

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות שלם ירמיה ו טז

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ANY one, who considers the circumstances of the Jewish people after the desolation of the first temple, will be inclined to make great allowances for the spirit of the rabbinical laws against idolaters. Idolatry was not to them a mere system of religious error. It was the source of all their misfortunes; and idolaters were the destroyers of their country—the desolators of their temple—and their own most cruel and tyrannical oppressors. Scarcely had they emerged from the horrors of the Babylonish captivity, when they were exposed to the insults and outrages as well as the persecutions of Antiochus; and hardly had they recovered from the havoc of his fury, before they were overrun by the fierce and haughty Romans, who were at last the executioners of the wrath of the Almighty. They not only saw the abominations of idolatry, but they felt the hard hand of the idolater; no wonder, then, if they hated the man as well as the system. In the *Hilchoth Rotzeach* there is a law which amply illustrates the misery of their situation, and the habitual treatment which they received from idolaters. According to this law, "It is forbidden to a Jew to be alone with Gentiles, for they are suspected of shedding blood; neither is a Jew to join company with them in the way; if he meet a Gentile, he is to cause him to pass on his right-hand (that the Jew, as the commentary says, may be able to defend himself, in case the Gentile should make an attempt on his life); if they be ascending a height, or going down a descent, the Jew is not to be below and the Gentile above him; but the Jew above and the Gentile below, lest he should fall upon him to kill him; neither is he to stoop down before him, lest he should break his skull." What an affecting picture does this present of the Jews under heathen domination; and who can wonder if such treatment called forth the natural feelings of the human heart, and dictated laws in the same fierce and merciless spirit? We, for our part, are quite ready to admit and to deplore the mighty provocations, which roused the spirit of retaliation in the rabbies, and consequently, to make all due allowance for the men. But that is not the question before us. We are inquiring whether their religious system, the oral law, is or is not from God, and whether this religious system teaches Jews to love all their fellow-men as them-

selves? We have shown that the evidence adduced on this point by the French and Bavarian Jews, proves the contrary; and is therefore, nothing to the purpose. But we do not wish to rest the decision upon such limited proof, even though it be strong; we are willing to look at the whole system, and to compare it with the law and the prophets, which we all admit as divine authority. We say, then, that the Talmud not only does not teach us to love all our fellow-men, but that it puts idolaters altogether without the pale of humanity. We have seen already that it forbids its followers to save the life of a perishing idolater. But it goes farther still, and extends this precept even to an idolater's infant, which knows not its right-hand from its left.

בן ישראל לא תניק את בנה של נכריה מטני שמאמלו
 בן לעבדה של כוכבי ומולו ולא תילד את דגברי
 עב' אבא מילתא דהא בשכר מטני איבה :

"A daughter of Israel shall not suckle the son of a heathen woman, because that would be to bring up a son for idolatry; neither shall she act as midwife to a heathen idolatress. But if she should, it must be for pay, on account of the enmity (that might otherwise be excited)." (*Hilchoth Accum.*, c. ix. 16.) What is meant by "pay, on account of the enmity," is fully explained in the following passage, which forbids a rabbinical physician to cure a sick idolater;—

מכאן אזהר: למד שאסור לרפא עובדי כוכבים ומולות
 אטלו בשכר וזבא דהא מתיירא מן או סדיה דווש
 משום איבה מרפא בשכר אבל בחנם אסור :

"Hence thou learnest, that it is forbidden to cure idolaters even for pay. But if (an Israelite) is afraid of them, or is anxious on account of enmity, he may cure them for pay; but to do it gratuitously is forbidden." Hence the commonest offices of humanity are forbidden. But the Talmud goes further still, and prohibits even the giving of good advice to these outcasts.

