

SELECTONS FROM

Mediaeval Jewish Writers.

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My son, give God all honor and the gratitude which is His due; for He it is who made thee and brought thee into this world. Thou hast need of Him, but He needs thee not. Put no trust in thy mere corporeal well-doing here below. Many a one hath laid him down to sleep at nightfall, but at morn risen not again; many a one hath gone to his couch at night, sound in health and of high cheerfulness, and has waked up to agonies and terrors.

Respect the poor man by gifts whose source he knows not of; and when he eats at thy table gaze not on him too much, lest he doubt his welcome; be not deaf to his beseechings, deal not hard words out to him, and give him of thy richest food when he sits at meal with thee. When thou prayest, be lowly and think thyself nothing before the Almighty, and use all thy soul's energy and force to hold in check what evil desire there may be in thy heart. Rather feed thyself with the poorest weed than make thyself dependent on other human beings; and seek not greedily after power and pre-eminence in the world. Be not as the fly that is always seeking sore and wounded places; and tell not of the faults and failings of those about thee. Dare not to rejoice when thine enemy comes to the ground; but give him food when he hungers. Be on thy guard lest thou give pain

ever to the widow and the orphan. Never enter thy house with abrupt and startling step, and bear not thyself so that those who dwell under thy roof feel dread when in thy presence. Purge thy soul of angry passion, that inheritance of fools ; love wise men, and strive to know more and more of the works and the ways of thy Creator. Forget not that the hope of pious souls is that concealed paradise prepared by God before the foundations of the world ; that consecrated place where pure and holy spirits enter at last into their rest.

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No crown carries such royalty with it as doth humility ; no monument gives such glory as an unsullied name ; no worldly gain can equal that which comes from observing God's law ; the highest sacrifice is a broken and contrite heart ; the highest wisdom is that which is found in the law ; the noblest of all ornaments is modesty ; the most beautiful of all the things man can do is to forgive wrong.

Do not inquire too curiously concerning the Creator, or seek by questioning to know the origin of things ; but see that God is never far from thy thoughts ; forget not what He has done for thee, and let not strange gods, let not thine own sensuous nature hold dominion over thy life.

Let thy dealings be of such sort that a blush needs never visit thy cheek ; be sternly dumb to the voice of passion ; commit no sin, saying to thyself that thou wilt repent and make atonement at a later time. Let no oath ever pass thy lips ; play not the haughty aristocrat in thy heart ; follow not the desire of thine eyes, banish carefully all guile from thy soul, all unseemly self-assertions from thy bearing and thy temper. Speak never

mere empty words ; enter into strife with no man ; place no reliance on men of mocking lips ; wrangle not with evil men ; cherish not a too fixed good opinion of thyself, but lend thine ear to remonstrance and reproof.

Honor thy parents ; make peace whenever thou canst among people, lead them gently into the good path ; place thy trust in, give thy company to, those who fear their God.

If the means of thy support in life be measured out scantily to thee, remember that thou must take up thy suffering as a test of thy piety and a preparation for better things.

But if worldly wealth be lent to thee, exalt not thyself above thy poor brother ; for both of you came naked into the world, and both of you will surely have to sleep at last together in the dust.

Let the man of humble mind carefully evade all marks of special esteem and recognition from men. If his failings are spoken of, let him give God thanks for putting this humiliation on him for the amendment of his ways, if they need it. But if he is well and surely convinced that they need it not in that wherein they blame, let him after all remember that whatsoever he be, he is but imperfect compared with what is required of him, and forgive the person who is speaking ill of him.

Surrender not thyself a slave to hate, that ruin of all the heart's good resolves, that destroyer of the very savor of food, of our sleep, of all reverence in our souls.

If thou hadst lived in the dread days of martyrdom, and the populace had fallen on thee to force thee to apostatize from thy faith, thou wouldst surely, as did so many, have given thy life in its defense. Well, then ; fight now the fight laid on thee in the better days, the fight with evil desire ; fight and conquer, and seek for allies in

this warfare of thy soul, seek them in the fear of God and the study of His law.

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Murmur not because the world goes well with the powerful and wicked. The ways and the methods of God are wonderful and admirable, even though our poor eyes may sometimes not be able to see the good things which we may be sure He always does for us. Remain faithful to the law, deny thyself even many things that are permitted ; be, so far as thou canst, ever of cheerful and even joyous temper ; and forget not that it is to God, the Eternal, God the Only One, to whom thy soul returns in death.

That our soul may become perfected in righteousness, needs must that we bear griefs and agonies ; and never should it cross our minds for an instant to shrink from boldly acknowledging that we are Jews.

