

**1802-1804 [s.d.], Nova Iorque. Sermão de Gershom Mendes Seixas dirigido aos
estudantes da escola Polonies Talmud Torah**

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

Address to the Scholars of Polony's School
of Talmud Torah

My dear Children – you have heard what has been said to your Parents, Guardians & Patrons, you certainly have noticed the serious attention they have paid to the various subjects, that have been treated of this day, you will also have noticed the principles & motives, by which they have been actuated. It now remains (with me) to remind you of the special & general duties you owe to your Parents, conformably to the 5th Commandment: “Honor thy father & thy mother, that thy days may be prolonged on the Land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

Remember not alone to honor, but to obey – that ye may be blest, for your own sakes, individually with all good. Consider how much is done by your parents to promote your welfare with what anxiety they have watched, over your more tender age, the earnest solicitude they display, to fit you for your entrance into life, amidst the toils & troubles of the world, consider, how much depends on yourselves to gratify their minds, and add to their pleasures, by your acquirements and conduct, by so doing, you will confer (if possible) a greater share of dignity, on their public characters, you have seen the dignified manner of their behaviour in the divine presence & ye can not but know their domestic œconomy, by endeavouring to fulfil their respective duties, according to our Sacre Law.

I would therefore recommend to you that you ever keep in remembrance, that their Honor is in your possession, that you preserve it unsullied, that you cause no reproach to be cast on them, by either the subjects of the following discourse are founded for which purpose. I have selected the 5th Verse of the 4th Ps. to expatiate on, & which is [*Hebrew*] “Stand in awe, & sin not, commune with your own hearts on your beds, & be still: Selah”.

Were we only to consider the goodness of our Creator, we should be governed by the purest principles of religion, and all our actions would emanate from the most beneficent motives, the imaginations of the mind would be filled with adoration, and

we should be impressed with the most lofty Ideas of Sublimity, for, in contemplating the greatness and glory of the Universal Father of mercies, & viewing ourselves in the relative position we stand towards Him, we become lost in astonishment! We stand in awe! And unable to give utterance to our feelings, we worship Him in Silence.

In examining the sacred pages of scripture we find many instances of this Nature, accompanied both with religious fear & love, of the most benign goodness, whose dispensations are ever consonant to justice and continually blended with mercy, for, when the sons of Aaron had transgressed the divine command by offering up strange fire, they were instantaneously punished for their presumption; and when Moses reprobate their conduct to Aaron, it is said [*Hebrew*] (Aaron was silent), he was convinced that the act was atrociously wicked, and amazed at the effects of infinite justice, the powers of utterance were suspended; sensible of his own imperfections, he readily acquiesced with the divine will, submitting his human feelings to the ordinance of eternal power, he became thoroughly reconciled to the event, & thereby manifested his disposition, to be governed by religious principle, and not by the feeble sensations of corporeal affections. The many vicissitudes of this transitory life, continually require, the greatest energies of the mind, to support us under every trial. The afflictions & distresses, to which human nature is subject, such as poverty, sickness & grief, with all their attendant evils (as well as the exciting causes) are dreadful to the imagination; and he who is not affected at such visitations, must be callous to the feelings of humanity, and insensible of the goodness of Providence. Alass!

How much is it to be regretted, that the good things of this world (which are but perishable) should so much engross the attention of the affluent! Without considering the source whence they are derived, vainly imagining that their own talents have procured them, ungrateful to Omnipotence¹, & insensible to the wants of their fellow-creatures². Observe! I only speak in general terms, for it would grieve me to the heart, to reflect so grossly on the compassionate part of Society, who are always willing to aid the poor & distressed, both by personal & pecuniary services, at all times & on all occasions. The Managers of our charitable Institution, claim no merit for having done their duty, but their means are inadequate to the end designed, and (with me) contemplate the effects of your usual Benevolence, that they may be enabled, to furnish the impoverished families, with some of the real necessaries of life, particularly, at this

1 1ª versão: "Providence".

