A SERMON
ON THE
IMPORTANCE OF THE HOLY LAW
WITH ITS EFFECT IN PROMOTING
UNITY AND PEACE,
DELIVERED AT THE
Spanish & Portuguese Jews' Synagogue, Bevis Marks,
ON THE SABBATH PRIOR TO THE
FESTIVAL OF PASSOVER,
8th NISAN—11th APRIL, 5600.

BY THE REV. D. MELDOLA,
&PRESIDING RABBI.

LONDON.

5600.
I.

"But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."— Malachi iii. 20.

The approaching season of the Passover festival requires that our attention should be devoted to the illustration of those passages of scripture in which is described the origin of its existence, and in which reference is made to the appointment of its observance. I have constantly endeavoured in the preceding course of sermons on this occasion, which I have had the pleasure repeatedly of addressing to you, to expound many of those passages and rites. It is clear that the important occurrences connected with the deliverance of our forefathers from Egypt, which are so copiously related in holy writ, were brought about by the interposition of a beneficent Providence; and that in those occurrences the natural and miraculous were wonderfully blended together. It cannot be too strongly impressed on your minds, that the Omnipotent God manifested his existence in a most striking manner by the series of miracles to which I have referred, and proved himself to be the Creator and great Ruler of the universe.
When our forefathers were suffering under the yoke of barbarous and tyrannical sway, then did the Almighty make known to them his glorious name, on that day when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, and when he made unto them a declaration:—"Ye shall serve God upon this mountain." (Exod. iii. 12.) Then it may be said, was the occasion on which our ancestors received by divine authority that law which has since shed its lustre on us, bright as the light of heaven, and which will continue to do so, till the glorious day when the sun of righteousness and justice shall shine on the people of God with healing on his wings. The beautiful propriety of expression contained in the words which I have selected for my text on this occasion, will at once be perceived; for then will the Divine Being treat every one according to his deserts. The sun of righteousness and justice will rise for the good only: it will hide itself from the wicked: it will be a light only to those who fear God: to those who do not fear his great and glorious name it will be darkness and obscurity. With gratitude then, ought we to adore the Supreme Being for the formation of that great luminary known by the name of the sun, which is emblematical of the sun of justice and healing, by whose beams we may be enlightened, warmed, and invigorated; and as it is our happiness to possess the inestimable treasure of the holy law, which is shadowed forth by the natural sun, we ought constantly to acknowledge the mercies of God, in imitation of the numerous and noble examples of gratitude recorded in our holy books.
When God created man in his own image and blended the body with the soul, he foresaw the frailty and instability of his nature and the weakness of his passions. The Most High also knew, that man was incapable of enjoying the bright vision of his divine presence; hence was it that he preserved himself invisible:—“For no man shall behold me and live.” (Exod. xxxiii. 20.) God likewise knew that man would be easily carried away by the torrent of vice, forgetting what was due to his Creator and Preserver; and therefore he implanted in all his rational creatures the sentiment and language of intelligence, which should not be effaced so long as the world endures, and by which he preserves the memory of his existence and superintending Providence. Again, if we look into the nature of man, we shall at once find ourselves compelled to acknowledge that there is within him a monitor which points out by distinct and powerful feelings that there is a God, and which constantly reminds him of his presence and existence. Let man then lift up his eyes to the glorious heavens, contemplate the sparkling firmament on high, with its innumerable hosts of stars and planetary orbs—and while he dwells on their splendor and reflects on their movements, he cannot but remember, and be deeply impressed with the fact, that there is a great and powerful God:—“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handywork.” (Psalms xix. 1.) Let him lower his eyes to the earth, and he will equally and with the same unfailing certainty discover the existence of a Supreme God, so loudly proclaimed in the voice of
the elements—so conspicuously displayed in the vegetable and animal creation, and even in the existence of the most insignificant insect; and passing from inferior objects to the rational part of creation, he will find kings and princes, aged and youth, of whatever condition they may be, all concurring in ascribing “Praise to the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent.” (Psalms cxlviii. 13.) For even if the works of creation do not vocally praise him, from want of the organs of speech, they afford an opportunity to man, by his contemplation of their marvels to remember his Creator and to offer to him the tribute of praise and thanksgiving. But these silent and inanimate declarations of the power and wisdom and goodness of God, are only necessary when the Lord preserves himself invisible: when he deigns to display his grandeur and glory and to manifest himself to his creatures, then they are superflous. It must appear evident to you, my brethren, that if all creation rejoices at the sight of the sun, the prince of all celestial bodies, how much more ought we to rejoice at the appearance of that sun, that light ineffable, which is the Lord, as shining forth in his Divine Law! How much, I repeat, ought we to rejoice, and to praise the Lord for this our felicity in causing to appear to us that divine light, the light of the law, whereby the heavens, the earth, the elements, mortals, immortals, are all existing, and are all destined to exist. Between the sun and the Divine Law, I may here be allowed to institute a comparison. And first, let me observe, that as the effects of light are referred to the first fountain, which is
the sun, so all the goodness that exists in the heart of man is produced through the instrumentality of the Divine Law.