Mislead no one through thy actions designedly, be he Jew or non-Jew ; be not disputatious and quarrelsome with people, whatever be their faith.

If any one offer thee an amulet, alleging it to be useful in helping to favor or wealth, carry it not, but place thy undivided confidence in God alone.

If, when thy plans fail, thou wouldst seek any other Lord than the Eternal thy God, it would be apostasy.

There are three sorts of people for whom we ought to feel especial pain and sympathy : a reasonable, prudent woman subjected to a crazy fool ; a good man who has to take orders from a bad one ; and a noble being dependent upon one of vulgar nature.

Ingratitude is the blackest of faults ; it is not to be endured even toward the dumb creatures whom we use.

Hear not calumny willingly ; seek rather to admonish

and encourage him who complains bitterly to thee of the doings of another.

If a rich man and a poor man be sick, and thou seest all the world going to see the rich man, go thou to the poor one, even though he be ignorant and unlettered.

If thou art in debt, pay thy debts before thou givest alms.

Make no sign of visible disgust when thou meetest people afflicted with loathsome disease ; for they too are God's creatures, remember, and healthy as well as sick are all alike dependent upon Him.

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Let no one be troubled in mind, or take up wrong ideas, because of the prosperity of wicked people, or of such as hold parents in little honor ; their end is bad. The reason why good men have an ill lot in life is, lest men should fancy that the good man can only then be good when the world goes well with him. If a congregation has bad men at its head, that is a punishment for not valuing as they should the good men among them.

The children of noble, righteous converts to the faith are to be preferred for the marriage tie, to the children of Jews of low nature or conduct.

Let one who hath never known parents, but only elder brothers, render the respect and honor due to father and mother unto these.

It is because man is half angel, half brute, that his inner life witnesses such bitter war between such unlike natures. The brute in him clamors for sensual joy and things in which there is only vanity ; but the angel resists and strives to make him know that meat, drink, sleep, are but means whereby the body may be made sufficient for the study of the truths and the doing of the

will of God. Not until the very hour of death can it be certain or known which of the two hath won the victory.

The highest service that can be rendered God is to love Him, purely because He is our Creator. And he who is striving to love God will do well to say audibly each day, as he rises: "This day will I be a faithful servant of the Almighty; be on my guard against wrath, falsehood, hatred, quarrelsomeness; and forgive those who wound me." For whoso forgives is forgiven in his turn; hard-heartedness and a temper that will not make up quarrels, are a heavy burden of sin, unworthy of an Israelite.

The proud cedar is felled, while the humble shrub is left alone, fire ascends and goes out, water descends and is not lost.

What a man spends on the poor when he is in full health is gold; when sick, silver; what he provides for them in his last will, copper.

Unmeasured drinking of wine brings poverty, shame, quarrels; leads to calumnious talk, unchastity, murder, to the loss of freedom, of honor, of understanding.

Well is it with him who, even out of all men's sight, fulfills the will of God; who without murmuring suffers pain and trouble for his faith; the day will come when he shall be freed from his griefs.

Do not struggle vaingloriously for the small triumph of showing thyself in the right, and a wise man in the wrong; thou art not one whit the wiser therefor.

I lay on my children my injunction or advice that at morning, immediately after rising, they read some passages in the Pentateuch or Psalms, or do some work of mercy. In their intercourse with others, Jews or non-Jews, let them be conscientious and anxious to do right, amiable and accommodating, and never speak when

speech is superfluous; so will they be guarded against uttering words of calumny or mockery against others.

The thread on which the different good qualities of human beings are strung, as pearls, is—the fear of God. When the fastenings of this fear are unloosed, the pearls roll in all directions and are lost one by one. But without taking a high degree in morality we can neither enter into possession of the learning of divine things, nor fulfill positive precepts: nay, even a single grave moral fault may be the ruin of all other advantages, as when, for example, one is always seeking to set off his own excellence by bringing into prominence his neighbor's failings.

The heart is like a tablet as yet unwritten; fools scratch it all over and ruin it; only the wise know how to engrave it with suitable matter.

Five bad habits are hard to get rid of: chattering, calumny, angry temper, suspicion, associating with bad people. Never be ashamed to learn good, even from men less than thyself.

Be tender-hearted toward servants. Make not their labor too heavy for them; treat them not as though they were of no account whatever; even in dispute with a serving man speak affably, and listen to what he has to say.

Forget never the merits that thou lackest, but forget always the good that thou hast done; set down thy failings, thy faults, in thy book, but not the benefits thou hast conferred. Forget the wounds inflicted on thee by others, and when thou prayest, forget thou earthly things.

Thou puttest thyself in fine garments to please men; forget not that God looks into thy heart: adorn that well in honor of Him.