A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE,

ON THE

Second Day of Pentecost,

IN THE YEAR 5602, A.M.

BY

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DISCOURSE.

ע"ז נותן הוא מ"ךאיל אל מטקדשך אלהים נורא
אליהים ברוך לעם ובעצמות

“Almighty, thou art awful out of thy holy places: the God of Israel it is that giveth strength and power unto the people. Blessed be the Almighty.” *

Thy glory, O Lord, filleth the world, and from the East to the West thy name is hallowed: all the radiant host of heaven proclaim thy greatness, and the boundless ocean unceasingly, in its foaming billows, shouts thy wondrous power. Thou speakest, and lo, there is a world covered with things of life innumerable: thou hidest thy face, and not a trace of it can longer be seen. How vast is thy greatness, O Lord; who can venture to describe thy glory? No eye can behold thee—no mind can comprehend all thy work: yet art thou regardful of man, and even dost invest him with honour and glory. Thou didst give him dominion over the works of thy hand, and didst call thyself "The God of Israel.” Thou didst trace the path wherein he should tread, yea in thy sacred ordinances thou didst show him the way by which he might exalt himself above this terrestrial world. “This,” thy loving kindness, Eternal

* Ps. lxviii. 36.
Father, "GIVETH STRENGTH AND POWER UNTO THE PEOPLE."

This, thy boundless mercy, cheers up our mind, when the bright days of our life are clouded with afflictions, and misfortunes threaten to disturb our hearts: yea, "Thou hast given us the shield of thy salvation; thy right hand holds us up, and thy gentleness makes us great."* For this we thank thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name. Yet, most merciful Father, the temptations of this mortal life often throw a mist before our eyes; so that, not beholding thy celestial attributes, we fall into baneful snares: often do our minds become intoxicated with the allurements of vain things; and thinking ourselves great and wise, we are precipitated into the abyss of mental destruction: therefore, most Potent Ruler of the universe, we beseech thee, in this hour, to strengthen us in our meditations on thy name, so that, in all our actions, our thoughts may never be withdrawn from thy glory; and if our steps begin to swerve from thy ordinances, be thou unto us our unfailing guide. May thy loving kindness incessantly inspire us with awe when contemplating thy supremely majestic power; may we have the faculty, O Lord, ever to appreciate thy unspeakable greatness, and the insignificance of our frail being, that we may never suffer ourselves to boast of our wisdom or strength, counsel or wealth, but meekly submit to thy Providence,—confident that in having a true knowledge of thee, and in glorifying thy

* Psalm xviii. 36.
sacred name, exist the means which alone can tranquillise our spirits when assailed with grief, and give a healthy zest to any joy with which our hearts may be inspired. Amen.

The Haftara of this morning, which is the third and last chapter of the book of Habakkuk, begins with the following two verses, which denote the nature of the contents of the two preceding chapters, and of itself:—

"A PRAYER OF HABAKKUK THE PROPHET, UPON SHIGIONOTH. O LORD, I HAVE HEARD THY NAME, AND I WAS AFRAID: O LORD, THY WORK, IN THE MIDST OF YEARS REVIVES HIM, IN THE MIDST OF YEARS THOU MAKEST KNOWN: IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY."

My brethren!—Before we attempt to make any observation to illustrate our text, let us for a while reflect on the whole of the prophet's vision; for, as in every object in nature, the beneficial properties of any object can alone be duly estimated, when it is acting in combination with others. By pursuing an inquiry otherwise we should probably arrive at conclusions quite the reverse of its correct application. We are all fully aware of the great usefulness of that important element—fire, when we view it in combination with the innumerable purposes to which, for the service of mankind, it is applied; but if we view it abstractedly, we perceive only the most fearful and destructive object that exists: so it is with the divine precepts that have been delivered to Israel. By looking at them collectively, we shall find a system
of instruction which bears on the face of it the most satisfactory evidence of its blissful source; but by referring to garbled passages—extracting here and there a verse, without alluding to the matter preceding and following it, every portion of the Scriptures may be rendered obscure and useless. Habakkuk first complains of the success of the wicked, alluding to the Chaldeans, who in his time had begun the conquest of several other nations, and who, according to his vision, were also to invade the land of Judah. He conceived this, the success of the wicked in general, to be the cause of the Israelites neglecting the holy law.

