

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות שלום ירמיהו טז

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ONE of the many bright features in the national character of Israel is the devoted constancy, with which they have, in the most troublous times and under the most disastrous circumstances, celebrated the anniversary of their first great national deliverance. More than three thousand years have now rolled away since Israel's God heard the cries of the first-born in Egypt, and by slaying the first-born of their enemies, effected their salvation with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And yet the memory of that great event is still fresh in the hearts of the nation, and the children of Israel, wherever scattered, in the wilds of Poland, the coasts of Africa, or the torrid regions of India, as well as amongst ourselves, are now making simultaneous preparation for the approaching festival. Such constancy and such devotion bespeak minds of no ordinary mould, and naturally lead us to ask, how is it that the Lord does not now hear Israel's cries and prayers, which ascend from every region under heaven, and restore them to that place in His dispensations and that rank amongst the sons of men, which his Word assigns to them? A Christian would give the answer suggested by the New Testament, but we waive that at present. The oral law gives a reply the same in substance. It tells us that the mass of the nation has obscured the light of divine revelation by the admixture of human inventions, that, therefore, a restoration would only be the establishment of error, and is consequently impossible. We have already given some proofs of this assertion, the rabbinical laws relating to the passover furnish us with many more, and to these the season of the year now naturally refers us.

Amongst the first directions relating to the passover, the Word of God gives this plain command, "Even the first day shall ye put away leaven out of your houses." (Exod. xii. 15.) This is intelligible to the most illiterate, and easy to be obeyed, but the rabbies have superadded a mass of explanations and observances, which tend only to perplex and to burden the conscience. In the first place they are not satisfied with the honest endeavour of an Israelite to obey the command of God, unless he does it according to the form and manner which they prescribe.

וכה היא השבחה זו האמורה בתורה היא שיבטלו בלבו ויחשוב אותו כעפר וישים בלבו שאני כעפרו חמץ כלי ושכל חמץ שברשותו הרי הוא כעפר וכדבר שאין בו צורך כלל:

"What is meant by the putting away (of leaven) mentioned in the law? It is this, that a man annul it in his heart, and count it as dust, and intend in his heart to have no leaven whatever in his possession, and that all the leaven in his possession shall be as dust, and of no necessity whatever." (Hilchoth Chometz Umatzah, c. ii. 2.) Here, then, they require a formal intention, but they have also prepared a form of words in which to clothe it.

כל חמירא וחמיץ דאמא ברשותי דחמיתיה הלא חמיתיה דבשתיה הלא בשתיה לבטל ולהי כעפרא דאמרא:

"All manner of leaven that is in my possession, which I have seen, and which I have not seen; which I have removed, and which I have not removed, shall be null, and accounted as the dust of the earth." (Levi's Prayers for the Passover, fol. 2, col. 1.) And to this form a rubric is added, "If the master is not at home, he annuls the leaven wherever he is." Now this may at first sight appear as a very innocent ceremony, but God warns us against all additions to His word and commandments. It is in itself presumptuous, and, as connected with the rabbinical doctrine of merit, must have an injurious tendency upon the minds of the multitude. They will argue that by observing this form, they have fulfilled a commandment, and that consequently there is an additional sum of merit to be put to the credit side of their account, as a set off against their transgressions. And on the other hand, if they forget to go through this form at the right hour, and afterwards any leaven be found in their houses, the rabbies bring them in guilty of transgressing two negative commandments, which they say is a more heinous offence than disobeying the affirmative precepts.

לפיכך אם לא במל קודם שש ומשש שעתו למעלה מצא חמץ שהיה רעוהו עליו חדה בלבו ושכחו בשעת הביטור והא בשורו הרי זה עבר על לא יראה ולא יכבש'והרי לא בשר ולא במל:

