

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם. ירמיהו טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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In discussing the substance and tendency of the oral law, the very nature of our design compels us to dwell upon its peculiarities, and to notice those traits which appear as its essential characteristics. Our object is not, primarily, to show its defects and faults, but to prove that it is not of divine authority. In proving this, it is absolutely necessary to show, by a comparison with the law and the prophets, as the unerring standard of right and wrong, that the system is bad. We know, and have more than once admitted, that as it is not a mere human invention, but a corruption of a divinely revealed religion, it must contain much that is good. But this admission no more justifies the system, than a small quantity of gold in a mixed metal would prove that the whole mass is gold. And this comparison may be well illustrated by the holy day constitutions, which have lately occupied our attention. The concluding paragraph of these constitutions contains several beautiful and pious precepts; as, for example, after the command to rejoice on such days, and to provide nuts and such-like things for the children, new clothes and ornaments for the women, and good eating and drinking for the men, we read as follows:—

וכשדוא אוכל ושורה חייב להאכל לנר לירום ולאמנה עם שאר העניים אבל מי שנועל דלתו בירו ואוכל ושורה עם בניו ואשתו ואינו מאכל ומשקה לעניים למדי נפש אין זו מצוה אלא שמחה כסו ועל אלו נאמר ובדרכים כלום אונים להם כל אוכלו יסמאו כי להם לפנים הוא :

"And when he eats and drinks, he is bound to feed the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, with the other poor. But he that bolts the doors of his house, and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, but does not furnish meat and drink to the poor and afflicted, is not to be regarded as having fulfilled the commandment; on the contrary, his joy is that of a glutton, and of such persons it is said, 'Their sacrifices shall be unto them as the bread of mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted: for their bread for their soul shall not come into the house of the Lord.' (Hos. ix. 4.)" (Arbah Turim, 529.) This makes a merciful provision for the poor, and as teaching all who partake of the good things of this world to remember their poorer brethren, is worthy of praise and

imitation. We know also that this charity is practised by all devout Jews in every part of the world, and that they are on this account entitled to the respect of all who can appreciate benevolence. But the reason why every believer in revelation will approve this commandment is, because it accords with the Word of God. Moses has made this precept a part of his law: "The stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest." (Deut. xiv. 29.) And in the New Testament there is found a similar command: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." (Luke xiv. 12—14.) But excellent as this rabbinical commandment is in itself, it loses considerably when interpreted according to the system. A person acquainted only with the law of Moses, or the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth, would say, that one of the most lovely features in the command is the universal love inculcated towards the stranger as well as the Israelites. But an acquaintance with the oral law would compel him to retract this commendation, for there universally the stranger is interpreted to mean, "a proselyte to Judaism," as for instance—

אהבת הני שבו ונכנס תרח כנפי השכינה שתי מצות עשה: אחוז משני שהיה בכלל רעים ואחוז משני שהוא גי והתורה אמרה ואיבתם את הני :

"To love the stranger who comes, and is gathered under the wings of the Shechinah, is to fulfil two affirmative precepts; one, because he is included in the number of those considered 'neighbours,' and a second, because the law says, 'Ye shall love the stranger.'" (Hilchoth Deoth. c. vi. 4.) Here, then, that comprehensive word "stranger" is narrowed down to the signification "religious proselyte," and abundance of similar passages have already been given in Nos. 4 and 5. But even with this great drawback

we admit that there is much to be commended in the above commandment. We are quite willing to recognise all the good which we can, and therefore add another passage or two which deserve notice.

מדת החסידים אשר השם לנגדם תמיד ובלב ודכידם ידעוהו בשת שמחתם או יותר יותר מברכים ומשבחים להק' ברה אשר שמחים יצאם האדם בלב בשת שמחתו והנאותו אם כך היא שמחה העולם הזה הוא הגל כי יש אחריה חונה וצער אם כן מה תהיה שמחה ע"ה" והמדות שאין אחריה תונה :

"It is a characteristic of the pious, who set the Lord always before them, and in all their ways acknowledge him, that in the time of their joy they multiply still more the blessings and praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, who makes them to rejoice. At such a season, too, a man ought to think, if such be the joy of this world, which is vanity, for it is followed by sorrow and trouble, what will be the joy of the world to come, which is everlasting, and to which no sorrow can succeed." (Arbah Turim, *ibid.*) This passage also, as resting upon the unsophisticated Word of God, must receive unqualified assent. The character of the pious is here beautifully described by the union of two passages of Scripture. They are those "who set the Lord always before them" (Ps. xvi. 8), and who "in all their ways acknowledge him." (Prov. iii. 6.) God grant that all, both Jews and Christians, may earnestly endeavour to realise this character. The piety of this passage is equalled by the prudence of one of their police regulations for the three great feasts.

