

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם. ירמיהו' טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

NUMBER 10.]

FRIDAY, MARCH 18, 1836.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

THERE are various marks by which a religion of man's making may be detected. It is usually intolerant, superstitious, and voluminous. It limits the love of God to a particular class. It exalts ceremonial observances above the worship of the heart; and so multiplies its laws and definitions, as to put the knowledge of it beyond the reach of any but the learned. Any one of these marks would go far towards shaking the claims of a religious system. For instance, if it lay down as religious duties so many and such subtle laws, as it is impossible for the unlearned to attain a knowledge of, it is plainly the invention of the learned, who have thought only of themselves, and have not that tender regard and consideration for the ignorant, which the Creator has. His religion must be for all, the poor as well as the rich, and the ignorant as well as the wise of this world. We fear that the oral law of the rabbies will not stand any one of these tests; it is, at all events, a religion for the learned, and the learned only. There is scarcely one of its commandments that is not so encumbered with distinctions and definitions, as to make the right interpretation of it the sole property of the educated. Take, for example, one of the first and most frequent of the commandments, in the rabbinist's daily practice, *דמים* (the washing of hands.) The command appears very simple. It says—

רחץ ידיו ורחץ על נשלת ידים

"Let him wash his hands, and pronounce the benediction for the washing of hands." (Orach Chaim. §. 4.) But out of this short command arise endless distinctions, according to which the act performed is regarded as a valid or invalid fulfilment of the command.

כל הנגסל ידיו צריך להודיר בארבעה דברים: במים עצמן שלא ידיו מסולק לנשלת ידיו ובששיר שיהיה בקו רביעי לכל שתי ידים ובכלי שיהיו המים שנוסלם בקו בכלי ובנוסל שיהיו המים במקו מכה נוח;

"Every one who washes his hands must attend to four things. 1st, To the water, that it be not unlawful for the washing of hands. 2d, To the measure, that there be a quarter for the two hands. 3d, To the vessel, that the water, wherewith the washing is performed, be in a vessel. 4th, To the washer, that the water come with force from him that pours." (Hilchoth Berachoth vi. 6.)

Each of these four limitations requires new explanations and definitions of its own, as for example, there are four things that make water unlawful for the washing of hands; one of these is, if any work be done with it. This necessarily requires fresh definitions of what is and is not work. Then come the directions as to how far the washing is to reach, the position of the hands, whether they are to be held up or down, the drying of the hands. A perfect and accurate knowledge of all these conditions can be attained only by the learned. And after all the care which these things require, the Israelite may after all fall short of Talmudic requirement, for there is still another condition, that involves another host of rabbinic definitions, the non-observance of which will invalidate the merit of his washing.

כל החוצץ במבילה חוצץ בידים וכו'

"Every thing that is an impediment in baptism is an impediment in washing of hands." (Hilchoth Mikvaoth xi. 2.) This, of course, leads to a new inquiry, what constitutes an impediment.

אלו החוצצין באדם: גלוף שדווק לעין וגל שדווק למכה ודמים של נבי המכה ודמייה שעליה וגלוי צואה של בשור ובק או שיש שדווק חוצץ החמלוטין של הנקו ושים היין ושים החוצצים וכו'

"These are the impediments in human beings. The film that is outside the eye. The incrustation outside a wound. Dry blood that is on a wound. The plaster that is on it. Filth upon the flesh. The impurity or dirt upon the nails. Dirt upon the body, mud, potter's clay, &c." (Ibid. c. ii. 1.) Every one of these can give rise to endless questions in casuistry, which are evidently beyond the powers of the unlearned, and must draw him, if he be a conscientious man, to the rabbi to solicit his advice. Thus, one of the very first commandments with which the Jew begins the day, requires for its accurate fulfilment a degree of knowledge which is far beyond the attainment of the multitude. This one commandment involves scores of others. Nay, we doubt not that an accurate Talmudist might make 613 constitutions out of this one alone; and we appeal to the conscience of the great majority of Jews in London to decide whether they possess the knowledge here required, and consequently

whether it is possible for them to keep this one commandment. If they transgress any one of these rabbinic distinctions, their hands are not washed, and consequently they are unfit for prayer. But this is not a command for the morning only. It must be repeated through the day.