אסור להשיא עצה טובה לגוי או לערד רשע . . .
 ולא תנבזה דניאל אלא על שדשיא עצה טובה לנבוכדנצר
 ליתן צדקה . שטאמר לון מלכא מלכי ישור עק' :

"It is forbidden to give good advice to a heathen or to a wicked slave. . . . Daniel was exposed to danger for no other reason than this, that he advised Nebuchadnezzar to give alms, as it is written, 'Wherefore, O

king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee.' Daniel iv. 23, in English 27.)* A more striking instance of the spirit of the Talmud can hardly be found. Nebuchadnezzar was the benefactor of Daniel, and had elevated him from the situation of a captive to the first dignity of the empire; and Daniel had not refused, but voluntarily taken upon himself the duties and responsibilities of the king's chief adviser. Under such circumstances, an ordinary reader of the Bible would imagine that Daniel was bound by every tie of gratitude to his benefactor, of duty and fidelity to his sovereign, to give him the best advice in his power. No, says the Talmud. If the man be an idolater, gratitude, duty, and fidelity are out of the question; and because Daniel exercised those godlike graces, he was punished. It appears, at all events, on the Talmud's own showing, that Daniel was not a Talmudist. These extracts seem sufficient to prove, that the Talmud altogether excludes idolaters from all benefit of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The system which makes it unlawful to save his life, to cure his sickness, to suckle his child, to help his wife in the hour of nature's trial, or even to give him good advice, can scarcely be said to teach us to love all our fellow-men, without any regard to religious differences. It may, however, be said, that the passages adduced lead to this conclusion only by inference, and that none of them expressly declares that an idolater is not our neighbour. We shall, therefore, add a few passages where this is plainly taught.

הגונב את הגוי אי שגב נכסי הקדש אינו משלם
אלא הקץ בלבד שנאמר ישלם שנים לרשעו . לרשעו
ולא להקדש . לרשעו ולא לגוי .

"He that steals from a Gentile, or he that steals property devoted to sacred purposes, is only to pay the principal: for it is said, 'He shall pay double unto his neighbour.' (Exod. xxii. 8, English 9.) To his neighbour, not to devoted property. To his neighbour, and not to a Gentile." (Hilchoth Genevah., c. ii. 1.) The same decision is given with respect to the law found Levit. v. 20 (in English, vi. 1), "If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour, . . . all that about which he has sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto." The oral law says—

הנשבע לגוי משלם את הקץ ואינו חייב בדומם
שנאמר וכדש בעמינו :

"He that sweareth to a Gentile must pay the principal, but is not bound to add the fifth part—(why not?) because it is said, 'and lie

* Hilchoth Rotzeach, c. xii. 15. See also Bava Bathra, fol. iv. col. 1., about the middle of the page, where the punishment of Daniel is more fully discussed.

unto his neighbour.'" Hilchoth Gezelah, c. i. 7. So that the reason here assigned why the Gentile is not to get the fifth part in addition, is, because he is not a neighbour. In like manner, in the xith chapter of this same treatise, which treats of the restoration of things found, it is expressly commanded to restore whatever belongs to a Jew, because he is a brother; but to keep whatever belongs to an idolater, because he is not a brother.

השבת אבידה לישׂראל כמות עשה שנאמר והשב
רשעים :

"To restore to an Israelite any thing that he has lost, is an affirmative commandment, for it is said, 'Thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother.' (Deut. xxii. 1.) אבידה גוי עובר ל' מותרת שנאמר אבידה אדוך . והמחזירה הרי זה עובר עבירה מפני שהוא כמות די רשעי עולם . ואם החזירה לקדש את השם כרי שיפאר את ישׂראל ידעו שהם בעלי אמונה הרי זה משומר :

"Any thing that a Gentile has lost is lawful, for it is said, 'With all lost things of thy brother's.' (Deut. xxii. 3.) And he that restores it transgresses a transgression, for he strengthens the hands of the wicked of the world. But if he restore it in order to sanctify the Name, that they may think well of Israel, and know that they are honest people, this is praiseworthy." In these passages (and many more might be added if it were necessary) it is plainly taught that an idolatrous Gentile is not to be regarded as "our neighbour," or our brother. We think then that we have fully proved that the Jewish deputies in France, and the compilers of the Jewish Catechism in Bavaria, did not learn their exposition of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" from the Talmud; neither in the particular passage which they quote, nor from the general principles of the Talmudic system. We have already stated our belief that they learned that exposition from the New Testament, for there it is taught plainly and repeatedly. We quoted, in proof, a parable spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall now add a few more passages in confirmation.