2 1ª versão: "fellow-man".

inclement season of the year, when much is wanted, & their funds but small. Were ye to view, & know, how little from the profusions of your tables would satisfy the hungry, & the helpless, you surely would not withhold it. How many pass their time in idle amusements, heedless of the expences attending them, & unconcerned at the extravagance of dissipation, which generally succeed the pursuits of Vanity, were such description of characters, only to reflect on the probable good, they could render to the afflicted poor, by curtailing their pleasures, and restraining themselves from the gratifications sense they could experience the more permanent pleasures of the Soul, for “He, that hath pity up on the poor lendeth unto the Lord; & that which he hath given will he pay him again.” This of itself, ought to be a sufficient inducement, to the inconsiderate, they would then lay up a store of good works, to secure to themselves a welcome reception, in the regions of everlasting life, “where all is harmony & bliss divine.” Whenever it pleases God, to call them to Himself, which may be when least thought of, & when most unprepar'd to meet the awful summons of infinite Justice, whose mandates, are suddenly executed by His ministring Angels, who are ever on the wing to perform the Will (decrees) of divine Wisdom. Happy is he who is ready to obey the call, and thrice happy must he be, who, after an examination of his past actions, during his abode on earth, is confident of having done his duty, for amidst the most gloomy reflections in the most solitary retirement, there is a cheering ray of Hope, founded on the principle of Faith, that pervades and animates the mind, these principles necessarily lead to good works, conformably to the assurances given to us, in the sacred doctrines of revelation [*Hebrew*] <4th Ch. Prov. 2^d Verse: “For I have given you good Doctrines, forsake ye not my Law”>³.

This should ever be the standard of our actions, and we should be more mindfull of our duties, by studying the holy Law of God, as handed down to us by our divine legislator (& so in continual succession from Joshua, through the medium of our Prophets) we should become more wise, better & happier, and by exercise ourselves in the practical duties of life, each one in his own station, and according to his circumstances, the wealthy would be righteous, & the poor would be gratefull, and, we oftener find, the middling Classes of Society; more charitable & more benevolent than those who value themselves on the abundance they possess, through the mercies of an all-gracious disposer of events; who oftentimes dispenses riches as a trial of Virtue in the same manner as Poverty, Sickness, or any other calamity; the charges given to the

3 Na margem.

Man of Opulence, are particularly described in ch. of Div.^e S.⁴ & we find throughout the S. S., many reprehensions made use of, to amend their conduct, & to bring them to a sense, & knowledge of their several duties to those who are dependant on their bounties. Were ye to consider, how much depends on good-works, joined to faith & hope in God, you would have more reason, to reap the promised assurances of Salvation, in the future state of retribution, and serve as a mean to accomplish the glorious restoration of Israel, as set forth by our faithfull Prophets & which now seems to be nearly approaching, by the many existing commotions throughout the world. Were we seriously to reflect on the series of events, which have attended the House of Israel, from the time we became embodied as a Nation, peculiarly chosen by God above all others <Ps. 135 (*Hebrew*), Deut. 32^d (*Hebrew*): “For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure”[>]⁵. We should humble ourselves before Him, & earnestly implore Him to fullfill His divine will, according to His sacred promise, given to us by Zechariah in the 14th Ch. & 9th Verse: “And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord & his name One”. And as we are living evidences of the Unity of God, according to the declaration of the Prophet Isaiah in the 43^d & 44th Chapters, we have every reason to believe, that the events will absolutely be as they are predicted, but remember, the want of Faith precludes the principle of Hope, and even these principles, without the practice of good-works, are of no avail.

