Darshan Yeshiva

Moses Mendelssohn

Bio

Moses Mendelssohn was a German philosopher and Jewish intellectual whose pioneering work in Biblical criticism and Torah study became the foundations for the 'Haskalah,' the Jewish enlightenment (beginning in the 18th century). Mendelssohn began his lifelong study under Rabbi David ben Naphtali Frankel, a respected Talmudist and Chief Rabbi of Berlin, and was considered as a potential rabbinic student himself. Mendelssohn would eventually undertake secular studies, however, and his works reflected a growing modern sensibility, including new translations of Torah, a rejection of some traditional Jewish ideas, and more.

Key Ideas

- The importance of understanding and tolerance between religious groups.
- The value of Jews receiving non-Jewish education.
- The need for a critical evaluation of traditional Jewish beliefs and ideas.
- The usefulness of different religions in meeting the needs of different people and cultures.
- The importance of the separation of religion and the state.

Resources

Jerusalem is a work in which Mendelssohn delineates his understanding of the relationship between religion and the state. It is also an opportunity for Mendelssohn to express his conception of the role Jews might play in a wider, secular society.

The Bi'ur is Mendelssohn's High Germanic translation of the Torah and other selections from the *Tanakh*, as well as commentary written by Mendelssohn himself and others. It was considered a valuable treasure during its time, especially given that it made the text more widely accessible to German Jews.

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