"Therefore, if a man does not annul (the leaven) before the sixth hour, and afterwards

from the sixth hour and onwards should find leaven, which was on his mind and in his heart, but he forgot it at the hour of removal, and did not remove it: Behold, such an one has transgressed the command, 'It shall not be seen with thee' (Exod. xiii. 7), and also the command, 'It shall not be found in your houses' (Exod. xii. 19), for he neither removed it nor annulled it." (Hilchoth Chometz, c. iii. 8.) Now, can you believe that this decision is from God who searcheth the heart? Can you believe that a man who had it in his mind and heart to remove a piece of leaven according to God's commandment, but whilst removing the rest forgot this one piece, is to be brought in guilty, simply because he did not observe a mere form, which God has no where commanded? Or that he would not have been guilty, if he had repeated some half dozen words prescribed by men, sinners like himself? Very different is the declaration of God himself, "יֵן אִשֶׁר הָיָה עִם לִבָּךְ" "Because it was in thine heart" (1 Kings viii. 18): he accepted the intention, and gave it the blessing of obedience. The rabbinic decision is, therefore, not of God, and goes far towards overthrowing the claims of the whole oral law. But the rabbies were not satisfied with this invention of *בדוק בכול חמץ* annulling the leaven, they have imposed upon the consciences of their followers another observance, utterly unknown to Moses, and that is *בדוק חמץ* the searching for leaven.

אור לארבעה עשר בניסן קודם צאת הכוכבים בדקין את החמץ לאור הנר של שעה החזית. ומשדגוע ומנו אכור לעשות שום מלאכה ר"ל לאכול ר"ל ללמד:
 "On the evening before the 14th of Nisan, before the coming out of the stars, they are to search for the leaven by the light of a single wax taper: and when the time draws near, it is unlawful to do any work, or to eat, or to study." (Passover Prayers, fol. 1, col. 2.) For this command there is evidently no foundation in the law of Moses. It is confessedly מדברי סופרים of the words of the scribes, and yet the most minute directions are given, and the greatest attention required, as if it had been from God himself, and various cases supposed where a second search is necessary, as for instance;

אם ראה עכבר שנכנס לבית חמץ בפני אור בדוקה צריך לבדוק פעם שנייה אף על פי שמצא פסודין באמצע הבית אין אומרין כבר אבל אורחה הסת במקום זה חזר הפסודין אלא חוששין שמא הביחה בזור או בדלוק ואלו הפסודין שם היו ולשכך חזרו ובדקו: אם לא מצא כלום חזר זה בדוק כל הבית ואם מצא אורחה הסת שנמלה העכבר ונכנס אין צריך בדוקה:

"If, after the search, he see a mouse come into the house with leaven in his mouth, it is necessary to search a second time. And although he should find the crumbs about the house, he is not to say, the mouse has eaten

the bread long since, and these are the crumbs, but, on the contrary, he must fear lest it should have left the leaven in a hole or a window, and these crumbs were there before; he must therefore search again. If he find nothing, then he must search the whole house; but if he find the bread with which the mouse went off, then no further search is necessary." Another case of equal importance, and more ingenuity, is the following:—

נכנס עכבר לבית וכבר בפניו יצא עכבר משם וכבר בפני אומרין הוא הראשון שנכנס הוא האחרון שיצא ואינו צריך לבדוק: היה הראשון שנכנס שחור והוא שיצא לבן צריך לבדוק: נכנס עכבר וכבר בפניו יצא אורחה משם חולה וכבר בפניה צריך לבדוק: יצאה משם חולה ועכבר וכבר בפניה אינו צריך לבדוק שהה הכבר הוא שדחה בפני העכבר:

"If a mouse enter a house with bread in his mouth, and a mouse also go out of the same house with bread in his mouth, one may conclude that this is one and the selfsame mouse, and it is not necessary to search. But if the former that entered was black, and the latter that went out white, a search is necessary. If a mouse went in with bread in his mouth, and a weasel come out with bread in her mouth, it is necessary to search. If a mouse and a weasel both go out, and bread in the weasel's mouth, there is no search required, for this is the identical bread that had been before in the mouse's mouth." (Hilchoth Chometz, c. ii.) We do not mean to say that this sort of wisdom was never found in Christians. We are well aware that the scholastic divines display much of the same perverse ingenuity, and the achievements of mice have figured in Gentile theology too, but we have renounced that whole system as contrary to the Word of God. You still adhere to the theology of the Scribes, and are now about to keep a solemn festival according to their ordinances. And yet you see how poor their view of true piety, and how perverse the application of their time and their ingenuity. The most unlearned Israelite who has read the law of Moses in its simple dignity, will know very well that when God commanded the Israelites to remove leaven from their houses, he did not mean that they should go and rummage out the mouse-holes, or spend their time looking after mice and weasels. If, instead of the oral law, you had read this in the New Testament, would you not have taken it as complete evidence against the claims of that book? and if St. Paul or St. Peter had given such commands to the Gentile converts would you not have said, these men were either fools or knaves? But in the New Testament nothing like it is to be found. The precepts there given, and the instruction there conveyed, is all of a noble and dignified character, whilst the trifling and the folly still exist in the oral law handed down by those