כל האוכל הפת שמגזינין עליו המוציא צריך נטילת ידים  
חזילה וסוף ואף על פי שהיא פת חולין ואף על פי שאין  
דין מלמכות ואינו יודע להן שומאדה לא יאכל עד שישלח  
שהי ידיו וכן כל דבר ששיבולו במשקן צריך נטילת ידיו  
חזילה

"Every one who eats that sort of bread, for which the benediction is, 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe! who bringeth forth bread from the earth,'\* is bound to wash his hands at the beginning and end. And although the bread be common, and although his hands have not been defiled, and he is not aware of any uncleanness upon them, he is not to eat until he wash both his hands. And thus, also, with regard to any thing that is dipped in fluid, the washing of hands is necessary at the beginning." (Hilchoth Berachoth vi. 1.) Here, again, it is necessary to know the different sorts of bread, and the compounds that may be made with the different sorts of flour, and the various forms of benediction, and out of these again may arise as many doubts and questions as out of the former, for the solution of which learning, acuteness, and practice are required; and the want of these may lead to transgression, and, according to the rabbies, to most fatal consequences. For instance, neglect of this command after the meal may cause blindness.

כל פת שהמלח בו צריך נטילת ידים באחרונה שמה יש  
בו מלח סדומית או מלח ששבעו כמלח סדומית ויעביר  
ידיו על עיניו ויסמא \* מפני זה חייבין לישול ידים בסוף כל  
סעודה מפני המלח \* ובמחנה פסורי \* בנטילת ידים  
בחזילה \* מפני שהן פסורי \* במלמכה וחייבין באחרונה  
מפני הסכנה

"All bread that has salt in it requires washing of hands after it; lest perhaps it might be the salt of Sodom, or salt of the same nature, and a man might pass his hand over his eyes and become blind. On this account all are bound to wash their hands at the end of every meal, because of the salt. But in a camp they are exempt from washing at the beginning, because they are oppressed with the fatigues of war, and are bound to wash after meal on account of the danger." (Ibid. 3.) Suppose, then, that a poor ignorant man, with the best intention in the world, set about this washing, and made a mistake with regard to the water, or the vessel, or the pouring, or the position of his hands; or suppose that a soldier, in the hurry of a camp, were to make this mistake, or omit the

\* Jewish prayer-book, p. 152.

washing altogether, and then have the ill luck to put his hands to his eyes, according to the oral law, blindness would be the consequence. Any neglect or defect in the morning ablution would be more fatal still.

וידקק לערות עליהן ג' פעמים מפני שרח רעה שורה  
על הידים קודם נטילה ואינו סדר עד שישנה עליהן שלש  
פעמים \* ועל כן צריך למונע מהגיע בידו קודם נטילה  
לפה \* ולחושם \* ולאונים \* ולעינים \* מפני שרח רעה  
שורה עליהם

"A man must be very careful in pouring water on his hands three times, for an evil spirit rests upon the hands before washing, and does not depart until water be poured on them three times. Therefore it is necessary, before washing, to abstain from touching the hand to the mouth, and the nose, and the ears and the eyes, because an evil spirit rests upon them." (Orach Chaim, §. 4.)

Now, is this the religion of the God of love, and mercy, and justice? Is it at all like Him to give laws so subtle and multifarious in their distinctions, that it is next to impossible for the unlearned man to obey them aright, and then to attach to this non-observance such calamitous consequences? If it be replied that the punishment is visited only on those who transgress wilfully, then there are thousands of Jews, perhaps in this very city, who live in the habitual and wilful omission of this precept, and who have the use of their eyes, just as well as the strictest Rabbinist. This fact, which no one will dispute, proves beyond doubt, that the oral law has spoken falsehood, and therefore throws utter discredit upon its testimony respecting the tradition of the commandment itself. It is confessedly not a commandment from God, but from the Scribes.

כבר ביארו שנטילת ידים וטבילתן מדברי סופרים

"We have explained long ago, that the washing and bathing of the hands are derived from the words of the Scribes." (Hilchoth Mikva'oth, xi. 1.) That they had no divine authority for the command is evident from the subtlety and superstition of its ordinances; for we presume that few will question the superstition of the threat of blindness to the disobedient, or of the fable of the evil spirit resting upon the hands. One such command, then, will go far to discredit the whole story of an oral law, and to invalidate the character of its witnesses. They were evidently superstitious men, no way elevated above the vulgar prejudices of the times, not at all scrupulous in adding to the law of God, and evidently aiming at a complete domination over the consciences of their followers. It is hardly possible to believe that they were not aware of the necessary result of the system, the complete subjugation of the consciences of the multitude. The mass of mankind has no leisure for the study of juristic distinctions, they must, therefore, if they believe such to be

divine, cast themselves upon the mercy of the learned, and there can be no doubt that those who have the keys of salvation, will also possess no small degree of influence and power in this world. But, whatever was the motive, there can be no doubt about the severity with which the rabbies enforced this command. They exacted even from the poor unfortunate, whom circumstances left only enough water to slake his thirst, that he should sacrifice a part of it to this rabbinical purification.

