

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות שלום ירמיהו טז'

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IN our last number we ventured to say, that in the English synagogues "The sacred voice of prayer still consecrates the intolerance, the errors, and the absurdities of the oral law;" and we gave an instance in proof of our assertion. But to some Israelites, who have overlooked the contents of their Prayer-book, this assertion may require more proof; we, therefore, proceed to give it, and, first of all, with regard to intolerance. In the ceremonial for the first two evenings of the passover, in the midst of the rejoicings and thanksgivings, which the memory of their great deliverance naturally calls forth, we suddenly find the following prayer:—

שׂוֹךְ חֶמְתְּךָ אֵל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּךָ וְעַל מַמְלַכְתּוֹ  
אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׂמְךָ לֹא קָרָא׃ כִּי אֵל אֵת יִעֲבֹךְ וְאֵת נִזְרָה  
הַשָּׁמַיִם׃ שׂוֹךְ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעֹמֵךְ דָּחִין אֶפְסֵי יְשׁוּעָם׃ הֲרַחֵם  
בָּנָה וְהַשְׁמִידֵם מִזְרַח שֶׁמֶשׁ׃׃

"Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place. (Psalm lxxix. 6, 7.) Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. (Psalm lxxix. 24.) Persecute them in anger, and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord." (Lament iii. 66.) Here are three passages of Scripture, taken from their context, and joined together to make one prayer. In their context, and with reference to the times for which those portions of Scripture were given by God, they are intelligible. After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, whilst the Jewish mind was still in a state of violent excitement against the authors of that calamity, such an imprecation may appear natural. During the persecutions of the Crusaders or the Inquisition it might be excusable, but in the present time and circumstances it is indefensible. Who are the heathen and the kingdoms, whom the offerers of these petitions wish to be pursued with God's wrath, and to be destroyed from under the heavens? Are they the Christians, or the heathen idolaters of Africa and India? The Mahometans profess a faith in the Unity very similar to that of the later rabbies; they, therefore, cannot be intended. If it be said that the idolatrous heathen are here intended, we must still protest against the intolerance of this imprecation; why should the Jews wish for their

destruction? What evil did these poor ignorant people ever do to the Jews in England, that they should pray for their destruction rather than their conversion? If it be said, that nobody at all is intended in the present day, why, we would ask, is it still made a part of the passover ceremonial? We have before us several copies of the Haggadah, some printed very lately, and it occurs in them all.

If this were the only passage of the kind to be found in the liturgies of the synagogue, it might perhaps admit of palliation or excuse, but it is only one of a similar class, all breathing the same spirit. In the morning service for the second day of the passover, as translated by D. Levi, we find another more fearful still.

בְּרַח דְּהָיָה אֵל לֶבְךָ וְעֵינֶיךָ שֶׁם׃ וְאֵם וְנִזְרָה טַב  
מִשָּׁמַיִם׃ אֲנִי שִׁמְעֵי שְׁאֵנָה קֵל צוֹרֵךְ וְרִגְשֵׁי׃ רַחֵם  
מִדָּם נוֹשֵׁם׃ וְעִשֵׂם מְחַלְבֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ וְעַגְרֵיהֶם יִעֲלֶה  
בְּאֵשׁ׃׃

"Hasten, O my beloved, to where thy heart and eyes are; and though we have cast off that that is good and pleasant, yet hear the roaring raging voice of those that oppress thy people; satiate the clods with their blood; manure the earth with their fat; and let the stench of their carcases ascend." (Levi's Prayers, vol. 5, fol. 142.) The translation is D. Levi's, so that it cannot be said, that the sense has been misrepresented or distorted for polemical purposes. It is the translation of a Jew, and of a Jew in England, and the title-page tells us that it is the second edition "carefully revised and corrected, and illustrated by Isaac Levi." The title-page also says, "As read in their synagogues and used in their families." Is not this prayer intolerant? Is there any thing like it in the New Testament, or in our Christian Prayer-books? And yet we are told that modern Judaism is more tolerant than Christianity, and that it teaches charity to all men. Let not the Jews think that we impute this spirit to the whole nation. No such thing. This passage is quoted as a specimen of the spirit of the oral law and its authors, who not only were possessed with this spirit of resentment, but so overwhelmed with it, as to transfuse it into their addresses to the God of mercy, and to prescribe it as a part of the public worship of the congregation. Whenever introduced, there it still remains, as a testimony to the

spirit of the first opposers of Jesus of Nazareth, and as a portion of the liturgic service of the synagogue. In these passages, however, it does not appear what nations are intended; no name or particular characteristic is given, though the allusion, in the last quoted prayer, to Isaiah xxxiv. naturally leads the reader to think of Edom; but in other places a more definite form is prescribed, from which we find that Edom is the great object of hatred.

