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THE

DIVINE JUDGMENTS IMPROVED :

BEING

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Synagogue,

BEVIS MARKS,

ON THE PENITENTIAL SABBATH,

6th TISHRI, 5610.

BY THE

REV. DR. MELDOLA,

CHIEF RABBI.

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LONDON :

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*Mahamad Chamber, R. H. Adar, 5610.*

**REV. SIR,**

The Gentlemen of the Mahamad direct me to inform you that they have laid your letter, together with the copy of your Sermon, on שבת תשובה, before the Elders of the Congregation, and that they have the pleasure to state, that the same was most satisfactory to them, and most cordially received by that body.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your very obedient Servant,

**S. ALMOSNINO, Sec.**

**Rev. D. Meldola,  
&c., &c.**

TO THE GENTLEMEN ELDERS OF THE SPANISH AND  
PORTUGUESE CONGREGATION.

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GENTLEMEN,

Having received an expression of your approval of the following discourse, I venture to commit it to the press, in the hope that the subject thereof, which is at all times profitable, may obtain a more extended consideration. No people have experienced the mercy and judgment of the Almighty as ours have done ; and none, therefore, have the cause to observe the dealings of Divine Providence with the interest which we ought to regard them.

With the attention shewn by the audience to whom this discourse was addressed, I have reason to be much gratified ; as indeed I have always had on every occasion of my publicly addressing our congregation. It is with true thankfulness, that I call to mind the kind consideration with which my humble ministry has been received. And it is my earnest desire more and more, to fulfil my sacred engagements in a manner at once profitable and acceptable to my beloved people.

Never could I forget the valuable instructions which I had the advantage to receive from my revered father,—one whose learning, piety, and devotion to the cause of religion, render his memory very precious. And as taught by him, so it has been my constant wish to attend to every branch of my pastoral duty with an eminently practical aim. With this view I still desire to prosecute my labours ; and it is from this motive that I have from time to time put forth various treatises for the improvement of our

#### DEDICATION.

youth, and the benefit of those for whom they were intended. The occasional publication of a discourse upon some particular circumstance or topic, is, I consider, well calculated to be useful, especially as it sometimes happens that the audience to whom it may have been delivered is scanty; and some who have heard it may have found their memories unequal to a remembrance of its various particulars.

I congratulate myself upon your approval of my endeavours; and as the Elders of a congregation whose kind interest in the poor, and in the general welfare of our people has been distinguished, you will, by accepting this Dedication, encourage and animate me to fulfil my resolve of prosecuting my duties in every way with all the promptitude and ability with which it may please the Almighty to aid me. With fervent prayer, &c.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Yours most devotedly and respectfully,

D. MELDOLA.

6, Great Alie Street, Goodman's Fields,  
11th Heshvan, 5611.

## DISCOURSE.

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מַחְצֵתִי וְאֲנִי אֲרַפָּא וְאִין מִדִּי מְצִיל •

“ I wound and I heal : neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.”—(Deut. c. 32, v. 39.)

WHEN we meet together in the presence of the Almighty, and assemble in the courts of his house to ask assistance in the hour of need, or deliverance from danger, it is very proper for us narrowly to examine the state of our minds, to enquire whether our veneration of God is a ruling principle within us, inducing those dispositions of adoration and praise which are due from the creature to the Creator, and that obedience to His laws which he has enjoined, and in the keeping of which there is great reward. We ought to look with a scrutinizing and jealous eye into our own bosoms, and strive to detect and put away from us those opinions of our own worth and merits, which we are too apt to indulge, and which hide from us our real weakness and wants, and disqualify us from being true and humble worshippers and suppliants of the divine mercy. We should inquire of ourselves how far we have discharged the obligations of brotherly kindness towards our fellow creatures, as it respects the temper of our minds, and our entire conduct towards them.

These and similar inquiries are well adapted to produce that seriousness which prepares the mind for engaging in the solemnities of public worship, and fits it to listen with becoming reverence to the word of God. Let us then so listen to it as it is written.—Deut. xxxii. 39.