Again, if the sun be the most glorious of created substances which appear to the natural eye of man, the law is the most glorious of those which exist in heaven, or which are perceptible to our spiritual vision. With good reason then, may we compare the law to the sun, for we find in both the same attributes and the same circumstances; the break of day (aurora) precedes the sun in his rising forth above the horizon to adorn the earth with the splendour of his rays, and to warm with congenial heat the productions of its surface; so other minor laws preceded the law of Moses, which was the sun to those auroræ. Adam had the precepts called the laws of Noachidae—Abraham, the circumcision, &c., and all these were forerunners and preludes, just as the aurora is to the sun, to the great and incomparable sun of the law, which had to appear in the horizon of Mount Sinai to illuminate a world involved in the darkness of the most abominable and detestable idolatries, amidst which our forefathers had forgotten their Creator; for thus saith the Lord concerning Israel, "Cast ye away every man the abomination of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Ezekiel xx. 7.) The body of the sun does not deviate any distance from the tropics, although its light reaches unto the extremity of the poles; so the body of the law never departs from the people of Israel, although its light reaches to the most distant
nations; all nations and kindreds most unequivocally confess and regard it as truth, they venerate it as holy, and adore it as celestial. The sun warms with his beneficial beams the nearest, while the more remote are placed beyond the reach of his more powerful heat; in like manner the holy law of God enlivens with divine zeal, and warms with divine love those who bask under its beams, while those who remain at a distance from it are deprived of its genial influences. The light of the sun although at times obscured by an eclipse, is never entirely extinguished: mankind in such a case are the sufferers, as they do not enjoy its brightness. In like manner the law, although concealed in part from us because of our transgressions (as even during our captivity a part may not be rightly observed or understood by us), yet we are not on this account to suppose that in any one point is it shorn of its grandeur, or diminished in its light, for “The law of the Lord is perfect.”