עֲלֵה נַפְסֵיהֶם תְּרוּם לָא לִצְאָה לִגְלָעָה מֵעִשְׁבוֹן כְּלֵי רַע
מִלְחָמָה אֲרֵי אַפְטָה עַל-לְבֵן נַו מֵעִשְׁבוֹן מִשְׁפַּחַת

"Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous, therefore wrong judgment proceedeth."

He then describes the power of the enemy, who attributes the successful result of his efforts to the idol he worships: this the prophet feels most acutely, and thereupon exclaims—

הָלָּא אַתָּה מְפַרְשָׁה יִרְחָה בֵּית לְאַלֶחָף קְרָש

"Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, mine holy One?"†

"And why,” thought he, “should the Almighty suffer it? By granting to the wicked complete success in life, he is made to think that his corrupt ideas of the Deity are correct; and 'therefore he sacrifices to his idols,' to whom he conceives his good fortune is owing.”

* Habakkuk, i. 4.  † Ibid. i. 12.
The conclusions of Habakkuk are not exactly such as would characterise him as a prophet, inasmuch as they are such as every one of us would be likely to draw. We may, indeed, hear constantly such observations as this—

“Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in life: they are not subject to trouble as other men are; they abound with wealth, and still do their riches increase.”

We are likewise induced to believe that the prosperity of the wicked propagates wickedness, and some will say, “We have cleansed our heart and washed our hands in vain; for throughout the day we have been plagued, and have been chastened every morning”—

and otherwise find fault with the Almighty’s decree. But if Habakkuk’s observations have been preserved in Holy Scripture, it is for the guidance of Israel, and to show us that our sensations are similar to those of the prophet, and, by his example, how to suppress them; for had the prophet been naturally of a different disposition, no inference could have been drawn from his writings available for our improvement.

* Habakkuk, i. 16.  
† Psalm lxxiii. 4, 12, 13, 14.
Let us now ascertain what Habakkuk did to tranquillize his troubled thoughts:

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." This, my friends, is what we are not always inclined to do; for if a question suggest itself to our mind inimical to the doctrine of the divine law, we do not think to endeavour to overcome the difficulty;—neither do we pause for an answer, nor seek for instruction; but instantly infer that our own notions must be right, preferring to fix a defect on the divine proceedings to laying bare our own ignorance. The Almighty then answered him, and said,

"Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that the reader may quickly understand it."

He then announced to him the certainty of his future judgment, which will fall upon the wicked, and pointed out to him the difference between the man who liveth in doubt, and him who places implicit confidence in the Lord. Both cases are fully described; and then follows the conclusion, that "All mortals must be silent before the Lord."

Were we to dwell at length on Habakkuk's observations on the Almighty's promise of his future judgment,
we should be able, with little difficulty, to obtain there-from much instruction for our conduct through life; but our chief object is to direct attention to the prophet's prayer, offered up to the Almighty after he was fully convinced of the truth of his sacred vision; and in carrying out this object we shall obtain answers to these three very important questions:—

“*What is the most essential means for obtaining a pure knowledge of religion?*”

“*By what means can men secure happiness throughout life?*”

“*How are we to approach the Almighty on this day, on which we are to celebrate the giving of the holy law?*”

And to thee, most merciful Father, do we appeal, that our eyes may clearly see thy beneficent precepts. Give us understanding, O Lord, that we may learn how to keep thy commandments faithfully, and bestow upon us thy favour in this hour, while our minds are engaged in meditating upon thee. Amen.

Let us inquire, first,

“*What is the most essential means for obtaining a pure knowledge of religion?*”

My brethren, There can be no doubt that all of us cherish a fervent desire to perform such actions as may be pleasing to the Lord, and to show that we take delight in fulfilling the duties imposed on us by our holy religion; for, said the Lord (Isa. ix. 21)—