These words are in the song which Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel, shortly before his departure. It is a song of God's mercy and judgment; and was composed and delivered that it might be committed to memory, and form the subject of frequent thought and serious consideration. It recounts and commemorates the wonderful works of God, and especially his love and favour towards his chosen people. It predicts many particulars of their future history, and especially of their departure from their allegiance by idolatry, and forgetfulness of the Rock of their salvation; the consequent hiding of his face from them and the mischief by the sword, and the scattering of their tribes which should befall them; and it promises deliverance at last, their restoration to the divine favor, and the re-establishment in all their ancient privileges, and it concludes by summoning all people to an observation of, and participation in, the joyous event.

“Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land and to his people.”—Deut. v. 32.

In the words which I have quoted, the Almighty is represented as himself speaking—that great Being who alone can say—“I lift up my hand for ever, and say, I

live for ever." Let each one of us then bow himself before the Divine Majesty, and reverently say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

When we are particularly called, as we are by this passage of holy scripture and at this time, to a consideration of the sovereignty of God, it becomes us to humble ourselves before him, and to acknowledge his justice and our demerits, for verily we are all guilty before him, and are all as an unclean thing in his sight.

We are hereby in the first place called to an acknowledgment of the hand of the Almighty in our afflictions. "I wound"—and what do we gather for our hope and encouragement from this? For there is hope and encouragement in it. Did our afflictions arise from mankind, we might fear, that as far as their evil intentions could be carried out, they would never relent. But there is mercy with God in the midst of judgment; and there is a merciful design in all his announcements of threatened wrath. Even the ordinary cases of adversity and bodily affliction to which mankind are liable, are so many instructive lessons which divine Providence intends for the amendment of our conduct, and the more careful observance of our duties. Would that men did but learn and know how to benefit by them; for truly they are judgments sent as punishments on the world that the inhabitants of the earth may therefrom learn righteousness. But of all the grievous afflictions which the Almighty in his infinite wisdom may for our common warning deem it needful to visit us, none is scarcely more alarming than a pestilence, which, like an avenging scourge sweeps off numbers for successive days and

weeks. And few calamities are more influential in arresting our serious thought, being all alike exposed to the same jeopardy; and we envy not the feelings of those who under such a visitation of a people are so hardy as to wish to blind themselves to the common danger, and to stifle in their hearts those emotions which are proposed by the Almighty in sending the visitation. It is sent as a punishment for our ingratitude, our unbelief, and our multiplied offences. And shall we disregard the rod, and him that hath appointed it? It is sent as a warning to survivors; and shall we obdurately close our eyes and stop our ears that we may not observe it? O! what may not be dreaded for such wilful infidelity! Whatever others do, let us not be guilty of such wickedness—we, whose entire history has been marked by the divine governance of us in the way of judgments and mercies, the record of many of which has been made by holy prophets, for our continual warning and encouragement. Let us, as we ought, be excited to serious considerations as to our frail condition as erring mortals, and be moved to sentiments of penitence and humble resignation to the decrees of that just God whom we have offended and provoked to wrath by our transgressions. Let us be confident in this—that this visitation is needful, or it would not be sent; that God doth not willingly afflict us, but he intends hereby our profit; and let us humble ourselves before him as towards a just, wise, and most merciful father, whose hand is stretched out still to pity, to pardon, and to save us.

When we are visited after this manner, we ought to



consider ourselves in a peculiar manner called to scrutinize our hearts, and with careful attention read our inward selves, with the view to form a correct and impartial self-judgment of what we really are. By this alone can we arrive at a true conviction of our inward guilt, and of our unworthiness to claim on account of our own righteousness, any participation in the divine favor and protection. And by this self-scrutiny and self-conviction alone, can that disposition to repentance, resignation, and amendment, which are intended to be wrought in us by the divine chastisements, be effectually promoted in us. In support of which, and illustrative of the vitality of inward examination of ourselves, there is no more ample and forcible elucidation than in the sound reason and unerring doctrine of the Talmudists (*Treatise Berachot*, p. 5), which is thus set forth:—"If a man sees that chastisements come upon him, he shall examine and seek for their cause in his actions and deeds."