who rejected Jesus of Nazareth. If the testimony of men at all depends upon the wisdom of him who gives it, the testimony of the Scribes is not worth much. But the trifling is exceeded by the presumption. These men have said, as we have quoted above from your prayer-book, "that when the time for the search draws near, it is unlawful to do any work, or to eat, or to study;" so that the poor man is to give up his lawful business, the hungry man to abstain from his lawful food, and all to neglect even the reading of God's holy Word, in order to go and search into holes and corners, for that which they know is not to be found, or to find that which was laid in their way intentionally and for that very purpose. We ask you can this be from God, or, are the men who make the reading of God's Word give way to this ceremony, to be depended upon as teachers of the true religion?

But the oral law not only adds human inventions, but lays down principles which involve considerable difficulties, the solution of which requires no small share of ingenuity. For instance,

חמץ שעבר עליו הפסח אכור בהני" לשלם

"It is for ever unlawful to have any profit from leaven, that has existed during the season of the passover." This is understood of leaven belonging to Israelites, and according to this all Israelites are obliged to sell, or give away, or lose all the leaven which they may have at the commencement of passover, and of course if they have much the loss would be very serious. But the rabbies who have made the difficulty, have also found various ways of evading it. One is by pledging the leaven with a certain form of words—

ישראל שהרחץ חמצו אצל הדני אם אמר לו אם לא הבאתי לך משהו מכאן ועד יום פלוני קנה חמץ זה מעבשיו ה"ו ברשות הדני ואחר החמץ מותר לאור הפסח

"An Israelite who has pawned his leaven to a Gentile, if he says to him, in case I do not bring thee the money from this time to a certain day, you have purchased this leaven from the present time; then this leaven is considered as in the possession of the Gentile, and it is lawful after the passover." (Hilchoth Chometz, c. iv.) If, therefore an Israelite, who has a large quantity of leaven, wishes to keep the commandment of removing all leaven from his possession, and at the same time to be able to resume the possession after the passover; and to have the worldly gain too, as well as the spiritual profit, he has nothing to do but to pawn it with this form of words. Now we ask every Jew of common sense, whether this be not a mere trick, an attempt to cheat one's own conscience, an unworthy artifice to serve God, and yet to avoid the loss which would result from a simple observance of the command?

It is plain that the man who acts thus has no real intention of renouncing the possession of the leaven. And this is not a single case; the oral law is rich in such cases, as it allows a mock pawning, so it allows a mock sale or gift.

אע"פ שהישראל מכיר לעב"ם ויודע בו שלא יבט בו כלל אלא ישמרו לו עד לאור הפסח ויחזור וחננו לו מחר :

"Although the Israelite knows that the Gentile will not touch the leaven at all, but keep it for him until after the passover, and will then return it to him, it is lawful." Of course a learned Israelite, acquainted with this provision of the oral law, will select a Gentile of this description to whom to sell or give his leaven, fully aware that after passover it will be his again, and he may enjoy the profit. But suppose a Jew had lent money to a Gentile, and received the interest every week in bread, what is he to do? It is evident that at passover he cannot make use of the bread on account of the leaven, neither after the passover can he receive that bread nor money for it, as according to the oral law he must have no profit from leaven which has witnessed the Paschal week. This is a difficult case, but it is not of our making. The oral law, which has proposed the difficulty, has also provided a solution.

ישראל שנקבל מני כספו רביה בכל שבוע רב אבי העזרי שיאמר לו קודם הפסח שיתן לו בשבוע של פסח קמח או משהו ואז אפי' אם באו אחר כך להשבון מותר לגבל ממנו מה שלא קבל בתוך הפסח :

"An Israelite who receives bread from a Gentile every week as interest, is, according to Avi Haezri, to tell him before the passover, that in the passover week he must give him flour or money, and then when they come to make up their accounts, he may receive from him that which he did not receive during the passover. (Arbah Turim. Orach Chaim, sec. 450.) According to this simple device, merely by saying a few words, he can make that lawful, which before would have been a great sin. It is not needful even to intend to have money or flour, he may intend to have the leaven after the passover; the words have the transforming efficacy. The same book gives Rashi's solution of another similar difficulty.