There is also to be admired in this holy law another attribute co-natural to the sun, namely, that if we did not know what is the sun or the law, we might easily say that the law is the sun, and the sun the law. We must also consider that the eclipse of the sun proceeds from the interposition of the lunar body between the solar and terrestrial orbs. It would appear then that though the moon receives all her light from the sun, she afterwards shews herself, if I may be allowed the expression, so ungrateful for, and insensible of, the benefits she continually receives from the solar luminary, as to obscure his splendour, by intervening between him and the
earth. The sun thus injured and insulted, would, to carry on the figure of my position, one would naturally suppose, feel indignant, and be disposed to punish such ingratitude and resent so gross an affront; such, however, is not the case. Unaffected by the ungrateful return, he does not cease to benefit the moon continually, without, in the least, diminishing his bounty; a circumstance by which we can clearly understand that moral and beautiful saying of our divines in the Talmud, “To those who are reproached and do not reproach in return, who bear their affront without manifesting a spirit of resentment, the verse is applied—‘But let them that love him, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.’” (Sabath, p. 88.) But though it is true that the sun disdains to seek vengeance from the moon, it must not be forgotten that God does not neglect the balance of inflexible justice, in which he always weighs the actions of men, to reward or punish them according to their deeds. In carrying out the parallel between the natural sun and the holy law, I may further remark, that no long period of time elapses after the eclipse of the sun, ere the moon, while journeying on her wonted course, falls into the shadow of the earth, and in her turn, becomes obscured and shorn of her borrowed splendour. Thus does it happen with the law; which, becoming eclipsed by the sinner through his sins, does not come forward to take its vengeance; but God, in his own proper time, not sinking in forgetfulness the ingratitude and neglect of the sinner, will execute his judgments for the slights and neglects which have been offered to his law.
Here, my brethren, you see the striking justness of the comparison of the law to the sun. The sun receives, without offence, the insults of the moon who obscures his effulgent light; the law receives, without offence, the transgression of the sinner who contemns it. The sun does not resent the outrage offered to him in darkening his splendour, neither does the law vindicate its injured dignity; but God visits with his indignation the contempt, as it may be termed, of the moon towards the sun by causing her to fall within the shade of the earth, and in her turn to become obscured. In like manner does God vindicate the contempt manifested by the sinner towards the law, by causing the offender to perish in his sins: “If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgressions.” (Job viii. 4.) We may, therefore, conclude, that of all the singular advantages and peculiar prerogatives possessed by our nation, that which is the greatest and shines forth most brightly and gloriously, is the inestimable light of the law:—“Then brethren of the house of Jacob, let us go in the light of the Lord.” (Isaiah ii. 5.) This is the true light which shews us the road to salvation, with this light the Lord conducts us in the true path of prosperity and eternal blessing. With this light, finally, the soul in glory becomes everlasting.

The most flowing fountain of eloquence would be drained, were I to attempt to point out the least part of its divinity and holiness; what can I say, when the inspired language of Job, when endeavouring to give us some idea of so prodigious a treasure, in this strain bursts forth,
that no mortal can know its intrinsic value, since it is spiritual and eternal, its true estimation cannot be discovered in this material world, for how can a human tongue praise a divine law? how can a finite creature adequately adore that which proceeds from an infinite creator?

II.

If I have attempted to compare the law to the bright luminary, the sun; if I have made observations on its equality, I shall now make them on its superiority. I shall explain the difference, or, in other words, specify the peculiarities of its divinity.

Though the sun is the fertile bestower and preserver of life to all creatures who rejoice in his light and ferment with his active heat; yet it has no power to confer life on that which is extinguished, or to restore that which is lost, but the holy law has the power to restore those souls that are dead to glory: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." (Psa. xix. 8.)

The sun at times is annoying to him who seeks repose, or to him who is immersed or absorbed in mental occupations; such persons flee from and avoid his light; but the divine law, on the contrary, never annoys nor is it painful—it is the cause of all pleasure, and a refreshment to the afflicted. So much does the soul enjoy in the divine commands, that "the statutes of the Lord are said to be right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps. xix. 9). The sun will become corruptible and perishable, as the prophet declares, "the sun shall turn into darkness"
(Joel iii. 4); but thou, divine law, by thy observances, art unchangeable and eternal, "enduring for ever."

I trust that the foregoing observations have fully convinced you of the power of the Divine Law, and shewn also that as it was a blessing bestowed upon the whole creation, so also does the whole creation exist for it; but neither in the effect of its beneficence, nor in the force of its valuable precepts can the law be said properly to exist, or be made permanent, without the union of love and peace in the creation. In the absence of this union, neither the world nor the system of things which obtains, could be perpetuated or preserved, however important the law might be in the object of its existence, and therefore am I most anxious to impress on your minds the sentiment expressed by our sages (Mishna Ohasin) in which it is declared, "That the Lord could not find a vessel that could contain a greater blessing for his people Israel than the peace." Hence it is said in holy writ: "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace." You will at once, I am sure, after this, perceive the force and beauty of those passages of scripture which import, that when God resolved to give "strength unto his people;" it was by the observance of, and obedience to, the law which had become their inheritance that were made strong in themselves. And that strength which had thus become an inheritance to them also from God, could only be maintained by the blessings of peace. It is therefore explained that the Lord could not find a more appropriate vessel to con-
tain and encompass so inestimable a treasure, than the vessel signified by the term of peace; for the intention of the law is to subject the body to the soul, and to promote the love and union of mankind—the basis of all religion. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." (Prov. iii. 17.) Then will our eyes be enlightened to receive the salubrious beams of the true light, for by preserving this desirable union, man will attain to perfection. The great object of the Divine Law is to implant peace in the heart of man; to render him contented and happy in the present world, and to bestow on him the purest and most exalted enjoyment in the world to come. The law is, in other words, the mysterious ladder whose foot rests on earth, and whose top reaches unto heaven, and by which our souls, metaphorically, ascend to the regions of bliss, there to be closely and eternally united to their Divine Creator, and where their virtue and glory shall be preserved pure and unsullied through Eternity's unending ages.