Hasten then to amend, that ye may be prepared, to meet the dispensations of the Omniscient God, who although abounding in Mercy, suffers not the incorrigible sinner, to go unpunished, how much better would be the State of Man, by obeying the Law of God, than to transgress? For “what doth the Lord thy God require of you, Oh Israel! but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, & to love Him, & to serve the Lord thy God, with all thy heart & with thy Soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord & his Statutes, which I command the this day, for thy God”, as set forth in the 10th Chap. of Deut. & 12th verse – can any exhortation be expressed more affectionately? Could the tenderest Parent, call on you, with more anxious solicitude? Could any greater inducement, be held out to you than for your own good? Surely, no one who has a belief in God, could refuse a willing compliance! It is on this belief that we ground our hopes, & we become strengthen'd in our faith, by fulfilling our moral obligations, confident of possessing the blessing of our Creator, by willingly performing his divine ordinances, &

4 Divine Scriptures.

5 Na margem.

conscious of his infinite love & mercy, extended to us, through the merits of our Fathers Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, we readily obey the mandates of our eternal Judge.

Reason within yourselves “commune with your own hearts, on your beds, & be silent” this is the earnest recommendation of King David, who was also a Prophet, filled both with Faith and Hope. The many trials he underwent are convincing proofs, that his sole dependance was fixed on God to Him, he attributed his deliverances from his persecutors, & he acknowledged his inability to render praises for the benefits, he had received when he said [*Hebrew*] “what shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits toward one” witness how Saul pursued & persecuted him, & how he was protected & delivered, with what self-command he forbore to injure him, when he had him in his power, although urged to revenge himself by his associates! Notice his grateful feelings, to the Son of his persecutor! Observe how tenderly (yet resolutely) he acted when his son Absalom rebelled against him & caused a revolt in his kingdoms by his insidious persuasions to the People; the chief commanding Captain of his army displeas'd him, by his inhuman conduct in the time of Peace, and various were the difficulties he encountered, yet was he steadfast in his faith, by faith was he supported, & by faith, was he enabled to surmount the opposition of his enemies, with what energy does he address the Lord of Hosts! With what gratitude does he express himself, for the interpositions of Providence! What a profundity of knowledge does he display throughout his sacred writings, he treats of every thing incident to Man, in every State & every situation, in health, or sickness, in riches, or poverty, in joy, or sorrow, in pleasure, or pain. In a word, there is no concern of Man, but what you may find a Psalm adapted to, if you are desirous of knowledge, read his compilations, compare them with the compositions of mere man, and you well soon perceive how immensely great is the difference! Judge for yourselves, attend to the Subjects of Infinite goodness! The lofty Ideas! The Sublimity of Style! And (no doubt) you will discover, that they have been written with the pen of inspiration. This is the belief that has obtained amongst all, who hold, in the doctrines of revealed religion.

He speaks of life & death, of goodness & wickedness, of rewards & punishments, both temporal & spiritual, of the body & of the soul, of the state of probation & the state of retribution, of the descent to the grave, & of the resurrection. These are subjects fit for animadversion, & which every one should apply his mind to in a greater or less degree, that they may know the ways of God to Man, & learn to bear with fortitude the Ills of life, for who can say, that happiness belongs to Mortals! Are we ever exempt

(speaking universally) from the terrors & apprehensions of evil? The dread of War! The calamity of Pestilence! And the actual diseases, incidental to the Climate, are evidences to the contrary. Under these circumstances, every citizen is affected, all participate in the general calamity, and none are happy on this terraqueous Globe, the disaffected part of Society are ever on the watch to sow dissensions, and the unwary are often lod by calummy & slander.

To guard ourselves from such impositions, it behaves us to examine the facts, & if not properly substantiated, we should dismiss them with disgust. There are several Instances in Scripture of this Species of malevolence, & our divine Legislator ordained rules to be governed by which are readily found in the 17th Chap. of Deut.^y. What were the conquences! The calumniators were condemned⁶, & the Innocence of the accused was made manifest, tale bearers & mischief makers were treated in like manner, for whoever devised evil against his neighbour, & sought to injure him, either in person or property, the parties were brought before the Judges of the day, & according to their decrees, punishment was executed on the offending party, & what he thought to do unto his Neighbour, was done unto himself.