“*Israel is a branch of my planting, the work of...*"
my hands that I may be glorified?" Yet, how far our endeavours are commensurate with such fervent desires, and in what manner we fulfil our religious duties when we have proper opportunities for so doing—whether, in reality, we do not set such limits to them as to confine them mainly to the thoughts: and whether, so far as our practice extends, it be strictly in accordance with the Almighty's desire, or according to our own erring judgment—is a question yet to be determined. Man, in his infancy, acts from natural impulses; no object besides those immediately around him has influence on his conduct. This we call the state of innocence—of purity, ere the carnal eye is unclosed. But as soon as a difference in external things begins to make an impression on his mind, the natural impulses of his heart control his actions no longer; he can find a multiplicity of reasons for resisting them: his eyes are now opened, but they are his carnal eyes; his intellectual vision is obscured, and the great Author of his existence he sees no more. Contentment no longer dwells in his heart; and while flitting from one worldly object to another—while intoxicated as it were with vanities, he utterly forgets that all the productions of the earth were not designed for his enjoyment, and that of the greater number of them he should only be the guardian: and though he retains the desire to fulfil the Lord's commandments, he is so lost to reflection, as never to perceive the proper means to accomplish such desire. This fault is not confined to a few individuals; it is the fate of whole nations—it has been conspicuous in some of the most distinguished prophets; and such deficiencies not only interfere with our mortal welfare, but also with that of our life hereafter.
Let us examine the conduct of Habakkuk; as he was favoured by the Almighty with a prophetic vision, surely he must have endeavoured to fulfil the divine ordinances in every particular: but he could not preserve the humility which is proper to a mortal being who thinks himself constantly in the presence of his Creator. He argued with the Almighty, and complained of his having suffered the wicked to prosper; and though this behaviour was doubtless the effect of a pious love for his nation, yet it was not an effect of a pure religious feeling, and could not have been acceptable to the Almighty: and the prophet, after receiving the rebuke of the Lord, confessed that he had fallen into error.

* שגיות על הנביא לחבקוק תפלה

From his proceedings, let us learn how a true knowledge of the Lord may be obtained, so that we may be able to follow the dictates of our heart, in its original purity.

The prophet describes the greatness of the Lord, and the terror which fell upon the world on his appearance to give the holy law to Israel.

"His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was as the light; he had radiant beams coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. He stood and measured the earth; he beheld

* The word ר🎥, according to רש״י and ב״א, does not signify a musical instrument, but is to be translated "errors," from שגיה, "to err."

This passage refers to the time when Israel appeared before the Lord, when they had witnessed the boundless power and wondrous deeds of the Almighty in Egypt,—when they had crossed the Red Sea, and when all the nation was prepared to listen to the awful voice of the Lord by three days of holy meditation. We can easily imagine the terror Habakkuk must have felt, when, after having argued with the Almighty, as it were to find fault with Him, with Him whose actions are perfect, he heard, in a voice of thunder,

“THE ETERNAL LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE; LET ALL THE EARTH KEEP SILENCE BEFORE HIM.” And how deeply he must then have regretted this presumption, and prayed that he might be pardoned for it, when he exclaimed—

“O LORD! I HAVE HEARD THY NAME, AND I WAS AFRAID,”—signifying thereby that he felt the utmost dread, that he was fearful the relative positions of himself and the Lord, the Lord’s immeasurable greatness, and his own insignificance, rendered his sin in the utmost
degree unpardonable. In this age, my friends, we are accustomed to call ourselves very wise. It is true, men can trace the celestial courses, and number the stars; can traverse the surface of the ocean, and measure its depth; and likewise, with indomitable fortitude, sustain the thirst and hunger which must be experienced in traversing the most desolate regions of the earth, and, with indefatigable industry, extract from fearful depths in the bowels of the earth all its precious metals: we can do all this with more accuracy than our ancestors, and with as much resolution, where resolution is the chief requisite: but does our wisdom suffice to keep constantly in our intellectual vision the Divine Creator, and to give us a constant view of our insignificance? How do we enter upon the study of His works? Are we not frequently prepossessed with flattering notions of ourselves? and, instead of calmly waiting to profit ourselves by his works alone, think to shed a lustre upon them from our own wisdom? My friends, the best mode of combining our wisdom with a knowledge of the Almighty’s works, and with a true sense of our very humble position in His sight, we must learn from our sacred law, through the mode of study adopted by our revered sages: by this means we shall be enabled to give free scope to the impulses of our heart, as in its native innocence, such as it developed ere it became a prey to worldly lusts. Then shall we see the beautiful purifying effects of religion.

Previously to the giving of the holy law, the Lord said unto Moses—

רב ברו נאם אָלּ יְהוָה לְמְדִים אַלּ יְהוָה לְמְדִימִים רָב

יִהוָה יְהוָה בָּאָב לְמְדִים אַלּ יְהוָה לְמְדִימִים רָב
"Go down, caution the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish: and let the priests also, which come near unto the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them."

