

THE SPIRIT OF JUDAISM

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649234264

The Spirit of Judaism by Grace Aguilar & Isaac Leeser

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GRACE AGUILAR & ISAAC LEESER

**THE SPIRIT
OF JUDAISM**

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THE

SPIRIT OF JUDAISM.

BY GRACE AGUILAR,

OF HACKNEY, ENGLAND.

"Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us,—yet have we not forgotten thee."—PSALM xlv.

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that ye may know and BELIEVE me. This people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise."—ISAIAH xliii. 10, 21.

EDITED BY ISAAC LEESER,

OF PHILADELPHIA.

PHILADELPHIA :

PUBLISHED AT NO. 1 MONROE PLACE.

5602.

SHEMANG YISRAEL.

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. AND THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIGHT. AND THESE WORDS, WHICH I COMMAND THEE THIS DAY, SHALL BE UPON THY HEART: AND THOU SHALT TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY UNTO THY CHILDREN, AND SHALT SPEAK OF THEM WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THY HOUSE, AND WHEN THOU WALKEST BY THE WAY, AND WHEN THOU LIEST DOWN, AND WHEN THOU RISEST UP. AND THOU SHALT BIND THEM FOR A SIGN UPON THY HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN THY EYES. AND THOU SHALT WRITE THEM UPON THE DOOR-POSTS OF THY HOUSE, AND ON THY GATES.

DEUTERONOMY VI. 4-9.

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TO HER
WHOSE PRECEPTS AND EXAMPLE
ORIGINALLY INSPIRED THE SENTIMENTS CONTAINED
IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES,
THE TENDER GUARDIAN OF MY INFANCY,
THE SOLE INSTRUCTRESS OF MY YOUTH,
THE FAITHFUL FRIEND OF RIFER YEARS,
TO
MY BELOVED MOTHER,
This Volume
IS MOST GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

It is with a high degree of gratification that I am enabled to introduce to our religious public a new labourer in the elucidation of our time-honoured faith, in the person of Miss Aguilar, the author of the present publication. This, however, is not her first work; as about four years since she committed to the press a translation of the "Israel Defended," by Don Isaac Orobio, the brave and undaunted defender of the Mosaic religion. In addition to this Miss A. has written several fugitive poetical and prose pieces, few only of which have reached me.

My first published sermons having attracted the kind attention of Miss A., she requested me to undertake the editorial supervision of her MS. work on the "Spirit" of our religion. I shall readily be believed when asserting, that I felt truly happy that such a demand had been made upon me; and I accordingly offered my services to do as I was desired. Somewhat more than two years ago, Miss A. having finished her work sent it out to America through a private channel; but from some cause unknown it never reached me. She had accordingly to undertake the laborious task of re-writing it from her original sketches, and she completed it anew about this time last year. Last May I at length received this long expected book, and had it not been for many unforeseen interruptions, its publication would not have been delayed till this time. The work is now, however, safely afloat on the ocean of public opinion; and I assure my friends that they cannot afford me a greater pleasure than to receive kindly and favourably the offering on the shrine of our religion so beautifully offered by our distant sister, distant only in body, because, though residing in another hemisphere, her spirit is linked to ours by the ties of national consanguinity and the bonds of one belief in the same kind and omnipotent God, whose are the sea and the dry land.

It would not become me to speak of the merits of this work, as it might be supposed that I were but offering the usual and fulsome adulation, which it is only too much the fashion to offer to an author. Yet I may say without hesitation, that our females will find in it many passages peculiarly calculated to win and arrest their attention by their elegant imagery and truly delicate portraiture.

Few indeed, whether male or female, but must rise refreshed and invigorated by a new feeling of religious hopefulness called forth by the pious aspirations which are scattered throughout these pages, and be the more strongly impressed with the beatifying principles of our religion; seeing, as they must do, that the argument so strongly brought home to the judgment of all is not furnished by a man PAID to *preach* our doctrines, but by a woman whose own experience has taught her the blessedness and life springing from the living fountain of the code and law of Moses. This voluntary testimony is worth much more than a highly elaborate treatise by one deeply learned in the law; and despite of occasional errors, which are for the most part animadverted upon in the notes appended to the text, I have no doubt but that it will aid greatly in diffusing a true spirit of religion, and assist our fellow-believers to lean in their joys and afflictions with confiding trust upon the Holy One of Jacob their Rock and Redeemer.

I rejoice greatly, that a gifted daughter of Israel has at length appeared, who does not disclaim to stand forth as the champion of her ancient creed, and who, forsaking for awhile the field of secular literature where both fame and profit await the successful aspirant, links her fate with those ardent few who hesitate not to avow their abiding hope in the law of their Hebrew forefathers, and who seek for no better reward, than to see their own religion followed and its adherents honoured, not for the possession of wealth and power, but for the possession of a piety and a devotedness to their God, which can proceed solely from hopes whose birth is in heaven and whose ending is only in eternity.