As to showing kindness to all our fellow-men, the New Testament teaches us to make no exception with regard to idolaters, or others who have not the same creed, but gives the following general rules:—"As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good UNTO ALL MEN, especially unto them that are of the household of faith." (Gal. vi. 10.) "See that no man render evil for evil UNTO ANY MAN; but ever follow that which is good both among yourselves, and TO ALL MEN." (1 Thess. v. 15.) "The Lord make you to increase and abound in LOVE one toward another, and TOWARD ALL MEN." (1 Thess. iii. 12.) You observe that in these general rules the New Testament makes no reservation with respect to idolaters, or epicureans,

or heretics, or any other of those unfortunate beings whom the Talmud outlaws from all the common charities of humanity. It commands us to do good to *all*—and that not to avoid enmity, nor for the sake of the ways of peace, nor because we are afraid, nor because we wish them to speak well of us, and to be thought honest people, but because it is our duty. The New Testament requires of its followers, not only to abstain “from active violence” in injuring them, but to do active good in assisting them, and the examples, which it proposes for our imitation, are of the same character as the precepts which it imposes upon our obedience. It sets before us Jesus of Nazareth, whom the traditionists crucified, praying for his murderers, and saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”—and Stephen, his first martyr, interceding for them that stoned him, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” And Paul, whose feelings to those who differed from him in religion are thus expressed, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” It sets before us the disciples of the Lord Jesus healing the diseases of all who applied, without reference to their religious opinions. (Acts xix. 11.) We repeat our question, then, which system is according to the truth and the will of God, the Talmud, or the New Testament? Your brethren in France and Bavaria have declared, by adopting the New Testament exposition, that it is right; and by rejecting the intolerant principle which pervades the oral law, that the oral law is wrong. We trust that your hearts respond to their declarations. But we do not rest the decision on the natural feelings of the heart, we appeal to Moses and the prophets.

The question is, do the laws, which God gave respecting the idolatrous nations of Canaan, apply to all other idolaters, and under all circumstances? The oral law answers this question in the affirmative, and hence the source of all those revolting laws which we have just considered. But the oral law is wrong: 1st, Because it draws a general conclusion from a particular case, which is contrary to all sound reasoning. That the command to destroy these nations was peculiar appears from the command itself—God does not speak generally of all the heathen, but only of certain nations which he specifies—“When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land, whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perrizites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no

covenant with, nor shew mercy unto them.” (Deut. vii. 1, 2.) Here the command is precise, and is as much violated by extending it to those, to whom God has not extended it, as by refusing to execute it on those, whom He has here designated as the just victims of his wrath.

2dly, The oral law is wrong in this general application, for it contradicts the written law—God expressly distinguishes between these and the other nations—“When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. . . . Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth, but thou shalt utterly destroy them; the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.” (Deut. xx. 10, 18.) In the first case God commands mercy—in the second, extermination. And if, as in the first case, he commands merciful dealing even to a nation at war with Israel, much more does he command it towards those, with whom Israel is not at war.

3dly, The written law not only gives a general rule, but lays down exceptions founded on certain principles. “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother; thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land.” (Deut. xxiii. 7.) Now the Egyptians were idolaters, yet God commands the Israelites not to abhor them, and gives a reason which will now apply to most nations of the earth—“Because thou wast a stranger in his land.” Suppose, then, that a rabbinist were to see an Egyptian drowning, is he to show him mercy? To say No, will contradict the written law; and to say Yes, will overthrow the monstrous fabric of rabbinic legislation respecting idolaters.