Divine warnings and calls to repentance always precede divine inflictions. But how usually has the mercy of God been met? The more he has menaced men, the more have they offended, shielding themselves in the perfidious sentiment—"If I don't see, I do not believe." And what, my brethren, has been the result of this incredulity? The truth and faithfulness of God have obliged him at length to fulminate those punishments which he only menaced. Such have been the fruits of unbelief—"They have belied the Lord, and said, it is not he, neither shall evil come upon us,—neither shall we see sword or famine." (*Jerem.*, ch. 5,

v. 12.) And hath not God in our time made it evident that his menaces are not fallacious as some would think, but infallible, which they would not wish. Had we not warning of coming evils? Did we not hear it said, "If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, the Lord shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee until he have consumed thee from off the land." And what were the blight on food and partial famine in a neighbouring country.—What the disturbances and wars which have raged in Europe—what the disease which has been prevalent, but the fulfilment of the threatened punishment for infidelities? Let others, we repeat, think and speak as they will, but let us bear the testimony with which we have been entrusted, as to the divine sovereignty.

Observe in the second place—it is added, "I heal," And how and when may we hope for this to be done? Healing hath two parts, the one curative, the other preservative. The former draws off the infirmity suffered; the latter prevents future affliction. The first is more difficult to obtain,—the curative may be doubtful in respect to human agency. To cure is the province of the physician—prevention, of all. So in like manner, as it respects the soul that is diseased, there is required both remedy and prevention. The remedy of God's appointment is repentance, the prevention, the avoidance of the contagion of sin. And as in diseases affecting the body, there are usually premonitory signs indicating an approaching crisis of peril, so also there are such in respect to spiritual maladies. By the mercy of God these are always preceded by warnings. The case

of the leper is a very apt illustration hereof. It is said by our divines that the disease of leprosy first appeared in the walls, afterwards in the garments, and finally in the body. These three steps in the progress of the disease indicated the necessity of using precautions upon its first appearance. But our fathers of old were often so negligent of the warnings afforded, that omitting to notice the first step, it was said concerning their false confidence—"Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully—she had no comforter (Lament. 1, ix.) In other words, they shut their eyes to the first indication of threatened infection, the second was experienced on the garments, and the last would by and bye ensue. The leper of the body being the departing of Israel from the holy temple and from God. This was the end, and such happens to all who carelessly and unconsciously allow themselves to be overcome by evil, adding sin to sin, until sudden destruction come upon them, and that without remedy. It cannot be said to have happened without due warning, but through neglect and false confidence: human policy has been preferred to divine, and step by step advance has been made toward ruin. Many such instances are on record in holy history—"Thou shalt speak all these words unto them, but they will not hearken unto thee: thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee." (Jer. 7, xxvii.)

No application will be made to a physician until we are sensible of our sickness, nor will God heal us either of temporal or spiritual plague until we are led to acknowledge his righteous judgments. "They will not

hearken unto thee," implies their obdurate unbelief, that faith is perished, and is cut off from their mouth ; that they have no fear of God before their eyes. In this condition we may exclaim with the prophet—"Cut off thy crown, O Jerusalem, and cast it away," (*Ibid*, v. 29.) for this faith in God and in his holy word is the chief and crowning possession of Israel ; and so it was thought by Jeosopha, who, when surrounded by the three powerful nations Amon, Moab, and Edom, addressed his people in the hope of divine succour, saying unto them,—“Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established ; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” Whilst in their want of this faith it was said—“Cut off thy crown O Jerusalem, for the Lord hath rejected thee and forsaken the generation of his wrath. Take up a lamentation in high places.” We profess of the Almighty, that “he is the Lord our God,” yet, “when his judgments are in all the earth,” not to see and believe, is indeed the highest excess of incredulity. It is written in Jeremiah, (5, iii.) “Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction.” Instead of taking example by the faith of the patriarchs, the unbeliever follows that of Pharaoh, who, notwithstanding the clear manifestations of the divine indignation in the numerous plagues by which he was visited, still hardened his heart—and so do sinners in all ages. So great is their repugnance to acknowledge the only true God as the author of their calamities, that they will attribute them to chance, to misfortune, to accident, to anything but to him who

hath wrought this. How then can they hope ever to be healed?