הייבן ב'ל' להעמיד שוטרים ברגלים שיהו שוטרים ומחשבים בנגות ופוסדים ועל הנדורות שלא יקרבצו שם לאוכל ולשחור אנשים ונשים ויבואו ליד עבירה :

"The tribunal is bound, at the three feasts, to appoint officers for the purpose of going about and inspecting gardens, and parks, and rivers, that men and women may not congregate in such places to eat and drink, and be led to commit sin." If the authors of the oral law had confined themselves to such commandments as these, there would be but little to blame. But unfortunately the good and useful precepts bear but a small proportion to the whole, and are often directly counteracted by the peculiar principles of the system. The above general description of piety is unexceptionable, but the detail of the requirements, even for the holy day alone, is such as must effectually pervert and distort the features there delineated. How can a man have a just idea of setting the Lord always before him, who thinks that a cunning evasion of God's commandments is permitted, as was shown in the last number? Or how can a man be said to acknowledge God, when his mind is filled and occupied with the manifold

and perplexing ceremonies of man's institution? Of these inventions many have already been given, but more remain, and the Jewish Prayer-book for the passover especially reminds us of one.

דיני עירוב תבשילין :

"The laws of the mixture for the cooking of victuals." The oral law has made it unlawful on the holy day to prepare food for the Sabbath.

יום טוב שחל להיות ערב שבת אין אושין ומבשילין ביום טוב מה שזמא אוכל למחר בשבת :

"When a holy day falls on the eve of the Sabbath, it is unlawful to bake or to cook on that day what is to be eaten on the morrow, i. e. on the Sabbath." (Hilchoth Jom Tov. c. vi. 1.) This law may of course create a great inconvenience, for if nothing remains after the meals of the holy day, there will be no food for the Sabbath, and on that day the law of Moses forbids all cooking. And, strange to say, the evasion which is allowed at other times is here forbidden. A man is not permitted to cook a surplus of victuals under the pretence that it is for the holy day. Another and more solemn mode of evasion has been invented, and is thus prescribed in the Jewish Prayer-book—

אם חל ערב שבת ביום ר"א או צריכים לעשות ערב תבשילין קודם י"ש וכן מעשהו ילקחין מצה שלימה וכדון תבשיל או בשר או ביצה צלוי' ומניחין אותה על המצה ובעל הבית רוכי :

Of which D. Levi gives the following translation, which though not very literal, is preferable to a new one as occurring in an authorised edition of the Jewish prayers:—

"If the first day of the festival happens on the Thursday, the following ceremony is observed. On the day preceding the festival, the master of every family takes a whole cake and a piece of meat, fish, or a roasted egg; and having delivered them to one standing by, to denote that all the other Jews in the city that may have forgotten to make the mixture shall, nevertheless, have the benefit of the said mixture, so as to be able to prepare on the festival what is necessary for the Sabbath. He then says the following:—

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על מצה ערב :

ברוך שרובא דהו שרא לא למיטא ולבשלא ולאשטמא ולאולקא שרונה ולמעבד כל צורכא מיומא סבא לשבתא י לנו ולכל יהודים בעיר הארץ :

"Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God! King of the universe, who hast sanctified us with thy commandments, and commanded us concerning the mixture."

