

In Memoriam, Baruch Spinoza

The Tercentenary of the death of Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) occurs this year. For taking philosophic and theologic positions disapproved of by the Jewish community of Amsterdam, Spinoza, at the age of twenty-four, was excommunicated. The decree that excommunicated Spinoza was read by Rabbi Isaac de Fonesca Aboab:

"The chiefs of the council do you to wit, that having long known the evil opinions and works of Baruch de Spinoza, they have endeavored by divers ways and promises to withdraw him from his evil ways, and they are unable to find a remedy, but on the contrary have had every day more knowledge of the abominable heresies practised and taught by him, and of other enormities committed by him, and have of this many trustworthy witnesses who have deposed and borne witness in the presence of the said Espinoza, and by whom he stood convicted. . . .

With the judgment of the angels and of the saints we excommunicate, cut off, curse and anathematize Baruch de Spinoza, with the consent of the elders and of all this holy congregation, . . . with the anathema wherewith Joshua cursed Jericho, with the curse which Elisha laid upon the children, and with all the curses which are written in the law. Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night. Cursed be he in sleeping and cursed be he in waking, . . . The Lord shall not pardon him, . . . The Lord shall destroy his name under the sun,

And we warn you, that none may speak with him by word of mouth, nor by writing, nor show any favor to him, nor be under one roof with him, nor come within four cubits of him, nor read any paper composed or written by him."

By the above words, Spinoza was exiled from the Jewish community. Who lost the most? Certainly it was the Jewish community and their heirs, who were denied the thought of one of the greatest minds in history. Had there been a polydox Jewish community in Spinoza's day, as there is today, he would have occupied an honored place there. Our lives as Jews today would have been so much the richer for it.

Reclaiming Spinoza is just one of the many tasks the polydox Jewish community of our time has before it.

The Editors