And now, Oh ye remnant of Israel, rejoice in the Lord, for He hath done marvellous things, as you may find in the 78th Psalm, and we may truly say, “had not the Lord been on our side, when Men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was hindled against us”. But He hath preserved us, & led us into this happy country, where we partake of every blessing, bestowed on the people of these States, and as we are the living evidences of His divine dispensations, His worderrfull works have not ceased in the Earth; for of all the ancient Nations, there are none left in the world, so distinct & dispersed, among the present race of man, as we are at this day. This circumstance alone is one of the greatest proofs, of the authenticity of the S. S.⁷ and as we are well acquainted, by the truth of sacred History, of the evils that should befall us in consequence of Sin & disobedience, & knowing by the records of faithfull historians, since the time of the Prophets, how much we have been oppressed, & persecuted even unto death, among those who led us (and kept us) captives. So may we rest assured that the time will come, according to the divine promise, that we shall (again) be happily restored to our own land, where “every man shall dwell in safety, under his own Vine, & under his own figtree, & none shall make him afraid”. It is on

6 1^a versão: “reprobated”.

7 Sacred Scriptures.

such like assurances that we fix our hopes, & by a sincere belief in the God of our Fathers, and depending on His holy word, we should not entertain the least doubt of the accomplishment of His divine Will, & in its due season he will hasten [*Hebrew*] the redemption of Israel, that he will gather us from the four corners of the Earth, “wither we shall be scattered, saying: fear not, for I am with thee. I will bring thy seed from the East, & gather thee from the West; I will say to the North, give up, & to the South, hold on back, bring my sons from far, & my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name, for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him.”

Can any thing be more consolatory to those who exercise themselves in the religious precepts & doctrines contained in our sacred Law, & which were originally practised by our ancient Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob; for we find in the blessing given to Abraham, a most powerful reason assigned by the Almighty God, which is, “For I know him, that he will command his children & his household after him, & they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do Justice & Judgement; and afterwards, when the Lord appeared unto Isaac, He renewed the promises made to Abraham, “Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, & kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, & my laws.” Here are exalted monitions! Here is an example for man to imitate! Whereby he may ensure to himself, not alone the blessings of this precarious state, but necessarily leading him to life everlasting by practising himself in works of Piety, Charity, & Justice, such in general are the instructions given to us throughout the sacred writings, and greatly is it to be lamented, that they are so much neglected, for of a thruth it is strictly commanded by Moses, that every Man should write a copy of the Law, & he also ordained, that when we should have a terristial King to rule over us, that the Law should be read to him, in the presence of Men, Women, & Children, even to the infants, that the whole body of Israel, should be made acquainted, with their respective duties, consonant to their different stations, & departments in life; the men to know, the women to hear, children to acquire, & the infants to be initiated, conformably to their several capacities, and we find that Joshua the immediate sucessor to Moses, give it in charge to the people assembled, to obey the Law of God, & confirms it by adding thereto, «this book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein, day & night, that thou mayest observe to do, according to all that is written therein, then shalt thou make thy way prosperous, & then thou shalt have good success, have not I commanded thee? Be strong & of good courage; be not afraid neither be thou dismayed,

for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest”, and when Solomon had dedicated the Temple, and had made all the arrangements for the honor & glory of God, according to the divine command, the Altar erected, the Priests & the Levites assembled, to offer up the sacrifices of sweet incense to the Lord God, Creator of heaven & earth, that the Law was brought before him, & read in the presence of the multitude assembled, he concluded by saying, “that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, & that there is none else, let your heart, therefore, be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes, & to keep his commandments, as at this day.” Consider well my dear brethren this excellent rule of right, “depart from evil & do good” that it may be well for thee, both here & hereafter, for, it is not a small thing, nor can it be called unimportant, to neglect the duties enjoined on us, whilst in this probationary state, & which is only preparatory to the entrance, into the presence of the eternal Judge, when we shall have changed from mortal man, to an existence in eternity, where there is neither favour or affection shewn to any, but only according to the works done in the body, where rewards will attend the righteous, and punishments be inflicted on the wicked. Happy will he be who hath considered the poor – who hath plead the cause of the Widow, protected & reared the fatherless, & hath dealt kindly and hospitably to the stranger – these, these are virtues that loudly demand attention.