"By this mixture it shall be allowable for us to bake, boil, and to keep the victuals warm; to light up lights, and to do, and prepare all things necessary, on the festival for

the Sabbath; we, and all Israel that dwell in this city." (Levi's Prayers, vol. v. pp. 4, 5.) Now, against this ceremony several and serious objections may be made. First, if it be absolutely unlawful on the holy day to cook for the Sabbath-day, how is the unlawfulness removed by going through a trifling ceremony, and repeating a few words? The cooking is, in the sight of God, either lawful or unlawful. If lawful, then this ceremony is utterly useless, and the solemn calling upon God is only a solemn profanation. If unlawful, then nothing but a dispensation from Israel's great lawgiver, God himself, can make it lawful. Any thing short of this must, by every honest man, be regarded either as an evasion, or a bold and wilful transgression. Secondly, the unlawfulness on which this ceremony is founded, is altogether of man's making—God has nowhere forbidden the Jews to prepare for Sabbath on the holy day. The Scribes have here as elsewhere dared to add to the law of God.

ואיסור זה מדברי סופרים כדי שלא יבוא לבשל מימם
מזב ליהוה שקל וחומר הוא לשבת אינו מבטל כל שכן
לדל:

"This prohibition is of the words of the Scribes, that a man may not be led to prepare on a holy day for a common day. For if he feel it unlawful to cook for Sabbath, still more will he feel this for a common day." (Hilchoth Jom. Tov. vi. 1.) Here it is plainly confessed that the prohibition is not from God but from man. A reason is assigned for this addition, which is unsatisfactory, and shows that the Scribes thought the law imperfect, and themselves wiser than God. They were afraid, if men got into a habit of cooking on the holy day for the following day, when that day was the Sabbath, they might get into the habit of cooking generally for the following day, and thus cook for common days. But did not God foresee this possibility, and know the frailty of human nature just as well as the rabbies, why then did he not take this precaution himself? If this precaution be absolutely necessary, as it was not given by God, it will necessarily follow that God did not give that which was necessary, and therefore that the law of God was imperfect until it was mended by the rabbies. If the law, as given by God be perfect, and who can deny it without blasphemy, then this precaution of the rabbies is useless, and they are proved guilty of making additions to the law of God, and of imposing needless burdens on the consciences of their brethren. If this ceremony were left to the free will of every individual, it would be very different, but it is imposed as an indispensable duty, and a man pronounced a sinner if he does not comply.

כי שאיפשר לו לשרב ואינו משרב אלא שרדנה לכאן
על עירובו של גידול היצר נקרא ששע אינו ידע בו :

"He who can make the mixture, and does not, but chooses to depend on the mixture made by the great men of the city, is called a sinner, and has not fulfilled his duty." (Arbah Turim 527.) Here then his conscience is burdened, but further, he may be exposed to considerable inconvenience, to escape from which he is driven again to a prescribed exercise of artifice and guile.

כי שלא הכיח עירוב הבשילין ולא הכיחו לו אחרים
כשם שמאריך לו לבשל ולאחר כך קמחו ומאכלו אחר
ואחר לאחד שהכחו לעצמו לבשל ולאחר לזה שלא
הכיחו עד שיקנה לו שנוכחם זה מבטל והאשה שלו
שרדו קמחו והם רצה יתן אחר כך לזה שלא הכיחו
במתנה :

"He that has not performed the ceremony of the mixture for himself and for whom others have not done it, as it is unlawful for him to boil or to bake, so his flour and food are unlawful; and it is unlawful for another, who has performed the ceremony for himself, to boil and bake for such an one until he buy it for himself. Then he may boil and bake of his own, for he has bought it, and if he please may make a present of it to the other." Here of course the purchase is fictitious. In like manner it is unlawful for him to light the Sabbath candle. This would be a great misfortune, and a learned rabbi has accordingly found out a remedy of the same kind.

כתב ד"ר מאיר מרוטנבורג שיחיל לחפש בדרך שום
דען בני אשלו מבשר יום ולהגידו רחוק עד הלילה :