My editorial labours were restricted, by the express direction of the author, to correcting the text where I might discover obscurities, and appending notes where they were required. I have fulfilled both parts of the pleasant task assigned me with honest fidelity, and with all the accuracy I could command. Of course perfect freedom from faults I do not claim either for my friend or myself; and any slight inaccuracies which may be discovered here and there will, I trust, be viewed with the usual indulgence which I have hitherto received. For all the notes bearing my initials I am alone responsible; since, owing to the distance between us, the author had no opportunity of seeing them before they appeared in print.

The chief points of difference between Miss Aguilar and myself

are her seeming aversion to the *tradition*, and her idea that the teaching of mere formal religion opens the door to the admission of Christianity. The reader will easily perceive from my notes to various passages, that I believe the traditions of our fathers of vital importance in elucidating the words of Scripture and regulating our course of action. And I insist in concert with all who have duly weighed the subject that, without claiming infallibility for the sayings and decisions of our Rabbins, they are nevertheless entitled to be listened to with profound respect and to be obeyed as holy ancestral customs, unless indeed they flatly contradict the text of Scripture and the legitimate common sense deductions therefrom. It is too evident for denial by the most prejudiced, that a discretionary power was conferred by the law of Moses upon the various chief tribunals for the time being, (see Deut. xvii. 10;) and their decisions, together with the oral traditions delivered by Moses himself to the elders, always constituted our customs, and are what we term the oral law, or tradition. That many things may have crept in in process of time, neither warranted by the strict letter of the law nor necessary for any useful purpose, I will neither deny nor affirm, for this is not the place to do so; but this much may be asserted without fear of contradiction, that without traditional authority there could be no Jewish conformity; since others use the Bible as well as we do, and still their conduct is so totally different from ours. Now what constitutes this difference, but our mode of interpretation? And whence is this derived, but from tradition? I regret that the small space I am necessarily limited to in this preface prevents me from enlarging on the subject; but I may say once for all, that Jews are not safe unless they abide by the doctrines which have been handed down as derived from and based upon the Bible; and though *all* may not be able to get a comprehensive knowledge of the minutiae of the laws, it is scarcely to be doubted, that there will be always educated men whose business it is to devote their whole attention to their religion and to be at all hours ready to show the people the way they should go, and to distinguish between the clean and the unclean no less than between the morally right and wrong.

In regard to the approach to Christianity by the formalist, I must remark that there seems to be no connexion between the two, any more than the apostacy to paganism or the Islam where either of these prevails. The Jew embraces Christianity, if at all, by his

desire for some tangible advantages which his change is supposed to bring, or from a mere ignorance of the principles of his own belief. It is, therefore, not because a person is a formalist, only because he is ignorant of his duties and their intent; and accordingly those who have received no religious education are more likely to swerve than they who have been instructed though faultily; for if these last fall it is not from ignorance, but from wickedness. Besides, in free countries, such as America and France, Jews do not embrace Christianity so much as become indifferent, and only coalesce through marriage or entire neglect of all religion with the multitude around them, simply because they do not *care*, not because they do not *believe*. Indifference therefore is a far greater enemy to us than conversion; and upon the former Miss A. has said but little, whilst she has expressed more fears of the latter than I believe warranted by the facts.

However my acquaintance with late events in Europe is not sufficiently extensive to hazard an opinion on either side; and I hope fervently that the Guardian of Israel who has so long preserved us from annihilation may farther bless and protect us, and give effectiveness to the earnest labours of His servants to spread a knowledge of His law among His chosen people.

In conclusion I will merely state, that late events, which some weak in faith have thought fraught with danger to our national unity, will surely prove in the end of the utmost benefit. Inquiry will be called forth; men of godliness will hasten forward to teach and proclaim aloud the word of God; the spirituality of our faith, as has been done in the present work, will be duly exemplified; love for our observances will be greatly increased; and labourers of both sexes will not be wanting to work with undismayed courage for the promotion of the kingdom of Heaven in truth, faithfulness and humility.—With these few and brief observations I surrender the work of my friend to the approbation of our religious community; little doubting but that she may meet with sufficient success to cause her never to regret the hours she has devoted to a task of all others the most pleasing, of having guided many to righteousness, and caused the drooping spirit to revive in renewed strength and hope in the Author of all the blessings that are ours here and in the life everlasting.

ISAAC LEESER.

Philadelphia, { Tebeth 21, 5602.
 { January 3, 1842.