

**DISCOURSES ON
THE
JEWISH RELIGION**

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Discourses on the Jewish religion by Isaac Leeser

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ISAAC LEESER

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BY

ISAAC LEESER.

הלוא כה דברי נאם ה' כאש וכפטיש יפוצץ כלע:
ירמ' כג' כט':

"BEHOLD! THIS IS MY WORD, SAITH THE LORD, LIKE THE FIRE,
AND LIKE THE HAMMER THAT SHIVERETH THE ROCK."

Jeremiah xxiii. 29.

Rev. Dr. Aaron J. Messing,
Chicago.

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DISCOURSES

ON THE

JEWISH RELIGION.

DISCOURSE I.

THE TESTIMONY.*

MY FRIENDS!

Although we are not assembled this day in a house consecrated to God, still we have met for the purpose of doing honour to our Everlasting King, and to labour in his name. It has always been the custom of Israel, on all occasions of public assembly, not to let the words of prayer be wanting; it is קול קל יקב "The voice which is the voice of Jacob," which is ever acceptable on High; in this is our strength, in this our victory; herein angels of mercy join us to do honour to the Creator; and of this, in our deepest affliction, tyrants in all their power, nations in all their tumultuous wrath, could not rob us. Let us, then, not be unmindful of this our potent weapon,

* An Address, delivered at the schoolhouse of the Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia, at the first opening of their school, on Sunday, the 4th of Nisan (April 6th, 1851).

the two-edged sword of God's praise which is in our mouth, and let us reverentially and with deep humility invoke the aid of our Father in heaven on the work which we are about to begin, in order that He may be with us at our first starting, and not withdraw from us his grace and aid till our task be accomplished.

O Lord Eternal! Thou hast commanded us in thy law, that we should propagate the doctrines Thou hast bestowed on us; since Thou hast ordained, "And ye shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." It is in obedience to this behest that we, thy servants, have striven to establish a seminary where the children born unto Israel might be taught of thy laws, and acquire a knowledge of the sacred language of thy people, without being exposed to the danger of contamination, by instruction which is hostile to the faith which we derive from Thee. Long has our striving been in vain, our words fell on ears deaf to admonition; but at length, for which we bless thy Name, we are at the eve of commencing the work which is so necessary to the well-being of all descendants of Jacob. But, O! how feeble is this beginning—how small the number of those who have inscribed their names unto Thee; but we entreat Thee, do not despise the offering which we bring, unworthy though it be of thy acceptance; and cause it to prosper and flourish, since Thine is the power to bless and perfect what man begins in doubt and sorrow.

Long has thy Name been profaned among the gen-

tiles, when they saw that they who were called thy people were untrue to their vocation, and faithless to the mission Thou hadst assigned them, to be a guide to the nations. The knowledge of thy word and thy ways has fearfully diminished, and many have fallen off, because they know not the principles of thy faith, and the duties incident to its followers. Grant then, O most merciful Father! that this school may become a shining light in Israel; that it may tend to invigorate with truth and knowledge the minds of many who otherwise would grope on their way in darkness; that its scholars may become quick in the spirit of salvation, and stand forth as Israelites in whom Thou art well pleased; and that through them many others may be drawn into the sacred influence, to devote to Thee their life, their best exertions, and their whole soul.

Upon the teachers, who are to engage in the holy work, send, we beseech Thee, thy gracious beneficence; inspire them with meekness, to labour in the arduous task which they have assumed, and with perseverance not to flag amidst discouraging trials to which they will be exposed. Lend eloquence to their tongues, and deep persuasion to their words, that they may be able to enchain the youthful hearts, and bind them indissolubly to thy service, so that in after-years they may rejoice over the multitudes they have brought under the overshadowing wings of thy Providence.

And upon us, and all the well-wishers of this institution, pour out the spirit of liberality and devotedness, that we may not be weary in our struggle, nor become faint-hearted, if immediate success crown not

our enterprise. Yea, teach us to wait for thy aid, in meekness and submission, and not to expect too much from our own strength and our own endeavours; so that, persisting to work in the cause of thy religion, we may be strengthened with the hope that Thou wilt guide us aright, and make everything eventuate for the best, to the extension of thy kingdom, and the spread of thy glory, and the joy of the holy ones on earth, in whom Thou feelest delight. Be it thus thy will to establish the work of our hands, and to let thy beauty be revealed over us. Amen.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

When Joshua, the successor of Moses, was nigh the end of his mortal career, he assembled the whole tribes of Israel at Shechem, and addressed the elders, captains, judges, and officers of justice, in a heart-stirring appeal, relative to their duties to their God, in reminding them how mercifully He had brought them and their fathers to be his servants. He left them, however, the choice of remaining faithful to the Lord, or selecting some of the various idolatries which were then in vogue, either that of the Mesopotamians, or of the Eморites, near whom they then dwelt; but whatever the people might resolve on, he declared his firm determination that he and his household would serve the Lord. The Israelites, however, who had been the witnesses of the mercy and might which had been displayed before them, had no doubt of the truth of their religion in their heart; they therefore chose the same worship which their leader had chosen, and they declared, "We also will serve the Lord; for he is our God." After again receiving