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THE JEWISH FAITH.

A SERMON

Delivered in the Great Synagogue, Duke's Place.

SABBATH, 24 SHEVAT, 5608 (29 JANUARY, 1848).

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BY THE

REV. N. ADLER, PHIL. DOC.

CHIEF RABBI OF THE UNITED CONGREGATIONS OF THE
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A SERMON.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

AT this momentous time, when so much is spoken on subjects profoundly interesting to us, we not unfrequently observe how busy calumny is in plundering our holy faith of its godly character. We perceive how some go even so far as to affirm, that they do not know at all in what our religion does consist; and, when we refer them to the Bible, the book revered by all, they say that its doctrines have been in the course of time so disfigured, that they can no longer be looked upon as our guide, and consequently that we have no religion at all. We can imagine that such a statement must have raised a smile in most of you, and must appear as absurd as if a man were to deny his own existence; for his religion is his life, nay his life of life—but there are others who, though convinced of the falsehood of an assertion so monstrous, yet cannot, in their simplicity, produce the arguments necessary for its refutation, although their own belief be of adamantine firmness. Therefore, we think it our duty to try to bring the substance of our holy faith, as we are *now* bound to believe and to practise it, into the smallest

possible compass ; and though the topic is one not easily despatched, and is difficult to be condensed into one discourse, I could not but invite you to follow me on a subject which will require your concentrated and continued attention. Besides, when can such a task be more justifiable and more indispensable than this day, when we have just heard repeated the awful revelation on the mountain of Sinai. Therefore let us endeavour to give a sketch of our holy faith. We take our text from the book of Ecclesiastes (xii. 13, 14), running thus:—

סוף דבר הכל נשמע . את-האלהים ירא ואת-מצותיו
שמור כי-זה כל-האדם : כי את-כל-מעשה האלהים
יבא במשפט על כל-נעלם . אם-טוב ואם-רע :

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or whether evil.”

After the wisest of men had, in the book of Ecclesiastes, considered how man is so low and yet so high, so insignificant and yet of such great moment—after he had beheld his earthly possessions from a double point of view, in their importance and their vanity and vexation of spirit—after he had contemplated the various purposes and destinies for which man was created: he finally

comes to that point which solves all the contradictions exhibited in that book: "Fear God, keep his commandments; for God shall bring every work into judgment."¹¹ In these words are involved the three fundamental articles of our faith, into which the thirteen dogmas of Maimonides^a are condensed^b namely:—

I. The Existence of God, מציאות השם.

II. The Divine Revelation, תורה מן השמים.

III. The Future Reward and Punishment, שכר ועונש.

May the Lord bless our humble words, that we may succeed in representing with dignity that which is most dignified!

I.

To fear God means first to know God.¹² While the fear of every other thing decreases in proportion as we approach to and are acquainted with it, the fear of God, on the contrary, increases the more we learn of Him, and the more our minds are filled with conceptions of His attributes.¹³ We tremble like our forefathers on the mountain of Sinai, when we perceive within and without us His thunderings and lightnings.^c True, it is difficult to comprehend those attributes: it is as if a child were to

^a Mishna Sanhedrin 10:1.

^b Ikarim 1:4.

^c Exod. xix. 16. It is to be observed, that, contrary to the usual phenomenon, on this occasion קולות thundering preceded ברקים lightning.

dig a hole in the ground for the purpose of exhausting the ocean. The study and labour of a life would not be sufficient to explore even one of the divine qualities. But to be convinced of His existence is not difficult. There is not a star that shines, not a plant that grows, not an insect that moves, but what is sufficient to confound the atheist. "Ask the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea, they shall declare unto thee that it is the hand of the Lord who has wrought them."^d It cannot be by chance; for chance has neither order nor regularity. Blots of ink cast promiscuously on paper cannot form a well-written letter — but in the world there is the greatest order and regularity. Chance has no design or end; but the natural as well as the moral world affords the most conspicuous and striking proofs of profound design and wisdom. Whithersoever we look, the most minute and inconsiderable, as well as the most stupendous and illustrious, works of God bear equal marks of that exquisite wisdom.