At the time we feel ourselves most confident of the efficacy of our wisdom, we ought to be more cautious than ever that it do not lead us astray. Even the priests, who, by the nature of their office, are the least likely to gaze upon the Lord with unreverend eyes—even they, on the spot where they have a right to be, must sanctify themselves before they venture to contemplate the proceedings of the most High. From these premises, my friends, what inferences do we draw applicable to ourselves? How should we behave, who have not personally beheld all the miracles, who are not, as the people just referred to, under the immediate direction of Moses? Is it not incumbent on us all to exclaim,

ירוה יклиעה, יקלע יראה

"O Lord! I have heard thy fame, and I was afraid."

Our sages of blessed memory, who, on this topic, expressed themselves in more comprehensible terms than any philosophers have ever done, who recommended their brethren to study the works of the Almighty—to study nature—in every ramification, when prescribing the mode, said,

און לוּם Lebena שְׁדֹאָוָא עַיִוֵּוָא יִרְוַאָא מַה יוּרוֹאָא עָפוּרָה וּיִרְוַאָא

"Woe to the world, who see and do not know
WHAT THEY SEE, WHO STAND AND DO NOT KNOW UPON WHAT THEY STAND.”

They described the nature of all things in existence, and made each one to praise the Lord with its peculiar quality, embodying such descriptions in a book, which they delivered to their disciples, with a request that they would never fail to give it their most studious attention, as that would ensure for them a share in the glory of the future world; † so strong was their conviction that only by studying nature could the wondrous works of the Almighty be thoroughly understood—a pure knowledge obtained of what the system of divine worship should consist: and, like Job, they thought—

“ONLY BY REFLECTING ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR OWN BODY, CAN WE BEHOLD THE ALL POWERFUL.” ‡

But did they mean, by such instructions, to recommend men to argue with the Almighty about the utility of his works—to investigate his holy precepts as if there could be any defect discovered in them? We are led to inquire if their doctrine sanctioned any discussion on divinity, unless the parties engaging therein had pre-

‡ Job xix. 26.
pared themselves for the purpose by a peculiar course of study?—or any discussion in the presence of a multitude, that might imbibe pernicious notions from some portion of their arguments, without intelligence from the other portions sufficient to counteract their pernicious tendency?

This question we may answer, by quoting from their own words,

אָֽזָּא דְּוַרְשָׁה בֵּֽמַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאָשִׁית לְשֵׁאֵלָהּ לְאָלֵּא בְּמַראָכָה
לְלָוֵר אָלֵּא אָמְנָהּ וְמִבְּתָּ הַצָּהָה תְבוֹאָה מְרַעֲשָׂה

“We are not permitted to treat verbally on the creation in the presence of two persons; nor on the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel even in the presence of one, unless it be one who has intellectual acquirements sufficient to enable him to judge for himself.”* They were afraid that, from a want of previous enlightenment on matters of that kind, to be obtained only by diligent study, their disciples would gain no fresh knowledge of the Almighty, but confuse and obscure that which learned righteous men had already imparted to them. Those, my friends, who have engaged in such investigations, and have gone through them with any perceptible benefit to themselves, are but few. לא רָבִּים יְנַבְּשׁוּ (Job xxxii. 9). Those who have rashly ventured so to do, have perhaps obtained a glimpse of the intelligence they sought, even as one who, with a weak vision, obtains in a gloomy night a transient view of certain objects from a flash of electric fire, which leaves all around him enveloped in a denser gloom than before. Others, who have previously strengthened their vision—their intellectual vision—
may have seen more clearly by such a glimpse,—and, by chance, the glimpse, like repeated flashes of lightning, has occurred to them several times while prosecuting their investigation; but still, when these glimpses have ceased, their knowledge consists only of a faint recollection of what they have seen.* And even he who was so fortunate in his studies on the works of the Creator, as to have flashes of light emitted to him till his own countenance became radiant by the reflection, was not preserved thereby from departing from the strict line of his duty:—even Moses, who thought he so perfectly understood the Almighty’s precepts, that he ventured to qualify the words in which they were given, and argued with the Creator as though He could have founded them in error. When Moses was commanded the second time to caution the people against approaching near to Mount Sinai, he replied:—

לָא יוּבֶל הָעָם לַעֲלָה אֱלֹהֵינוֹ אֵלֵי עַל־אַחַר הַיָּמִים עַל הָרֶם בָּנָבְךָ אַתְכֵיהֶם וּלְעֹלָם:

"THE PEOPLE CANNOT COME UP, FOR THOU HAST CAUTIONED US, SAYING, SET BOUNDS ABOUT THE MOUNT, AND SANCTIFY IT;"—just as if the Divine Being were not aware that this had been done. No one has ever supposed that Moses uttered these words because he thought the Lord was forgetful; he could only have spoken them to show the Almighty that he thought he
fully comprehended his command. At all events, it teaches us this: that we, who are immeasurably inferior in worth to Moses, should entertain for all the ordinances of the Lord the most profound veneration, seeing that a prophet like Moses, by presuming in the least degree, fell into serious errors.

