of death, who denies the providence of God, and acts in defiance of every mortal & religious law, see, with what agony of mind, he utters the most horrible imprecations, & with what acrimony he blasphemes, insensible of the mercies of his maker he relinquishes life with anguish & despair, and plunges himself in the abyss of condemnation, unfeeling & unfelt for – such is the consequence of sin, while every one possessed of the feelings of humanity, laments the loss of the truly pious Man, whose life was spent in innocence & peace.

From what has been said in the preceeding pages, you will readily observe the propriety of sanctifying this day, as a tribute of thanks justly due to our heavenly Father, for the kind display of His providential care, during the last season, in protecting us from the malignant disease that hath prevailed in former seasons, for his enabling us to carry into effect – the institutions that have been established, within the year – & for the general, & special blessings, we have enjoyed in peace. You will likewise find the necessity of prayer, to continue us under His all powerfull protection, that we may at all times, so conduct ourselves that we may not incur his divine wrath, but always be sensible of His power & glory, that we may publish to the world; that through His mercies & truth, we are brought safely to this period of our lives, and not from any merit of ourselves – and according to the words of our text let us declare with King David, “Not unto us, Oh Lord! not unto us, but unto thy name give glory for thy Mercies & thy truth.”

Let us then cheerfully unite in praises & thanksgivings, to our God, the God of Israel, & humbly invoke Him, to pour forth His holy spirit upon us, that we may be made perfect in the law of obedience to his divine Will, that we may be accustomed to good works, & that we may ultimately receive the blessing of life everlasting – We humbly beseech thee Oh Lord, our God, & the God of our Fathers, to hear our supplications when we call upon thy ineffable Name, grant us thy blessing on the

3 1ª versão: “regrets”

institution established under the name of Polony's [*Hebrew*: “*Talmud Torah*”] and may you, my D^r Children, who are now under my tuition, be reared as an honor to the Institution, and as ornaments to Society, may the promoters, & benefactors live to see their rising offspring, grown up in the love & fear of God, and may you all receive the pleasures arising from a consciousness of duty. Grant to the Inhabitants of these States – the United States of America – the blessing of health, the increase of prosperity, succeed them in their lawfull pursuits, whether agricultural or commercial, let peace & harmony prevail in their territory. Bless & preserve the Rulers & Administrators of the government – remove far from them, the evil spirit of discord, let no cause of jealousy subsist among them, to injure the welfare of their respective constituents. May union of sentiment ever preside in their councils, teach them to respect themselves, that they may always be respected among the Nations of the earth, may each one in his own department, act so as to deserve the approbation of all, and may the Magistrates of this Metropolis be ever vigilant in their duties, and may they long practise the call of piety, and ever be attentice to the true principles of Virtue.

May you & all of you assembled this day be blessed, and may the lessons which you have heard be imprinted on your minds, that we may be made worthy partakers of the glorious advent, which is apured unto us by the holy pensmen, & may all Israel enjoy peace like the days of Heaven upon Earth, & may we truly rejoice & be glad in the hopes of salvation through the abundance of thy mercies & truth. Amen. Then sing [*Hebrew*].