"Rabbi Meyer, of Rothenburg, has said in his writings, that a man may seek for something in the room by the light of a candle, yea though it be still day, and then leave it lighting until night." (Arbah Turim 527.) We ask the Jews seriously to consider this specimen of rabbinical wisdom and conscientiousness. A man who has not performed the ceremony of the mixture dare not do what God has allowed him to do, he dare not light the candle for Sabbath, that is, if he does it honestly and openly, he would, according to the oral law, commit a sin. But then he may do this same thing by using guile and deceit, which God has forbidden, and then according to these same teachers, the act is lawful. He may light a candle under pretence of searching for something, even though he has the day-light, and therefore evidently does not want it for that purpose, and then he can leave it lighting. Thus the oral law teaches that the neglect of a mere human invention is a greater sin than guile and deceit. Is not this to strain at a gnat and to swallow a camel? But some Rabbinist may say, if the oral law encourages guile and deceit, why does it forbid the employment of guile in the preparation of food for the Sabbath, as has been stated above? This is a curious point, and deserves attention. The oral law says, if food

be left after the meals of the holy day, it is lawful to eat it on the Sabbath, provided that no guile be used; but if guile be used, it is unlawful. Whereas, if a man wilfully neglect the ceremony of the mixture, and cook notwithstanding for the Sabbath, he may lawfully eat what he has prepared. This has at first sight the appearance of wishing to discourage guile, but the reasons, given for this decision, show that this is far from being the case.

למה החמירו ואסרו על המערס ולא אסרו על
המזיד שאם החזיר למערס נמצאו הכל משרימין וישמעק
שם ערובי המשליך. אבל המזיד אינו מוצי ואם עבר
ידום לא יעבר פעם אחרת:

“What is the reason that they were more severe upon him that used guile than upon the wilful transgressor, and made it unlawful for the former, but not for the latter? The reason is this, if they had pronounced it lawful for him that uses guile, all would use guile, and the very name of mixture for food would perish. On the other hand, a wilful transgressor is rare, and if he transgress to-day, he will not transgress again.” The employment of guile, then, is not forbidden because it is odious in the sight of God and man, but simply from the fear that it might operate prejudicially upon the observance of a rabbinic command. Such is and must be the effect of multiplying religious ceremonies, and imposing them upon the conscience as necessary to salvation. The conscience becomes burdened, and beset with difficulties, and is glad of any refuge or relief, even though it should be derived from artifice and deceit. Artifice is at last made lawful, or even prescribed, as we have seen in many instances, and then religion, which God intended as a remedy for our moral disease, becomes itself a new source of infection. But if any burdened conscience should awake and become sensible of the cheat that has been put upon it by the oral law, the probability is that it will cast off religion altogether, and mistake Moses too for a companion of the Scribes and Pharisees; and thus many a rabbinical Jew has been led to utter infidelity.

But there is still a third objection to be urged against this ceremony of the mixture, and that is, that it prescribes a form of thanksgiving to God for appointing that which he never appointed. “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God! King of the universe! who hast

sanctified us with thy commandments, and commanded us concerning the mixture.” Where has God commanded the mixture? Where, from one end of the law to the other, or in the prophets, is there one word about this ceremony? It is from first to last a pure invention of the Scribes. God never appointed it. This prayer, then, contains a positive untruth, and thus the ignorant and unlearned are deceived, and taught even in the solemn act of public worship to believe that God has commanded what he never commanded. The minds of children, too, are thus imbued with the commandments of men, and taught in the language of prayer to stamp the divine authority upon the invention of the Scribes and Pharisees. And this is done not only in the forests of Poland, or on the uncivilized coasts of Barbary, but here in England. This ceremony and this prayer are prescribed in the two editions of the Jewish prayer-book, published by Levi and Alexander. In this country, where full liberty of conscience prevails, the language of the synagogue is just the same as in the darkest and most oppressed regions of the habitable globe. The Jewish children are still taught to bless God for giving what he never gave, and the sacred voice of prayer still consecrates the intolerance, the errors, and the absurdities of the oral law. In other countries, where the circumstances were not so favourable, the Jews have made more than one attempt to renounce and repudiate the errors of the Talmud. But in England, whether from listlessness or from a love to these Talmudic doctrines, we do not presume to say, nothing has been done either by the German or the Portuguese Jews. In England the Talmud still maintains its empire of error and uncharitableness, and spiritual tyranny, and not one individual has dared publicly to protest against it. We ask the Jews seriously to consider this matter, and to compare the extracts which we give with Moses and the prophets; if the oral law agrees with that which is confessedly the Word of God, then we beg of them to explain the lawfulness of using guile, of inventing new commandments, and enforcing them with the severest punishments. But if they decide that these things are altogether forbidden by God, then we call upon them to protest aloud against these adulterations of revealed truth.

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