4thly, The general practice of the Israelites, as described in the subsequent books of the Old Testament, directly contradicts the oral law. We have seen already that the prophet Daniel did not hold the doctrine, that no mercy was to be shown to an idolater. When he knew of the judgment that was about to descend on Nebuchadnezzar, he was deeply distressed. “He was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him;” and instead of leaving the idolater to perish, he endeavoured to find means to ward off the calamity. The prophet Elisha was of the same mind; when the idolatrous leper came to him for help, he administered it, and, contrary to the

Talmudic command, he administered it *gratuitously*; and Gehazi, for acting in conformity to Talmudic ordinance, and making the idolater pay, was smitten with the leprosy. (2 Kings v. 20.) In like manner, when the Syrian host was miraculously led into Samaria, and the King of Israel proposed to act as a Talmudist and smite them, the man of God answered, "Thou shalt not smite them; wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken with thy sword and bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." (2 Kings vi. 21, 22.) This answer is important, as it not only furnishes an example, but exhibits the principle, according to which idolatrous captives, not Canaanites, were to be treated. The prophet appeals to the general rule, "Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and bow?" Even then, as they are not Canaanites, they ought not to be smitten; therefore, in this case much more, they ought to be treated with mercy. We have still another instance of a prophet acting contrary to the oral law, and in conformity with the New Testament interpretation. The prophet Jonah once saw idolaters "nigh unto death," and ready to sink in the great deep, but he had mercy on them, and pointed out the means of deliverance. When he fled from the presence of the Lord, the mariners in whose ship he sailed were idolaters; for when the storm raged, it is said, "They cried every man unto his god." In their anguish they said unto him, "What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" In other words, "What shall we do to save our lives?" Now if Jonah had been a Talmudist, it would have been plainly not his duty to have told them, but to have allowed the sea to rage on until the ship went to pieces, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the idolaters go to the bottom. This would have been an act of obedience to a precise command, and could have made no difference to Jonah. For, as to himself, there are two suppositions possible, either he knew that the Lord had prepared a fish to swallow him, or he knew it not. If he knew it, then he was secure of his own safety, and would have known that the fish could find him out just as readily if the ship went to pieces, as if the idolaters threw him into the sea. It would, therefore, have been doubly his duty to conceal from the idolaters the means of deliverance. On this supposition, Jonah's counsel to them can only be accounted for on the principle that he was not a Talmu-

dist, but considered it his duty to save the lives of perishing idolaters, even when nothing was to be feared or to be gained. If, on the other hand, he did not know of the fish, he must have expected a watery grave, whether the idolaters threw him into the sea, or whether he waited until the ship went to pieces. In this case, also, if a Talmudist, it would have been his duty to have stayed where he was, and if he perished, die in the fulfilment of the command, to show no mercy to idolaters. But he did not—he had compassion on them, and, to save their lives, relinquished his only chance of safety, by telling them to throw him into the sea. It is plain, therefore, that Jonah was not a Talmudist. We have here, then, three inspired prophets, Daniel, Elisha, and Jonah, all bearing a practical testimony against the Talmudic principle, which extends God's law against the Canaanites to all idolaters, and under all circumstances.

Lastly, we have the testimony of the God of Israel himself. He who gave the command to destroy the Canaanites on account of their exceeding wickedness, shows by his own dealings with the world, that this case is an exception to the general rule, for "The Lord is good to all, and his mercies are over all his works." He provides food and clothing for the idolater, as well as for those who worship him in truth; or, as the New Testament says, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. vi. 45.) He, then, whose conduct most resembles that of his Creator, is, beyond all doubt, the nearest to the truth. The Talmud, therefore, is wrong, and the New Testament explanation of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is right. We ask the Jews, then, to account for this fact, that Jesus of Nazareth was right, and those who condemned him wrong, respecting one-half of the whole law. And we ask, moreover, those Jews who abhor the above Talmudic principles, how they can conscientiously join in the synagogue prayers, which ascribe to the Talmud Divine authority? We ask them why, at the very least, they have never publicly protested against these enormities; but allow their brethren through the world to remain victims to a system, which not only contradicts the written law of God, but outrages all the better feelings of even fallen humanity?

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