From the actions of Habakkuk, then, let us learn in what manner we ought ever to contemplate the glory and ordinances of the Most High—all the mighty deeds performed by Him in days that are passed. Let a sensation of profound reverence for those objects ever dwell in our hearts, and then our outward reverence will surely correspond; and we shall refrain from the slightest discussion on the import of any one of His commands, when our minds are not so prepared by holy studies, as to enable us to do so in a spirit of love and fear;—the blessing of the Lord will ever attend us in our family circles, even as in this temple; we shall enter this house with a feeling of solemnity and devotion, and read our prayers with profound humility. And should any interruption arise, we shall be ready to proclaim, with one accord, in the voice of sacred command, "Be silent all the earth before the Lord."

The poor, the rich, the low and the high,—in property, learning, and virtue, all preserve a meek veneration for the ordinances of the Almighty! Let us, my brethren, unceasingly echo the words of the prophet "O Lord, I have heard thy fame, and I was afraid." These observances constitute the means "most essential for obtaining a pure knowledge of religion."

The second question proposed, is, "By what means can men secure happiness throughout life?"
The purpose of the Lord in reproving Israel, was to promote their welfare, both in this world and the future. He, therefore (blessed be his name!), accompanied his reproofs with most merciful and considerate counsel, which would tend to their happiness throughout all conditions of this mortal life. The Creator did not deem it requisite to direct any reproach against the prophet himself; Habakkuk had only addressed an argument to the Lord as between the Lord and himself, never attempting to draw to it the attention of his people, or to excite them to adopt such remonstrances themselves. There is ample reason for supposing that Habakkuk endeavoured to tranquillize the minds of those who appeared discontented and irreverent to the Lord, and admonished them that they were the cause of the nation's falling under misfortunes. The Almighty knew that the complaints of Habakkuk were prompted by his zealous attachment to his people, and his enthusiastic devotion to the divine precepts; therefore, He led him by benignant instructions again into the straight path of his duty. But such forbearance is not shown to the exalted—like Habakkuk, when they give vent to complaints against the Lord before the nation. In that case, they may, it is true, be actuated by the best intentions; but, as they exhibit a culpable disregard of caution in doing what may be injurious to the Almighty's ordinances, inasmuch as others may afterwards think proper to act in the same way from their example, till complaining may become so general as to bring those ordinances into contempt, the Almighty's determination is to inflict the severest punishment on them in the presence of those who may have been led from their
strict duty by their conduct. This the Lord distinctly declared in the words—

“And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves;” and, accordingly, when Nadab and Abihu, from too great a zeal, had exceeded their legitimate authority,

“There went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”

Moses, who could readily penetrate Aaron’s feelings on that melancholy event, which were those of regret, and naturally, as all knew that these victims of the Divine wrath had been only too enthusiastic in their holy duties, instantly reminded his brother that their’s was as deep an error as they could have fallen into, against which the Almighty on the solemn occasion of his giving the holy law to Israel had especially warned them; and Moses then said,

“This it is that the Lord spake, saying, ‘I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.’”

In the language of Habakkuk there is this peculiarity—that, although he avows his knowledge that Israel was sinning, saying:
"The law is slacked and judgment doth never go forth;" yet he does not bestow any direct censure upon them; and the Almighty, in reproving Habakkuk, instead of directing the greater portion of his speech to him, as we should naturally expect, conveys in one verse an assurance of the redemption of Israel, and in the other the prophet's reproof; but in words that may be applied to the offences of any individual. The Lord then refers to the wickedness of the Babylonian king, but in such a manner that the latter portion of His words may be reasonably applied to other transgressors, and perhaps to the Israelites themselves. By this we may perceive the Lord's merciful consideration in reproving in general, and also how differently is received the conduct of those who, when they do presume to expostulate with the Almighty, confine their sentiments to themselves, and risk not their effect on the minds of the multitude. Thus was Habakkuk pacified, and the Lord not only forbore to rebuke him with asperity, but thus revived his hopes of Israel's redemption:

יאש יתמהמה יכהו לאר לאר לא יראה

"Even if it tarry, yet do hope; the vision will assuredly be fulfilled." And therefore did He command him to make it known to the nation by recording it on tablets, in so distinct a manner that the reader might not fail to understand; to the end, that whoever might read it should be comforted through all conditions of life, even when oppression were the most stern, or when doubts might suggest themselves concerning the Almighty's inscrutable proceedings.