And this brings us to a third observation, viz., that there is no salvation but in God himself, "neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Let sinners think as they will, and say what they will, there is infinite truth in this declaration of the Almighty—"The fool may say in his heart there is no God," no *Elohim*, אֱלֹהִים—or, as the word signifies, no Almighty observer, judge and punisher; but the thoughtful and the prudent will tremble at the very mention of such profanity and desperate wickedness. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He can punish now, and he will punish hereafter, and who can deliver out of his hands is a question none that ever lived or ever shall live, can answer. Would we avert his anger, we must turn away from our sins. This is the only way by which we can hope to obtain deliverance from the effects of the divine judgment. Penitence is the only antidote. It is said in the Talmud, Jom. 86—"So great is the virtue of penitence, that it brings cure to the world." Let it not be supposed that this consists in a mere frame and exercise of the mind, unaccompanied by suitable conduct. It rather implies an entire change in the bent of the will and the course of our thoughts and actions; nor will pardon and deliverance be granted until our penitence amounts to this, as it is written, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts; Let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him and abundantly pardon him." Nor let us suppose that penitence is to be limited to

any sin committed by outward action, but be assured that it must extend to evil thoughts, the iniquity of which must be abandoned. Thus taught Maimonides, the great luminary of our literature, in his treatise on Penitence, "Do not suppose that penitence is to be performed only on such transgressions as are perpetrated in action, as whoredom, theft, &c., but ye are bound to turn from evil thoughts. 'The Lord searches all hearts and understandeth the imaginations of the thoughts;'" and why? because thoughts may not only be sinful, but they are the very fountain-spring of all evil actions. The heart must be circumcised before we can be a holy people, that is, by casting away pride and all that is sinful. The evil of our thoughts must be repented of before we can be said to be truly penitent. When these are repented of: when our thoughts of God and of his providence are reverential, and when, as it is expressed Zech. vii. 10. "we no longer imagine evil against our brother in our heart," then may we look for reformation in our outward conduct; and then only, may we expect a merciful answer to our prayers for deliverance from the effects of the divine indignation. Then there will remain no fear of pardon of our offence, nor of our obtaining an immediate alleviation; and however proper it may be to humble ourselves outwardly, yet it is not sackcloth and fasting which in themselves appease the wrath of the Almighty, but the turning from the evil of our thoughts and of our ways. The Searcher of hearts regards not these, but as in the case of king Hezekiah, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy *tear*, רמעתך, I will heal thee" (2 Kings xx. 5.)—the humbling

of the heart; and as one tearful contrite prayer sufficed for his recovery, even so with us.

It is not the outward manifestations of repentance, but the sincere expressions thereof which God will discern, and the resolves of our hearts to amend which will attract his attention, will cause "him that wounds to heal," **מחצתי ואני ארפא**. Humble yourselves then, brethren, under the mighty hand of God, and unite with me in the language of prayer—

O God of Israel, behold thy unworthy supplicant! Humbly we approach thy holy throne, and beseech thee regard not the extreme of our demerits. We acknowledge the justice of thy ways, and that our sufferings are less than our deserts: for verily we are all guilty before thee. Thou only, O God, art holy, just, and righteous. Merciful father, behold thy children, they look to thee! they supplicate thy grace, thy pardon, and thy healing. Listen, we implore thee, to our prayer, and shew us mercy; enable us to put away the evil of our thoughts and of our doings: and do thou, O holy father, remove thy chastisements from us; command thy angel to put up the sword of thy anger into his sheath, and cause thy face again to shine upon thy people **האר פניך ונושעה**. Remember, O Lord, the covenant which thou didst make with our fathers, and the promises which thou hast given to their children. In wrath remember mercy, and forsake us not utterly, ungrateful and sinful as hath been our conduct towards thee! "Thou, who art the keeper of Israel," behold the returning sinner, and teach us to look to thee alone for preservation, and to thy holy word for comfort. Let not thy truth be corrupted

by wicked minds, let such who oppose it be as chaff before the wind, and let the angel of the Lord chase them. But let them that fear thee be shewn thy salvation. Amen.

3 JY 65



























