

Moses ben Nachman

A GREAT SCHOLAR, A HUMBLE MAN

By Rabbi Samuel Silver

The year 1970 marks the 600th anniversary of the death of one of the giants of Judaism.

He was Moses ben Nachman, known as Nachmanides. He is not to be confused with Maimonides, who lived an earlier age.

Nachmanides was respected for his vast scholarship. He helped to create what is known as the Golden Age of Spain, an epoch of great literary creativity of a spiritual nature.

Many of the ideals which we take for granted today were expounded by Nachmanides for both Jews and non-Jews. The value system of the Talmud, which contains ways for enriching life and human relationships is something he elaborated on in glittering literary productions.

When the Church challenged Judaism, Nachmanides became a gladiator on behalf of his people. He engaged a Christian divine in a debate. He so impressed his Christian audience with his learning that the King himself awarded him a prize. Later Nachmanides went to Palestine to live.

In a tribute to Nachmanides, Rev. Marc Angel, in the bulletin of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City, quotes just one statement by the great sage demonstrating how humble he was in spite of his vast knowledge.

The scholar was giving guidance to his son, and in a letter he wrote as follows:

"All your words should be said pleasantly... You should consider every man to be greater than yourself.

"If he is wiser and richer, certainly you owe him respect.

"If he is poorer and less wise, think in your heart how much more innocent he is than you.

"For if he should sin, he sins either because poverty or ignorance drove him to error.

"But if you sin you have not his excuses.

"Think about your words carefully before you utter them".

Nachmanides was one of your cultural forbears. It should make us proud to know that we descend from men of such greatness of mind and humility of spirit.

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