To fear God signifies, in the second place, to know God rightly—not to fall into the hands of those rival enemies, superstition and unbelief, that is, to believe too much or too little. "Take ye good heed," said the Lord, "unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake

^d Job xii. 7.

unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.”^e The dogma, that the Supreme Being is a spirit—the highest spirit—incorporeal—and neither may nor can be represented by any likeness, is of the greatest moment. He is elevated above all the passions, free from all the foibles, exempt from all the frailties which degrade man. Let it not be objected, that we find in the Holy Bible many instances where corporeal attributes are imputed to God, where it speaks of God’s anger, revenge, jealousy—of God’s rising and moving; for bear in mind, that the Bible being written for men, the Lord descends therein to the level of human understanding, of human apprehension and human conception, and assumes human language—גדול נביאים שמדמים צורה—ליוצרה “it is a great thing that the prophets were permitted to assign the image of man to the Creator who created man in his image.”^f But those expressions must be purged and purified in our minds from all gross associations; for “to whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?”^g There is none, either in the heaven or in the earth, who can be compared or likened unto him.

To fear God signifies, thirdly, to trust in and worship God. The fear of God also differs, in this respect, from the fear of any other power—that generally we cannot have confidence in him whom

^e Deut. iv. 15.

^f Ber. Rabba, 27. Moreh 1:46.

^g Isa. xl. 18.

we fear; but the more we fear God the more our confidence in him must increase in strength. When we are convinced that with God is power which *can* give, and goodness which *will* give—that we owe to him alone all the benefits of our past and our present—that very often^h בעל הנס אינו מכיר בנסו “he who is the object of a miracle, at first does not perceive it”,—such discovery of God’s omnipresence; infinite goodness and kindness, must be a new ground of hope, of trust, and of cordial submission. We feel ourselves bound to worship him alone and none else; we feel it incumbent on us to lift up to him every day thanks תודה, praise תהלה, and supplication בקשה,ⁱ—thanks for the past, praise for the present, and supplication for the future. It is true, that by uplifting our voice to heaven, we cannot convey to the Almighty any new knowledge; for he knows everything before we call, he hears before we cry.^j But though we cannot work a change in God, we can work a change in ourselves by making ourselves fit subjects for his benevolence, kindness and mercy, and qualifying us to receive his blessing.

II.

But we must not only worship God at certain hours, or periods; but our whole life must be one

^h Nidda 31, a.

ⁱ Our daily prayers embrace these three parts.

^j Isa. lxv. 24.

long spiritual service—we must *keep God's commandments* continually.

The Divine revelation is the next fundamental article of our faith. Observe, my brethren, they are His commandments. They are not the production of man, the offspring of mental contemplation, the fruit of human intellect: but, they are the superhuman communication from God, confirmed by miracles, and bestowed upon our forefathers in their own presence. Our holy religion is not a mystic revelation, a sealed book, a concealed communication; but it is founded on the fact, that six hundred thousand men saw and heard, and perceived it with all their senses:—**רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד** **פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך**, “Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen . . . especially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb . . . when the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire.”^k If the evidence of two witnesses is sufficient to prove the truth of a statement, even though the life of a man depend on that evidence, how much more has the strong testimony of such a multitude of individuals a claim upon our credence, confidence, and conviction. If the evidence of strangers, whose motives are unknown, is entitled to belief when affirming a common occurrence, how much

^k Deut. iv. 9—14.

more does the solemn fact testified by our ancestors, by our parents, who had a parental interest and desire not to mislead us, but to direct and to give us the best advice, the best inheritance,¹ deserve our firm belief.

Besides, the commandments have their evidence, bear their godly character *in themselves*. Though we may not know the reason of each separate law and statute; yet, thus much is obvious, that they are all for our good. “Now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes which I command thee this day (לְטוֹב לְךָ) *for thy good.*”^m The commandments have for their aim and tendency, either duty towards God, or towards ourselves, or towards our fellow-creatures; but they have generally man, the *whole man* for their purpose, either his body or his intellect, his mind or his spirit. We ask you, my brethren, must not a law of which love towards God^p is the sun, the centre—as it were, the heart of its heart, the soul of its soul—a law which commands love towards our first benefactors, the representatives of God—our parents,^o love towards our wife,^p

¹ Kusri, i. 87—89.

