

TO THE MINISTERS AND OTHER ISRAELITES.

To my brother Israelites in North America, I call in the name of my God, חזק ונתחזק בער עבנו "Be firm, and let us strengthen each other in behalf of our people." The Rev. Editor of this periodical has granted me the favour to give publicity to my views about the association of Israelitish congregations in North America, to produce one grand and sublime end—to defend and maintain our sacred faith, to the glory of God and for the benefit of Israel and all mankind.

Brethren! though I am a stranger among you, unknown and unimportant,—though I am aware that there are men among you much better than myself, קטנם עבה ממתי "Whose little finger is thicker than my loins,"—though my years are but few in number, and among you are men gray-haired and highly experienced,—notwithstanding all this, I make use of the Rev. Editor's permission to express publicly my views on this important subject, because I think with Elihu, son of Borachel, the Buzite of old, א-בן רוח היא באנוש ונעמז עזי הנבים "Verily it is the will in man" (that renders him able to speak and act), "it is the spirit of the Almighty that gives understanding to them" (who have a good will devoted to God and virtue,)—or if I shall express the same idea in a Talmudic form of speech, I may say I trust כסיעתא דשמיא "in the help of heaven."

It is one of the holy demands of our religion, ללכת בדרכיו to walk in the ways of God. God is a unity, ה' אחד wherefore all mankind will one day be united for one great end—to worship in truth the Most High, to adore His holy name with humility and purity. Then will also be fulfilled, ושמו אחד that God's name will be one. To bring about this sublime unity, God has selected the people of Israel from among all nations, to be the bearers of divine truth, and to diffuse the bright light of religion

among mankind. Wherefore we may justly say, our cause is the cause of mankind,—our elevation and success are the elevation and success of the human family,—our fall is also the fall of all society; since every one must admit the fact that true religion is the basis of civilization. There is perhaps not a single Israelite among my readers who is not fully inspired with the inclination to share in the mission of his ancient people, as the voice of God called to each individual of Israel, without exception of either sex, or age, or spiritual abilities: “But you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests.” Now in order to fulfil our sacred mission, to send our important message to mankind, it behooves us to be united as one man; to be linked together by the ties of equal views concerning religious questions—by uniformity in our sacred customs, in our form of worship, and religious education. We ought to have a uniform system for our schools, Synagogues, benevolent societies—for all our religious institutions. This we need to have throughout the world, if we are to be considered as the same descendants of Israel, the same disciples of Mosheh—if we are truly to fulfil our sacred mission. Our fathers, whilst living in the Holy Land, were commanded to appear three times every year at the place selected by God himself. This commandment had not for its sole object the prescribed sacrifices, but chiefly it was calculated to uphold a friendly union,—a religious uniformity among all Israelites.

Let us now direct our attention to the country where we live, and the circumstances in which we are placed. The majority of our congregations in this country have been established but a few years back; they are generally composed of the most negative elements from all the different parts of Europe and elsewhere; they have been founded and are now governed for the greater part

by men of no considerable knowledge of our religion, and generally of no particular zeal for our common cause. The consequence of all this is, that many congregations have no solid basis, no particular stimulus to urge on the youth to a religious life, and no nourishment for the spiritual Israelite. This naturally produces an enormous amount of indifference; and each congregation pursues its own way, has its own customs and mode of worship, its own way of thinking about religious questions, from which cause it then results that one Jew is a stranger in the Synagogue of the other Jew. It is a pity to observe that any man who is so happy as to have a license (קבלה) to kill from some unknown person, can become the minister of a congregation, and the teacher of the youth, without any proof of his knowledge of religion, and in the absence of any evidence of his conduct as a Jew. I will be silent about what is called שאלת חכם—I will be silent about the רין, though our wise men teach כל מי שאינו בקי בשיב גיטין וקרושין אל יתעסק עמהם “Whoever is not thoroughly acquainted with divorces and marriages, shall not have anything to do with them.” I will be silent about the whole casuistic theology, and ask only the community at large: “What will become of our Synagogues?—what of our youth?” You see we have no system for our worship, nor for our ministry and schools, and we are therefore divided in as many fragments as there are congregations in North America. It is lamentable, but true, that if we do not unite ourselves betimes to devise a practicable system for the ministry and religious education at large,—if we do not take care that better educated men fill the pulpit and the schoolmaster’s chair,—if we do not stimulate all the congregations to establish good schools, and to institute a reform in their Synagogues on modern Jewish principles,—the house of the Lord will be desolate, or nearly so, in less than ten years, and the

zeal of the different Christian missionaries will be sufficient to make among us a large number of unprincipled infidels. It needs no prophetic spirit to read this horrible future in the present circumstances. I lay down these lines before the throne of history as a solemn protest against the spirit of separate action and of indifferentism which has taken hold on so many noble minds of our brethren, and I proclaim before the whole world, before the present and future, my sincere conviction that now something must be done to defend and maintain our sacred faith. Nor is it too late; everything can be done if we are all united before God.

But who are the men that shall lay the corner-stone to this reunion? Are not the ministers of Israel those who must take the first step? Is not the spiritual welfare of Israel entrusted into their hands? Are they not responsible for it, if coming generations should be corrupted through their neglect? Are not included in this class the pious laymen who sigh over the downfall of the ancient customs and forms, without the establishment of the modern ones? Shall we not include those learned laymen who mourn to see how some people in their ignorance sanctify the profane, but profane the holy? Yea, it is the duty of all those to unite themselves, and work for the reunion of all the congregations. I call on you in the name of our God: "Be firm and strengthen yourselves for the sake of our people." Arise, ye men of piety and wisdom, ye shepherds, ye fathers of Israel, let us all meet *איש לא נערר*; let us first take counsel what should be done, and how it must be done; let us amicably consider what we ought to do as men and Israelites for the spiritual welfare of the present and coming generations; let us earnestly deliberate on a plan to unite all Jews to defend and maintain their sacred religion for the promotion of the glory of God and the bliss of Israel!

I call upon all my honoured friends, both ministers and laymen, and all who have an interest in the promulgation of God's law—come, let us be assembled in order to become united! Exercise all your influence on your friends and acquaintances, to bring together all men of zeal and piety, of wisdom and knowledge, to consider what should be done for the union, welfare, and progress of Israel. Let the place of assembly be *Philadelphia*, it being nearly the centre for the Jews living in North America; and let the time of meeting be the second day of the Rosh Hodesh Iyar, 5609. I trust in God to meet in the next number of the Occident many honourable names who will join this meeting, and also their divers views about it; but I particularly call on the Rev. Drs. Lilienthal, Kohlmayer, Merzbacher, the Rev. Messrs. Isaacs and Felsenheld, not to be the last ones in offering their views. I pray them to assist my weak voice, and call on all Israel חוק ונהרוק בער עכני. And may God, the great Father of all, unite and bless the house of Israel! May He enlighten all men with the shining light of truth, be gracious to all that seek Him, and merciful to all that have forsaken Him. Amen.

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Albany, the ninth day of Marcheshvan, 5609, A. M.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—Dr. Wise has in the above responded to our request to give his views concerning the proposed meeting of Jewish ministers in the course of the ensuing spring. Without endorsing beforehand all that this gifted son of Israel has said in his address, we beg leave to second earnestly his ideas about the necessity of a thorough union of all Israelites residing on this continent. There are at present men among us who are capable of doing good service; but their strength is paralysed by their being unknown to the communities beyond which they live. Let a union be formed, and they will be supported by the public voice to erect a strong bulwark against infidelity; for we do not believe that the heart of our brothers is so corrupt by worldliness as