ליל שמרים אל הצהי בחצות לילה בתוך מצרים  
כיצא גבור על אדום יחצנה כחוצה :

"God divideth the night of preservation, when in the midst of the night, he went forth through the land of Egypt: may the mighty God also divide it concerning Edom." (Levi, *ibid.* fol. 7.) This is a petition that God would do to Edom as he did unto Egypt. Again, a little further on we read,

מסח דורב חדה על אדום י ביד צח ואדום י כמי דג  
פסח :

"On the passover, a sharp sword shall fall on Edom, by the hand of him who is white and ruddy, as in the days of the feast of passover." (*Ibid.* fol. 10.) And so throughout the prayers there are frequent allusions to this subject, as for instance—

שם יקרא ככתובתו י מהציו תחמלא ויברו י עד  
תחנשא מלכותו י וכסאו יתן במלאותו י נכדי שעד  
בהכותו י בארצו יתן נקמתו :

"Then will his name be pronounced as it is written: when the other half will complete the word; his dominion also will be greatly exalted, and his throne be completely established; when he shall smite the descendants of Esau, and take vengeance on his enemies." (*Ibid.* fol. 214.) But these are sufficient to show that Edom is the great object of antipathy, and of course the great question is whom do the Jews understand by Edom? Let the most famous of their rabbies instruct us in this matter, and first let us hear Maimonides.

אדומים עובר ע"כ"ם הם יום ראשון הוא יום אדם  
לשיך אסור לשאת ולתת עמהם בא"י יום המשי ויום  
ששי שבכל שבוע ושבוע וא"י זל יום ראשון עצמו שהוא  
אסור בכל מקום :

"The Edomites are idolaters, and the first day of the week is the day of their festival; therefore it is forbidden to have commerce with them in the land of Israel, on the fifth and sixth day of every week. It is not necessary to say that the first day itself is every where unlawful." (*Hilchoth Accum.* c. ix. 4.) There is but one class of religionists who observe the first day of the week as sacred. Now let us hear Kimchi. In his commentary on Joel iii. 19, "Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah,

because they have shed innocent blood in their land:" he says,

זכר מצרים בעבור ישמשאלים ואדום בעבור מלכות  
רומי ואלה שתי האומות הזה הגבורות זה ימים רבים  
ותדענה עד עת הגאולה היא דוחאת רביעאה בכרואת  
דניאל ויאמר זה בעבור כי מלכות רומי רובם אדומים  
ואע"פ שנתשבו בהם עמים רבים כמו שנתשבו גם  
כן במלכות ישמשאלים נקראים על העיקר :

"The prophet mentions Egypt and Edom: Egypt, on account of the Turks, and Edom, on account of the Roman empire; and these two have now had dominion for a long time, and will continue until the redemption. This is the fourth beast in the visions of Daniel. . . . And this is said, the majority of the Roman empire is composed of Edomites. For although many other nations are mixed among them, as is also the case with the Turkish empire, they are called after the root." Kimchi then fixes Edom upon the Roman empire, in which he evidently includes the Greek empire, for he wrote in the 12th century, long before the Constantinopolitan dynasty was overturned. *Aben Esra* gives a similar interpretation on the blessing of Esau.

ורומי שהגלחנו היא מודע כחים וכן אמר המורגם  
וצים מדי כחים והיא מלכות יין כעצמו כאשר פירשתי  
בספר דניאל והיו אנשים מודי מספר שהאמינו באיש  
ששמוהו אלהו וכאשר האמינה רומי בימי קוסטנטיין  
שחודש כל הדה ושם על דגלו צורת האיש י לא היו  
בעולם שיסמרו תורהו החדש חוץ מאדומי מעמים  
על כן נקראה רומי מלכו אדום :

"Rome, which led us away captive, is of the seed of Kittim, and so the Targumist has said, in number xxiv. 24, 'And ships shall come from the coast of Kittim.' And this is the same as the Greek monarchy, as I have explained in the book of Daniel; and there were very few who believed on the man of whom they made a God. But when Rome believed in the days of Constantine, who changed the whole religion, and put an image of that man upon his standard, there were none in the world who observed the new law except a few Edomites, therefore Rome is called the kingdom of Edom." (*Comment.* on Gen. xxix.) We do not now stop to refute the false statements which *Aben Esra* here makes. Every one, that knows any thing of history, knows that in less than a century after the time of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christian religion had made great progress in the whole Roman empire, and that the propagation of the new law, as *Aben Esra* calls it, before the time of Constantine, was more rapid and more extensive than after his conversion. Our business at present is with his interpretation of the word Edom, he says plainly that Edom and Edomites mean the Christians. Now let us hear *Aben Barbanel* :—

ומה תדע שלא לבר על ארץ אדום המסוכה לא"י  
בבא הנביא כ"א גם על הארמה שנסתנע' משם  
ונתפסשה בכל העול' היא אומת הנצרים היום הזה  
שדום מבני אדום :