We have as a Congregation endeavoured to fullfill our duties – you have been blessed in your efforts, they have succeeded according to your expectations, in some measure, though not compleatly, but surely, it is not a vain Hope, that our rising generation may experience greater advantages, than we have hitherto had. Let us be gratefull to our benevolent Father, who through divine Grace, hath bestowed on us the means of instituting & supporting a Scholl, where our young ones may attain a knowledge of our holy Law, & that we may comply with the recommendation of the Prophet [*Hebrew*] “And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, & great shall be the peace of thy Children.” It is now upwards of Eleven years since the commencement of the [*Hebrew*] it has altogether been supported by free-will offerings, you have always patronized the Institution, and until now, the managers have never been obliged to remind you, thus publicly, of the necessitous calls of the poor & helpless, they depend on the public bounty, for the means of continuing their assistance, to the indigent, that there is a peculiar pleasure resulting from voluntary contributions, may be proved from the Book of Kings Ch. 8th, after People had brought their offerings and sacrifices to the Temple, that they celebrated the day with joy & gladness of heart for all the goodness

that the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people, these were the delights of the soul, not merely the gratifications of sense, not that I deny the justness of judging by the feelings of human-nature, for they are often truly correct in the event, but they should always be subservient to reason, and ought not to be indulgent in the extreme, for, even virtue, carried to excess, becomes a vice, when surpassing the bounds of Reason.

Let us now revolve in our minds the benefits of complying with the law of Moses, who, with the Prophets that succeeded him, have uniformly taught us that obedience to the law, avoiding sinfull actions, turning from evil-doings, sincere repentance, ardent prayer, and bestowing alms, will be the happy means of procuring the redemption of Israel, from this long & tedious captivity; and restoring us again to the holy land, which was given unto our Fathers for a possession to them, & to their children for ever.

It is here necessary to observe, that there were certain conditions stipulated, which were an obedience to the Law, that they might be blest by our glorious Creator, as stated by Moses in Deut.^y Ch. 11th, [verses] 28th & 30th, & he concludes, after all the maledictions are denounced against those, who reject the Law, & refuse to obey the voice of God, by repeating “Behold! I have set before thee this day, Life & Good, Death & Evil, & calls Heaven & Earth to witness, that he had felt before them, life & death, blessing & cursing, & recommends to them to choose life that both them & their seed might live.”

Those who obey the Law are assured of life & good, & those who are refractory of death & evil; these are considerations of great importance and consequently require great attention, for as we have a prospect of eternal bliss, by complying with God's holy Will; so must we expect eternal misery, if we transgress against Him; for the death here mentioned is not confined to the privation of this transient life, but extends to that state which is only appropriated to the righteous & the Just. [*Hebrew*] <Ps. 31st, v. 19th “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!”>⁸

We will here recapitulate the different subjects, discussed in the preceeding pages; you have (no doubt) observed the various duties pointed out to you, that are due to our Creator, the necessity of humiliation, thanksgiving, & prayer, to humble ourselves in His divine preference, & to acquiesce in His holy Will; to manifest our gratitude for the blessings we enjoy, both individually & collectively; to implore Him for a continuance