Allow me to submit to you, as being very appropriate in connection with the present subject, the sublime expressions of the profound theologian, in his inspired work, 'Bechinat Holam,' (by Badrashi) part xii, chap. 1—

"O my heart! my heart! the law and man, when in union, form a divine light upon earth; the law is the flame
that reflects the celestial fire, emanating from the source of light—man, in his two compounds of body and soul, formeth the lamp in which the light is displayed, the body resembleth the wick, and the soul the oil of a pure olive; if they agree together, the whole edifice is lighted up with the greatest splendour."

The importance of our religion consists in our unity; this principle of unity has been obviously made manifest in the commandments of God, even to the ransom for the soul, where God commanded Moses when he should take the sum of the children of Israel after their number, each man numbered should give "half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary, the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord to make an atonement for your souls." This passage beautifully displays the effect of unity, which shews that the poor man's half shekel would, in combination with the rich man's ransom, reckon for a whole, whilst the rich man would gain nothing by himself, albeit he possessed the means of offering the whole shekel without the aid or interference of the poor man. No, saith the spirit of the Divine Law, in the ransom of transgressions, the poor man's offering shall extend equally with the rich; and it is by unity alone that the two halves shall make one whole—that the two bodies of Israel shall be compounded into one, and thus shall all men be equally open to redemption from their sins. Again, let me refer you to the circumstance of Jacob's vision, "when he took of the stones of the place" and placing them under his head he
slept, and the power and love of the Deity for his people were revealed to him in his dream; he awoke, and taking the stone that he had put for his pillow, he raised a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it: all this coincidence of circumstance is a type of the same unity which is again shewn at the time of Jacob's death, when he calleth his sons together to give each his particular blessing. Of Joseph he saith, "from thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel." This clearly shews, that in all the care and protection manifested by the works of the Almighty for his people, the bond of unity has been the great and universal basis of its strength and truth.

Brethren of the house of Israel, who are compared to the olive tree by the words of the prophet, "the Lord called thy name, a green olive tree," Jer. xi. 16—(Jalkut, Jer.) let us then entreat the Omnipotent, that we may see our community flourishing as the olive tree, that happy emblem of returning peace and concord, which, when the Lord was wroth with the whole human race, and the waters of the flood created disunion even of the very elements, the symbol employed as the first announcement that his anger was appeased, and that peace should be restored to the face of the globe, was the olive leaf—"And the dove came in to him in the evening, and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf." (Gen. viii. 11.)

There being concord, union and peace, we shall be well disposed to observe the Divine Law in the same manner as our forefathers received it, "And there Israel camped before the mount" without any separation, Israel
as one man and one heart. Let us confide in his divine mercy that in blessing ourselves with union, as his chosen people, he may enlighten our eyes to enjoy the light of the sun of Righteousness "with healing in his wings," and that glorious luminary will heal our hearts by its enlightening influences. And the union thus produced by the agency of the sun of righteousness, will be at once pure and permanent. The nature of God's people will be invigorated, sanctified, and enlightened. Their devotion will be in perfect accordance with the requirements and dictates of the holy oracles. They shall see eye to eye, and shall all walk in the same holy and happy paths. "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:" (Jer. xxxii.39.) removing every obscurity, so "that all shall come to its effulgent radiance, and kings to the brightness of its rising." Then shall all men give glory to its splendour, and behold in its transcendent rays, the purity and truth of our Divine Law, the judgment by which all men shall pass into eternal happiness, and the division of holiness and peace be no longer known upon the earth. Amen.