אֲשֶׁלוּ אֵין לוֹ מִים אֵלָא כִּי שְׁתִּיָּה נוֹשֵׁל יָדָיו בְּמִצְוַת  
וְהָיָה אִם אֵין לוֹ מִים אֵלָא כִּי שְׁתִּיָּה נוֹשֵׁל יָדָיו בְּמִצְוַת

“Though he should only have enough water to drink, he is to wash his hands with a part of it, and then to eat, and to drink the remainder.” (Hilchoth Berechoth, vi. 19.) And not content with this harsh requirement, they sentence the despiser of their commands to excommunication.

צִוְּךָ לִיהַדֵּר בְּנִשְׁלֹחַם שְׂכָל הַמּוֹלָל בְּנִשְׁלֹחַם חַיִּיב נִדְרִי  
“It is necessary to be very careful in the washing of hands, for every one who despises the washing of hands is guilty of excommunication.” (Orach Chaiim., §. 158.) And this same book confirms this decision by a case which actually occurred of a man thus excommunicated, and who dying in his excommunication had the usual indignities offered to his corpse.

אֵת מִי נָדוּ אֵת אֱלֶעָזָר בֶּן חַצְרַי שֶׁשָּׁפַק בְּנִשְׁלֹחַת יָדָיו  
וְשִׁכַח שְׁלֹחַת יָדָיו בֵּית דִּין הַחִיבֵהוּ אֲבָן גְּדוֹלָה עַל אֲדוֹנוֹ לַמֶּדֶךְ  
שֶׁל הַמִּתְנַדֵּה וְכֵן בְּנִדְרוֹ בִּד' סוֹלֵקִים אֵת אֲדוֹנוֹ  
“Whom did they excommunicate? Eleazar ben Chatzar, who despised the washing of hands; and when he was dead, the tribunal sent, and had a great stone laid on his coffin, to teach thee that of every one who is excommunicated and dies in his excommunication, the coffin is stoned by the tribunal.” (Talmud. Berechoth, fol. 19, col. 1.) When they had the power they employed it to the full, and now that they have it not, the oral law still threatens poverty and extirpation to every transgressor.

כֹּל הַמּוֹלָל בְּנִשְׁלֹחַת יָדָיו בָּא לְיָד עֲנִיּוֹת : וְהָיָה  
אֲמָר ר' אֱלֶעָזָר כֹּל הַמּוֹלָל בְּנִשְׁלֹחַת יָדָיו נֶעֱקַר מִן הָעוֹלָם :  
“Every one who despises washing of hands sinks into poverty. R. Zerika says in the name of R. Eliezer, Every one that despises the washing of hands is rooted out of the world.” (Orach Chaiim., *ibid.*) Such is the toleration of the oral law towards Jews, accused of no breach of God's commandment, convicted of no denial of God's Word, guilty of no crime. And yet these same men, who are strict even to persecution about one of their own institutions, allow that which they consider the Word of God to be transgressed with impunity, if it be expedient. They assert their belief, that the law of Moses forbids the Jews to have cloth-

ing, like that of the Gentiles, to shave or to wear their hair like the other nations, and yet they say the transgression of this divine command is lawful under the following circumstances.

יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׂתִיָּה קָרִיב לְמַלְכוּת צֹרֵךְ לִישֵׁב לְפָנֵי מַלְכֵיהֶם  
הִיָּה לוֹ גִּנְאָה לִּי שְׂמָא יִדְמָה לֶהֱוֹן הִרִיז הוּא מוֹרָר לְלִבּוֹשׁ  
כְּלַבּוֹשֵׁיזֵין וְלִגְלוּל כְּבִדּוֹ מִנֵּי בִרְכּוֹ שֶׁהֵן שְׁשִׁין

“An Israelite who is near to royalty, and is obliged to sit before Gentile kings, and for whom it would be disgraceful not to be like them, is allowed to dress and to shave as they do.” (Hilchoth Accum., xi. 3.) But it is not to be wondered at, that those should lightly esteem the Word of God, who are capable of confounding the guilt of transgressing a mere human ceremony with the guilt of transgressing a divine command. The Talmud makes the sin of neglecting this command as great as that of gross immorality.

כֹּל הָאוֹמֵר לֶחֶם בְּלֹא נִשְׁלֹחַת יָדָיו אֵין אֵישֶׁת זוֹנָה  
וְכִי  
“Every one who eats bread without washing of hands, is as guilty as if he had committed fornication.” (Sotah, fol. iv. col. 2.)