The Lord instructed Habakkuk closely to observe the prosperity of the wicked in general, it being their
apparent prosperity that had grieved his soul; his instructions were in substance thus:—"Time will teach thee that the success of the wicked is only momentary, and that transgressors against my ordinances do not always attribute that success to the influence of their idols; 'It is the wine he drinketh that causes him to transgress,'"

Many persons, when they are lifted up in the world, when they are permitted to enjoy the fat of the land, become intoxicated as it were, with their station, and their actions are accordingly vain and sinful. But the Almighty is not for ever silent. Those whom the elevated man has gathered around him in his overweening pride, will eventually undermine his station—"Those who build their houses on high to escape the punishment of the Lord, will not be saved, for the very stones in the edifice they inhabit shall cry out against them. Neither are those secured who build fortresses by means of iniquity." Thus it is, whatever measures the ungodly may adopt—however wealthy, great, wise and learned they may appear, time will show how very weak is the foundation on which their fortunes have been raised, that they consulted shame upon their own houses; "for the time will come," said the Lord, "when the world will no longer be deceived by their wicked leaders."

The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters of the ocean fill their immense bed; and all the various opinions and doubts by which the minds of men are now agitated, will for ever disappear. Fear not, therefore, for the success of the enemy, or those
who think like him. Time will teach, said the Lord, that “He who intoxicates others in order to behold their nakedness shall be forced to drink of the same cup, and his own shame shall lie before the world.” Why, then, should the temporary success of the wicked furnish any reason for the Israelites to neglect the proper worship of the Lord? Would he who constructed the idols yield them homage when in future time their utter impotency is proved? The time will come when all my words will be fulfilled, said the Lord, לֹא יֶבֶשֶׂה בְּזֵית וְאוֹרִיךְ בְּאָמְרֶיךָ יְהוָה. Still it is needful that we have perfect confidence in Him; we must implicitly believe that all his actions, whether comprehensible to our understandings or not, are designed to promote our welfare. Such firm belief alone can preserve us immaculate—not a wavering disposition—not a mind liable to receive an impression from any vague notions which others may choose to propagate; for a mind so conditioned soon loses all faculty of clear perception, and will probably soon become a dead blank.

Now, my brethren, what must each of us feel on hearing of the Lord’s reproval of Habakkuk—the bland, and benignant nature of the language used therein—yet so searching to the conscience of a righteous man as to penetrate to his very soul? Are we not impressed with the idea that the words are directed to each of us? and led by them to ask ourselves the question, If there is not something deserving reprehension in our own conduct?—and led so to do in a manner that cannot excite in
us either mortification or grief? In these words the Almighty alluded to Nebuchadnezzar, in answer to Habakkuk's expostulations; and yet every one of them remains an everlasting lesson to every Israelite, indeed, to every member of the human family gifted with reason; for, with all our exertions for the best, with all our apparent purity, there may be many a blemish in our hearts that it would be well to remove. It is a glorious reflection, that,

"Every word of God is purified: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. xxx. 6). Only the knowledge of this fact will render our lives happy and blessed. The prophet was not only gratified by the assurance that the enemy would not conquer, and that Israel would not be lost; but was also greatly affected by the Almighty's pointing out to him the unsafe ways of the wicked, as a beneficent father gives virtuous lessons to his son. He was penetrated with the conviction, that time would show that the prosperity of the wicked was not everlasting, and would assuage the trouble of his heart who felt distressed to witness that prosperity; therefore did he exclaim—

"Thy work, O Lord, in the midst of years will revive him"—meaning him who puts his trust in the Lord, after having suffered severe pains in the mind through not being able to reconcile the success of the wicked with the Lord's justice and benevolence.