^m Deut. x. 12, 13.

ⁿ Deut. vi. 5. Maimonides Hilchoth Jesod Hathora, ii. 1—4.

^o Exod. xx. 12. Lev. xix. 3. Deut. v. 16. Prov. xxiii. 22. Ibid. xxx. 17. Jer. xxxv. 5—8.

^p Gen. ii. 24. Malachi, ii. 14—16. Jebamoth, 63, a; Sota, 12, a; Baba Metzeah, 59, a.

children,^q and family;^r love towards the stranger,^s orphan,^t and widow;^u love towards our country,^v whose air we breathe, whose language we speak, whose soil feeds us, and whose laws protect us, and finally, love towards *all* our fellow-men,^w so that Hillel considers the last as the basis of all commandments^x—must not such a law intend our good? Must not a law, which enjoins obedience consistent with the other laws of God, to the sovereign,^y to superiors,^z judges,^a to instructors and teachers,^b regard for the aged^c and experienced,^d the learned^e and the virtuous^f—must not such a law promote our temporal welfare? We ask further, a law which descends even to the feelings of the lower animals, and forbids to

^q Deut. vi. 7. Ibid. xi. 19. Isa. xlv. 4. Jer. xxxi. 15. 2 Sam. xix. 1. Ibid. xxi. 10.

^r Lev. xxv. 49. Isa. lviii. 7. Jebamoth, 62, b. Shemos Rabba, cap. 31.

^s Exod. xxii. 21. Ibid. xxiii. 9. Lev. xix. 10. Ibid. xxiii. 22. Deut. xvi. 14.

^t Deut. xxiv. 19—22. Exod. xxii. 22—24. Jer. v. 25. Rambam, Hilchoth Nachaloth, at the end.

^u Deut. xxiv. 19. Job, xxix. 13. Jer. vii. 6. Zech. vii. 8—10.

^v Jer. xxvii. 7. Ibid. xxix. 17. Ibid. xi. 9. 2 Sam. i. 10. 1 Kings, v. 27. Dan. vi. 2, 3. Neh. ii. 3. Berachoth, 17, a. Kethuboth, 110, b.

^w Lev. ix. 18. Ibid. xix. 7, 18. Deut. xxvii. 24. Isa. xxxiii. 15—16. Ibid. lviii. 6—8. Micah, vi. 8. Amos, v. 4. Ps. xv.

^x Sabbath, 31, a. Sifra Kadoschim, 4: 12. Jerus. Nedarim, 9: 4.

^y Eccl. viii. 2. Jer. xxvii. 17. Ezek. xvii. 11—16. Prov. xxiv. 21. Ezra, ix. 9. Aboth. 3: 2. Berachoth, 58. Babā Kama, 112.

^z Shevnoth, 44. Sifri to Deut. 1: 7.

^a Exod. xxii. 24. Maim. Hilchoth Malachim, 4: 1.

^b Aboth, 4: 12. Pesachim, 113, b. Kedushin, 33, a. Joreh Dea, 242.

^c Lev. xix. 32. ^d Kedushin, 33, b.

^e Sabbath, 119. Sanhedrin, 99, b. ^f Ps. xv. 4.

take the dam with her young,^g so that she may not feel how her young ones are bereft of their freedom — a law which takes care even of inanimate nature; when it bids us spare the trees in the hostile city,^h — must not such a law imbue us with kindness and affection?

But there are some who think that the *oral law* has altered and disfigured the *written law*, so that it is no longer the same. How erroneous, how false is such an opinion! Nothing but superficial reflection could have engendered it. You are aware it is an article of our belief, that the law given through Moses, (the greatest of prophets, who excelled all the sages that either preceded or succeeded him) has not been changed, nor ever will be changed; consequently, the oral law is not, and cannot be, a different code; but both the written and the oral law emanated from the same shepherd,^k the same legislator.

“God hath spoken one, but I have heard two.”^l For if even the text of a human law requires interpretation, and often admits of different constructions, how much more needful is interpretation to the profound word of God,^m which is like a fire, and a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces, so that

^g Deut. xxii. 5.