8 Na margem.

of His ineffable Grace, to support us under every affliction, that we may encounter, that we may always acknowledge that “the Lord he is the God” who suffereth not the feet of the righteous to slide, but ever upholdeth those, who put their trust in Him, and are obedient to His Law, not judgeing, by the fallible reasoning of mere man in contradistinction to the ordinances of an immutable God, whose designs are not (& can not be) comprehended by finite beings. For what mortal can judge of that which is Infinite? Our greatest merit is to have a firm faith & hope in God, and to rely on his providential care, for all His goodness to the works of His creation, when we attempt to be governed by reason, we are lost to Faith, and are only actuated by bodily sensations from selfish motives, or wordly considerations, but when we are led, by the love & fear of God, we perform the obligations incumbent on us, with awefull tremblings & joy, & with that alacrity of disposition, that invigorates the spiritual hopes of obtaining life overlasting among those souls who inhabit the regions of eternal Bliss, prepared from aforetime for their reception, & by our compliance with the several duties enjoined on us, whilst inhabiting the Body, exercising ourselves in works of benevolence, piety & Charity, humbly submitting ourselves to the Will of God, bearing with fortitude the Ills and calamities of life, without murmuring or repining, at the decrees of infinite Wisdom, we shall become worthy partakers, of that blissfull state, where all-perfection dwells. In the character of Aaron is exemplified the recommendation of the [*Hebrew*] divine Psalmist – Stand in awe & sin not – for he hold his peace⁹, he opened not his mouth to complain, he did not repine, nor did he murmur at the dispensation of infinite Justice, he was perfectly reconciled when Moses said, “This is it that the Lord spoke, saying, I will be santified in them that come nigh me, & before all the People I will be glorified.”

You will likewise have observed the promises given in holy writ for the redemption of the House of Israel from this long captivity, & for the restoration to our own territory, to be again embodied as a Nation, to have the Temple rebuilt, the Priests, & the Levites, reinstaled in their respective offices, the sacrifices to be offered, according to order, & the service of divine Majesty be performed as in “the days of old & as in former years” [*Hebrew*], when that we shall have returned unto the Lord, with a contrite spirit & sincere repentance, to have ceased from evil, & seeking after that which is good, pursuing the paths of righteousness, executing Justice, & equity to all, providing for the poor, the Widow, the Orphan, & the Stranger, promoting & encouraging the study of

9 1^a versão: “was silent”

our holy law, with all the consequent blessings, establishing Societies for the amelioration of the Indigent, relieving the necessitous poor, by extending the hand of charity, visiting the sick, comforting the mourners, and rendering services, to all our fellow-creatures, from the principles of [*Hebrew*] true Benevolence, at the particular times, & on all occasions, whenever deemed requisite.

It is by practising such like Virtues, that we may rationally hope, through faith, in the Author of all good, to arrive at that period of redemption “when the hearts of stone shall be taken away & hearts of flesh will be given,” that we may become sensibles of our improprieties, and only place our trust in the fountain of all Perfection, [*Hebrew*] <“For he who trusteth in the Lord, mercy encompasseth him”>¹⁰ that we may ascribe power & glory to the God of Salvation, for Unto Thee, Oh Lord! do I lift my voice and earnestly beseech thee, to grant us thy officient Grace, to obtain Salvation; render us worthy, of thy special favour & strengthen us in our faith; endow us with knowledge that we may celebrate thy praises.

Grant health & peace to the President & Vice-president of these, the United States of America, the Senators in council, & the representatives in Congress assembled, the Judges & Officers of the general government, in their respective departments; endue them with an emanation, of thy divine essence, to direct them in their deliberations & judgements, empower them to execute the will of their constituents, that they may preserve the affections & confidence of all.

Grant health & peace to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Senate, & the People of this State, represented in general Assembly. Bless the Magistrates of this City, the Judges, & the Subordinate officers, in their Several Stations, with a true & perfect & knowledge, of their various duties, that they may long continue faithfull to their trusts.

Graciously heal the infirmities of mind & body of those who are now lying on the beds of sickness, supplicating aid from on high, hear their prayers, Oh Lord! restore them to health, & relieve them from their sorrows, take from us the apprehensions & dread of war, & cause us to live in safety, may all contention cease, and every blessing attend the citizens of the United States; may commerce flourish & Agriculture increase; may the Arts & Sciences long be encouraged, & literature prevail, may the eyes of the blind, & the ears of the deaf be opened, according to the prediction of Isaiah that they may see & know that the Lord he is the God, & lastly, may universal knowledge, be diffused throughout the globe; & do thou, Oh Lord, speedily approximate the glorious

¹⁰ No rodapé.

advent which thou hast promised “that the Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as waters cover the Seas.

“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, & drink thy wine, with a merry heart, for God, now accepteth thy works.”