"Thy work, O Lord, in the midst of years thou
makes Known." It will teach men that all thy ways are just, and that he who patiently waits to see thy ends accomplished will assuredly obtain everlasting life.

My brethren, by observing the course of events in time past, and in our own days, we shall see that the most exquisite happiness that man can wish to enjoy finally became theirs who have continued steadfast in their faith in the holy law, and in the doctrine of our revered sages; those I mean who never suffered their minds to be clouded with doubts, and who, as a proof of their confidence in the Lord, gave up their lives with as much satisfaction as others approach a day devoted to festivity, when the cause of our holy law happened to be in danger.

But let us contrast with their felicity, the wretchedness of those who fretted themselves with searching and scrutinizing the holy law and the doctrines of our sages, to find out imaginary defects in them; and who, consequently, were so loose in their attachment to the sacred cause as to abjure it altogether, when their worldly interest manifestly required it. Let us then rest firm in that belief, and it will be a balm for all affliction. Time has already manifested to us, that it is the integrity of the holy law alone that has preserved our glory, and indicated to all the nations of the earth, that Israel is a plant which the Almighty has especially cherished. By this belief, my brethren, has Israel ever been revived after the many and various persecutions he has undergone, and drawn from this such virtue as to flourish now with a vigour that bids fair to realize eventually all our fondest hopes.

On this day, my brethren, let us solemnly undertake
to preserve the integrity of our holy law, and the sacred illustrations of our blessed sages, for all future time; by this shall our wishes and anticipations be accomplished, even as the Almighty has said. By such steadfastness, we shall ever be marked, as we ever have been, as “the ministers of the Almighty’s ordinances;” and this is a glorious reflection, that must inspire our hearts with the most enthusiastic joy, from which no earthly care can ever detract. By this means, my brethren, “can men secure happiness throughout life.”

The third and last object of our inquiry is, “How are we to approach the Almighty on this day, on which we are to celebrate the giving of the holy law?”

The preceding observations, my brethren, are, I trust, of a nature to impress our thoughts with a proper sense of the Almighty’s stupendous power, and our own insignificance; they exhibit to us his perfect justice, and, at the same time, his boundless mercy. Therefore, what desire can the heart entertain more fervent than to pour forth an humble prayer to Him, who is so potent, and yet so benign,—so just, and yet so merciful? For what else is prayer than the utterance of the heart’s most intense emotion?—overflowing till it can no more be confined to the heart, but extending itself to all the members, as though the lips and tongue wished to pronounce it, the ear anxious to listen, the eyes to accompany it with a supplicant glance to Him, the feet to run into the temple of Nature, yea, as though his whole frame wished to say, “O Lord Eternal! who is like unto thee?”
Thus it is that we find the prayer of Habakkuk, though brief, consisting only of one short sentence, so deeply impressive; it is characteristic of a man with noble and benign principles, whose submission to the divine will, after being roused from his errors, was meek and perfect, which furnishes a beautiful example for the conduct of all the human race.

Habakkuk, when reflecting on the magnitude of his sin in arguing with the Lord, and reflecting also on the mercy shown by Him to Israel, notwithstanding their repeated transgressions,—and when meditating on the prospect of the enemy’s being utterly destroyed, exclaimed in the fulness of his heart, "In wrath remember mercy, O Lord!" praying not only for himself, not only for Israel, but for whoever might have excited, may ever excite, the Lord’s just anger. To perceive the change produced in the Prophet’s mind by the Almighty’s instructions, we only need to contrast his words spoken subsequently, with those to which he had given vent before:—“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me, and thus strife and contention arise. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.” Now, these are words that might be uttered by any man who thinks himself eminently wise and learned, and who, therefore, thinks himself at liberty to complain of all things that he sees done wrong around
him, and, knowing that his own motives are pure, thinks that if the world would act according to his wishes and instructions, the duties of religion would never be neglected. But mark the words of Habakkuk when he had heard the Almighty's answer:

"O Lord, I have heard thy fame, and I was afraid: thy work, O Lord, in the midst of years revives him, in the midst of years thou makest known: in wrath remember mercy." We have here the language of a man who, from fear of the Lord, dared not to raise his head; one who was possessed with the fullest conviction that all the actions of the Lord tend to develop his glory and mercy, and that the deeds of impotent man are too often directly of a nature to excite the Lord's displeasure: therefore he prayed, "In wrath remember mercy."