The sum of all that has been said is, that the Scribes and Pharisees added a commandment not given by Moses, that they so refined upon the conditions of its fulfilment as to make it almost impossible for the unlearned not to transgress it, and yet denounced such heavy penalties upon the transgressor as to make it an intolerable burden to the conscientious; that when they had the power, they persecuted all that refused obedience, and did not scruple to pronounce the guilt of transgression as great as that of breaking one of the moral commandments. They have presented as the religion of Moses a system which is voluminous, superstitious, and intolerant; difficult to the comprehension of the unlearned, terrific to their consciences, and cruel to their persons. But when the poor were ground down and oppressed under this weight of superstition and tyranny, God sent them a deliverer in Jesus of Nazareth, who asserted the revealed truth of God, and protested against this mental bondage. “Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the Scribes which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled (that is to say, with unwashed hands) they found fault. . . . He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. . . . And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you and understand: there is nothing

from without a man that, entering into him, can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile him. . . . For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within, and defile the man." (Mark vii. 1—23.) Here the Lord Jesus asserts what is alike the truth of God, and agreeable to the dictates of sound sense. So Samuel said in the Old Testament.

הארם יראה לעינים ויודה יראה ללב

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart." (1 Sam. xvi. 7.) But the Scribes and Pharisees treated the Lord Jesus in the spirit of the laws which we have adduced above. They persecuted him unto death, and to the death He willingly went a martyr for the truth, and a sacrifice for the sin of the world. The authors of the oral law had but a short triumph. He rose from the dead, and his doctrine spread through the world, and everywhere announced freedom from the bondage of superstition as well as a hope of everlasting life. And the Jewish nation is at this hour enjoying the fruits of His death and doctrine in their liberty from rabbinic domination. Many of you now hold some of those principles, the assertion of which was the cause of His death. You believe that moral duties are far beyond ceremonial observances. You believe, many of you, that to eat with unwashed hands is no sin, and have given up the practice. You transgress this commandment of the Scribes, and yet you are not excommunicated nor persecuted. For all this you are indebted to Jesus of Nazareth. If the oral law had triumphed, and the doctrine of Jesus been silenced, you would still be living the victims of superstition or persecution. You would have been afraid of being struck with blindness, or haunted with an evil spirit, or even of being rooted out of the world. If a ray of divine light had visited your understanding, and you had protested against these traditions, you would have had to feel the weight of rabbinical persecution, like Jesus of Nazareth. You would have been excommunicated like Eleazar, and if God had given you strength to remain faithful, would have died excommunicated, and have had a stone upon your coffin. How is it that now you are free, that you can think and act without any such fear? Is it because the Talmud has altered?

No, it is just what it was. The conscientious believers in the Talmud are just the same as their fathers, and as conscientious men, if they had the power, they would think it their bounden duty to treat you, as their predecessors treated Eleazar. But the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth delivers you, and the followers of Jesus of Nazareth are your protectors against the rigour of the oral law, and the intolerance of your brethren. Should not this fact, then, lead you to examine into the claims of that same Nazarene? How is it that if the principles of Jesus of Nazareth should ever become universal, the world will be universally happy; whereas if the principles of those who rejected him became universal, the whole world will groan under superstition and cruelty? What stronger testimony can there be to the justice of his claims, and the injustice of his condemnation? Examine, then, into the other evidence, and in the meanwhile protest against the principles of the Talmud, and endeavour to deliver your brethren. There are multitudes of Jews who still groan under the superstitious laws respecting the washing of hands. In the book of daily prayer published here in London, the ordinance of washing of hands is acknowledged as divine. On the 151st leaf, col. 2, you will find the following blessing:—

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו על נשילת ידים

"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God! King of the universe! who hath sanctified us with his commandments, and commanded us to cleanse our hands." Now this is a positive untruth, God has not given the commandment respecting the washing of hands. And yet here your prayer-book solemnly tells him that he has. And this prayer-book has also put a rubric to this benediction, "When the children wash their hands in the morning, they are taught to say the following blessing." From which it appears that the Jewish children in England are still taught to acknowledge the divine authority of the Talmud, for the only way in which that benediction can be defended, is by saying that the oral law is divine, and that its commandments were given by God. It is therefore a holy and imperative duty on all those Israelites who reject Talmudic superstition and intolerance to have this benediction erased from their prayer-book, and to preserve the children from the infection of that law which persecutes the living and insults the dead.

London:—Sold at the London Society's Office, 16, Exeter-hall, Strand; by James Duncan, Paternoster-row; and B. Wertheim, 57, Aldersgate-street. This publication may be had by applying at No. 5, No. 7, or No. 13, Palestine-place, Bethnal green.

Macintosh, Printer, 20, Great New-street, London.