שאלה ל'שי ישראל וני שיש להם תור בשופח מדור לומר לגוי שול אתה של פסח ואני אסול אחר כך והשיב שיתנה קודם הפסח וישל דמים מאותו שבוע :

"A question proposed to Rashi—Suppose that an Israelite and a Gentile had an oven in partnership, shall he say to the Gentile, Take thou the profit during the passover, and I will take afterwards? He replied, Let him make a bargain before the passover, and take the price of that week." (Ibid.) A man of common sense will see that here, as in the other cases, the Jew does really re-

ceive the profit from leaven in existence during the passover, and that whether he receive the money or the profit before or afterwards, there is no real difference in the circumstances of the transaction; one principle pervades all these decisions, and that is, evasion of what is considered a divine command. The man who gives away the leaven with the full intention of resuming possession after the passover, and the man who sells only for the week, in full persuasion that his right and interest remain, does in reality neither give nor sell. There may be an outward appearance of the thing, but God does not judge according to the appearance; he looks on the intention of the heart. He is not satisfied with the form of giving or selling, but looking at the inmost thoughts of the souls, He sees that the man does not wish nor intend to do either the one or the other, and marks him as a deliberate and wilful transgressor. But we appeal to every unsophisticated mind in Israel, would such a system of evasion be considered as honourable, even according to the maxims of this world? Or can that conduct, which men would call dishonourable, be considered as an acceptable service before God? But, above all, can it be the law given to Moses by the God of truth? This it is which gives this discussion all its importance. If the Talmud and all its decisions were retained merely as a curious remnant of antiquity, as the effusions of a perverse ingenuity, or the waking dreams of scholastics, we might both pass it by with a smile. But it is proposed as the law of God. It is the religion of the great majority of the Jewish people, and no doubt at this very time, many an Israelite in Poland and elsewhere, if not in England, is preparing a mock sale, or drawing up a contract for the imaginary disposal of the leaven in his possession, in obedience to the above directions. They do it in simplicity, with a mistaken devotion. They are misled; but does not a fearful load of responsibility rest upon those Israelites who know better, and yet leave their brethren in this grievous error, yea, and confirm them in it by joining in all the ceremonies which that system prescribes? Because of this system, the nation is still exiled from the land of Israel. Because of this system, the anger of the Lord is not turned away, but His arm is stretched out still. If then you love your people—if you

desire their national exaltation, and their eternal welfare, lift up your voice and protest against the oral law. Condemn the scribes and pharisees as the inventors of the system, and the first authors of that moral captivity in which the people has been held for so many centuries. Now when you remember the mercies of the Lord in delivering you from the house of bondage, make an effort to deliver your brethren from the more degrading chains of error and superstition. At the same time we would ask you to consider the case of so many of your nation, who, when these chains were rivetting, gloriously maintained their freedom, and have left us a collection of writings, entirely free from every trace of this mistaken ingenuity. We mean the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. They, too, were Jews, children of Abraham, and of the stock of Israel. How is it then, that they who were condemned by the Talmudists as heretics, and propagators of a false religion, have left us the principles of a healthy, manly, and rational piety, whilst their judges and accusers have fallen headlong into error and even absurdity? If Jesus and his disciples were deceivers or fanatics, how is it that they were preserved from inculcating such false doctrines: and if the scribes and pharisees were right in condemning and persecuting them—were actually serving God in resisting false pretensions, how is it that they were given over to such delusions, and to such a system of trifling? That they were not infallible, the above extracts from the oral law prove beyond all controversy. They have altogether erred in the first element of acceptable worship, simplicity of intention and uprightness of heart. They have confounded the form with the reality of obedience to God's commands. And in all these things where they have erred, Jesus and his disciples have asserted and maintained the truth. Account for this fact. The Talmud tells you to light a taper and search for leaven in a mouse-hole, and to get rid of all in your possession by a fictitious contract. The New Testament says, "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor. v. 7, 8.)

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