^h Deut. xx. 19.

^k Eccl. xii. 2. Chagiga, 3, b. Kusri, 3: 65. ^l Ps. lxii. 11.

^m Ps. cxix. 96. Jehamoth 21, a. See the reply which Hillel made to the pagan convert, who refused credence to the Oral Law, yet could not resist the fact, that even the mode of reading the alphabet is received by tradition.

the sparks fly about." Now, my brethren, though Moses and the Prophets, inspired by the holy spirit, declared, explained, and unfolded the statutes, and handed them down to us,^o though our teachers derived decisions from the written law according to the exegetical canon,^p though our sages made ordinances and institutions to preserve the law, and established fences around it, so that the holy mountain might not be touched;^q yet they never deviated from, or counteracted the written law; on the contrary, they strove and laboured to explain every word, every letter, nay, every dot, to keep it as a sanctuary, as the greatest treasure of life.

III.

But, besides the consciousness which accompanies obedience to God's commandments here, there is a higher and a greater recompense, which follows hereafter; for a *future reward and punishment*, is the *third* fundamental article of our faith. "God shall bring," concludes our text, "every secret thing into judgment." When we throw a glance upon the earth, we cannot deny that we meet with scenes which surprise us, and show that God hideth himself,^r (בעב הענין). We sometimes perceive that the virtuous are swept away and the worthless left

^o Jer. xxiii. 29.

^p Aboth, 1: 1.

^q Sifra, 1.

^r Exod. xix. 12.

^s Deut. xxxi. 18. Kusri, 5: 23.

to flourish; that merit languishes in neglected solitude, and vanity gains the admiration of the world. From the hand of violence, the righteous look up to God as the avenger, but they sometimes look up in vain. This Divine government conflicts with our notions of God's justice and wisdom, with the evident marks of order and righteousness which we discern within and without us. "Can iniquity," we ask with the Psalmist,^s "can iniquity be united with the throne of judgment? Can he who frameth the law, indulge in mischief?" Therefore, even the simplest intellect must admit that the righteous Lord will bring righteousness about; and if not here, then in the world which is to come. But that which reason only indistinctly conceives, our doctrine has clearly explained, and fully confirmed. The immortality of our soul is one of our holiest dogmas. God will judge the soul created in his image, which is light of his light, and spirit of his spirit. God in his revelation has promised by the lips of his prophets and saints, that the dust shall return to the dust, but the spirit shall return unto him who gave it,^t that he will not leave the soul in the grave, nor suffer his holy ones to see corruption, but he will shew them fulness of joy in his presence, and at his right hand pleasure for evermore.^u He has promised that

^s Ps. xciv. 20.

^t Eccl. xii. 7.

^u Ps. xvi. 10, 11.

our expectation shall not be cut off,^v but that we shall have places among the higher spirits,^w there where neither pain nor trouble, nor separation, nor death have any existence, but where light and glory dwell. He has vouchsafed that, though our flesh and our heart shall fail, still the Rock of our heart, our portion—God—is, and remaineth for ever.^x

And there is not only a futurity for the individual, but also for the people at large. The same God who bore us on eagles' wings^y above all impediment, and destined us to be מַמְלַכַת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation^z a pattern and a standard for all mankind; the same God, who, in consequence of our sins, has fulfilled every word of his threat, scattered us among the nations, and left us few in number,^a the same God who sifted the house of Israel as corn is sifted in a sieve^b—the same God will surely fulfil the other part of his revelation, that he will have compassion upon us, return and gather us from all the nations, and will bring us into the land which our fathers possessed.^c He will bring forth a root of David, which shall stand for an ensign of the people^d and re-establish the temple, the mountain of his house in the midst of Jerusalem, which shall be exalted above the hills,

^v Prov. xxiii. 18.

^w Zech. iii. 7.

^x Ps. lxxiii. 26.

^y Exod. xix. 4.

^z Exod. xix. 6.

^a Deut. iv. 27.

^b Amos ix. 9.

^c Deut. xxx. 3—5.