My brethren, it is to be hoped we clearly see the effect of God's word in the prophet's bosom. And what is it necessary for us to do on this day, when we are called upon to celebrate the giving of the holy law? Are there not amongst us many whose faults are similar to those of Habakkuk? Are there not amongst us some who think themselves able fully to comprehend the divine precepts, even as Moses thought, and who, therefore, may presume to argue with the Almighty thereupon? And should we not all, equally with those ministers of the Lord, exclaim, "O Lord, in wrath remember mercy." Is it not our absolute duty to adhere to the very word and letter of our
holy precepts, even as did Moses and Habakkuk? Should a question suggest itself to us regarding them, or the shadow of a doubt arise, is it not incumbent upon each of us to say,—

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved": it is thus, my friends, that each of us should speak, and not, on the first sensation of a doubt, instantly proceed to action as if it were an established fact. We are well assured, my brethren, that there can be no comparison whatever between the religious and virtuous principles and deeds of the very best amongst us, and those of Moses and Habakkuk; it is utterly impossible that any of our minds can attain the comprehensiveness of his of whom the Scriptures say, "and there was none like him;" nor can any of us be said to equal in piety the prophet Habakkuk: but yet there is one truth which is equally the inheritance of us all; it is the blessing, the everlasting blessing of the Most High, of which the humblest of our race may as freely partake as the holy men by whom the Lord has spoken to us; it is the blessing by which He attached the name of Israel to his own hallowed name—thus "the God of Israel." This it is, my brethren, this alone, that elevates our hearts, and inspires us with hope that there is still a glorious field for us to cultivate, from which we may obtain most precious fruits, and laurels for our brows, whose hue, for ever and ever, will be beautifully fresh and verdant, as those of the prophets and seers of old.
From this hope do all of us derive a healthful vigour; for it is the delight and glory of us all to be known as Israelites; and thus, whatever good may be unattainable to one section of us, may easily be attained when we all strive in unison, guided by ONE law, as expounded to us by our venerable sages, ONE sacred language, ONE mutual feeling of pleasure in contemplating the ordinances of the Lord, the manifestation of which to all the earth will be of such unity the grand result.

But if amity and unity be the only means proper to arrive at this grand consummation, what must be the result of various modes of action, governed by various principles? As a nation, we should be disorganized; our blissful anticipations would dissolve, and a dreary blank occupy their place; and discord and misery would arise amongst those who at present exist in holy brotherhood. Ought we not, then, simultaneously to cry, and repeat to our children, "ONE law there shall be to us all," for He who gave us this blessed law is ONE?

Ought we not, with one voice, to cry,

“All that the eternal God has spoken we will do.” No exceptions should be made to any one of His precepts; ALL are upon us equally binding.

It is, doubtless, my brethren, the earnest desire of us all to preserve entire our character as Israelites, and to do all that our law enjoins; therefore, when we know what the impediment is that interferes with the accomplishment of our desire, let us endeavour, with a hearty will,
to avoid it, and make use of those means only that we are sure will facilitate our progress. Let our immediate act be to pray, like Habakkuk,“That our past-errors may be forgiven. And let us take his example for our general guide through affairs of religion, and not immediately draw inferences from our own system of reasoning, but inquire of those who are competent to solve our doubts; and if our question cannot be answered at once, let us, like Habakkuk, with tranquil minds wait till the Lord’s will appear.

My brethren, we must now once more impress on our minds the boundless might of our God, and our utter insignificance: His patience and mercy as contrasted with our fretfulness and passions, which cannot fail continually to lead us into error.

"Almighty, thou art awful out of thy holy places: the God of Israel it is that giveth strength and power unto the people. Blessed be the Almighty!" Conscious of this important truth, we shall approach the Almighty this day with feelings of the sincerest gratitude, for the guide He gave us in our holy law to lead us safe through all conditions of life, and implore Him to look with compassion upon us when our steps, from whatever cause, may begin to fail (תורני וחוסַה הַכּלֶּכְּרוֹר), and that He will bestow upon us fresh energy to keep inviolate His holy word,—the blessed fruits whereof will then be displayed in our places of worship, in our homes, amid our wives, mothers, and all
who own the pleasing yoke we bear. Then shall we each be enabled to say with our prophet,

“The Lord Almighty is my strength, and He will make my feet like hind's feet, and lead me over my high places. This shall ever be devoutly sung in my most sacred melodies. Amen.”

who own the pleasing yoke we bear. Then shall we each be enabled to say with our prophet,