^d Isa. xi. 10.

so that people shall flow unto it^e. But mind, my dear brethren, mankind at large has nothing to fear from the advent of the Messiah, has no reason to look upon it with an eye of envy or suspicion. How happy would the earth be if that great event would happen soon, very soon — that time not of sowing but of reaping, not of combat and labour, but of rest and enjoyment, not of hostility and discord, but of dove-like peace; that happy time which shall establish universal harmony in this world,^f when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall learn war any more,^g when every passion shall be tamed and appeased; when the earth shall be full of knowledge as the waters cover the sea;^h and what is still more, when all the inhabitants of the earth shall pay homage to the Lord; for in that day the Lord shall be one and his name One.ⁱ

Ask not what advantage can accrue therefrom, to all those generations who long since were gathered unto their fathers; for, according to our belief, there will be a final judgment of God, where many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.^k In the great distinction of good and bad, of righteous and wicked, all the other distinctions of the world shall be eter-

^e Micah iv. 1. ^f Isa. xi. 3. ^g Isa. ii. 3. ^h Isa. xi. 9.

ⁱ Zec. xiv. 9.

^k Daniel, xii. 2.

nally lost. It is true, that this awful event is a secret. We do not know in what manner this resurrection of the dead shall take place; but every doubt as to its possibility must disappear, when we daily perceive how that comes into existence which never yet existed—much more that which already existed; when we see how the single grain lying beneath the snow comes forth from corruption into beauty; when we observe how the new-born child bursts forth through the doors of darkness into light. Every doubt must vanish when we trust to the revelation of Him, whose are the pillars of the earth, and who set the world upon them, who bringeth low and lifteth up, maketh poor and maketh rich, killeth and maketh alive, bringeth down to the grave and raiseth up.^m

Such, my dear brethren, is the substance of the holy faith revealed on mount Sinai, and accepted by our forefathers. Such is the faith which went before them, like the pillar of light, through all their troubles and sorrows and sufferings. Such is the law, for the sake of which many thousands of our ancestors—from their cradle to their grave, from their youth to the moment when the angel of death, who to them was an angel of life, closed

¹ Sanhedrin 91:1. ^m 1 Sam. ii. 2—6.

their sufferings,—gladly sacrificed all that is sweetest, and endured all that is most painful in life. Such is the faith which over all periods has diffused, and is daily diffusing, its blessings over millions of men in all parts of the earth. With this faith we step forth before mankind, and ask whether they can find in it aught which can be injurious to the interests of society and the state, or to the world at large. Indeed you are the witnesses: your own existence, the monumental endurance of the same law, afford the strongest proof of the contrary. “Therefore fear the Lord, keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man”: the whole of your duty, your interest, your happiness, here and hereafter. Let your hands be steady^o, and your look upon God stedfast,^p until the going down of the sun, until the last breath, when the victory will be ours, for it is for God, the everlasting God.

Lawgiver of Sinai! we owe thanks, fervent thanks to thee, for all the benefits which thou showerest upon us every day, every hour, nay, every minute; but we owe thee infinite thanks for the precious gift which thou hast bestowed upon us, in imparting to us Thy law, Thy revelation, the

ⁿ Isa. xl. 12.

^o Exod. xvii. 12.

^p Rosh Hashana, 29 a, Mishna.



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ray of Thy everlasting light, the sun, whence flow warmth and light unto the whole of mankind. How many fallen has it raised, how many desponding comforted, how many weary restored, how many blind enlightened! How often has it been the effectual spring of persevering virtue, when the realities of life had scattered our hopes, when this world's enjoyment was unable to quench that deep thirst of happiness which burns in our breast! And yet Thy law cannot be comprehended, its lofty height cannot be reached, nor its sublime depth penetrated; therefore, Teacher of all mankind, grant that the fundamental articles of our faith may never depart from our mind and heart and spirit, that we may ever fear Thee, and keep Thy commandments, and think on the world which is to come. Rouse those who are indifferent—rekindle the fire in those that are cold—inflame our zeal—fortify our resolution in fulfilling our duty towards ourselves, towards our fellow creatures, and especially toward Thee, O Lord! Amen.

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way of Thy orientating light, the sun, whence Thy
western and eastern light into the world

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How many-fallen has it raised, how many
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