"From this you may learn that the prophet (Obadiah) did not prophecy only against the land of Edom, which is in the neighbourhood of the land of Israel, but also against that people which branches off from thence, and is spread through the whole world, and that is the people of the Christians in this our day, for they are of the children of Edom." (Comment. on Obadiah.) Here, then, we have Maimonides, Kimchi, Aben Ezra, and Abarbanel, all giving the same interpretation, and all asserting that Edom means the Christians. According to this interpretation, then, the above dreadful imprecations are for the destruction of the Christians. Is this tolerant or charitable? Is this in accordance with Moses' account of the divine character—"Merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth?" Are these the petitions that poor sinful creatures ought to offer when they assemble for the worship of the Creator of all flesh? Above all, are they suitable in an English synagogue, and in the present day? You may say that Kimchi and those other commentators, lived in the times of Popery, and that Edom only means the Roman Catholic Christians. But what will those Jews say who live in Rome itself, and France, and Bavaria, and other Roman Catholic countries? You may think them in error, so do we, but we cannot for that pray that God "would satiate the clods with their blood, manure the earth with their fat, and cause the stench of their carcasses to ascend." We could not utter such an imprecation against the cannibals of New Zealand, nor the man-stealers of Africa. But if you say that you do not offer up these petitions against the Christians, whether Protestant or Romanist, may we ask against whom then are they directed? And what are your thoughts when you hear these petitions read, and join in them in the synagogue? The literal Edom was destroyed long since; the children of Edom have long since been utterly lost. Where are their posterity now to be found? The above-named rabbies say the Romans were descended from Edom, but where is their proof, either from the Bible or from profane history? But suppose it was so, how will that prove that the Greeks, the French, the Germans, or the inhabitants of the British isles are thus descended? The truth is, there is no historical evidence whatever to give even a colour to this assertion respecting Rome. The rabbies found dreadful denunciations of wrath against Edom in the prophets, particularly in Obadiah and the xxxivth of Isaiah, and they thought that

Rome and the Christians deserved such punishment more than any one else; they therefore applied them to these objects of their antipathy. As far as authentic history will carry us, the descendants of the Edomites are to be sought for rather amongst the Jews themselves, than amongst any other people; for the last that we read of the Edomites is, that they were subdued by John Hyrcanus, and converted to Judaism at the point of the sword.\* Amongst the Jews, then, their descendants have ever since continued, and strange enough some of them may now be offering in the synagogue these imprecations against themselves. But, however that be, the prophecies against Edom do certainly not apply to the Christian religion, which was not Edomitical, but altogether Jewish in its origin. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew, and his disciples and first disciples from a province of Judea as remote as possible from Edom. And even if the rabbies could prove that Rome is Edom, still this will have nothing to do with the other nations who are in no wise descended from, or connected with that city or people.

We are not ignorant of the many prophecies against Edom, but, however many or severe, they form no justification of these prayers, even if the rabbies know who is intended. God is a merciful God, as well as a just Judge, and when he arises to judgment, or when he utters a denunciation of wrath, we may be sure that he does all in truth and righteousness. But that furnishes no excuse for the sons of men who presumptuously take upon themselves to call down God's wrath by prayer, or to offer themselves as the executioners of his anger. The Word of God contains many denunciations of wrath against the Jews, but this does not justify the nations who have persecuted and oppressed them. What would the Jews think of us if we collected all the fearful passages in the xvth chapter of Leviticus, and the xxviiiith of Deuteronomy, and wove them into a prayer to call down God's wrath upon the people of Israel? What would they say if we appointed this form for the most solemn days, and for the time of our festivity? Yet this is what the rabbies have done, and what the oral law prescribes, and therefore we say that such teaching is not from God. And we say this, not simply because reason leads to this conclusion, but because such prayers are directly contrary to the express command of God. When He sent the Jews into captivity to Babylon, he did not tell them to pray that "He might pour out his wrath" upon that city, and much less to "satisfiate the clods with the blood" of its inhabitants. On the contrary, he said—

\* See Jost's Geschichte, vol i. 70 and 153.

“ And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” (Jerem. xxix. 7.) Now how does this command agree with the above prayers? Suppose even that the rabbies were right, and that Edom does mean Rome, how can the Jews there pray for its peace and for its utter destruction at the same time? Those prayers are utterly irreconcilable with this command of God, and therefore furnish another proof of the error as well as the intolerance of the oral law. This was the object which we had peculiarly in view. We do not wish to burden every Israelite in London with this intolerance. Many are perhaps ignorant that such prayers are offered in the synagogue—many overlook them through inattention, and many others disapprove of them. But in those who do know and disapprove, it is exceedingly inconsistent to join in them, or to remain silent. The spirit of these prayers is thus countenanced, and the intolerance handed down from generation to generation. Children go to the synagogue, and hear these prayers offered; they think as it is the language of prayer, of public prayer, of the prayers of the people of Israel, it must be right. What other conclusion can they form? Thus they imbibe the same spirit, and thus the people of Israel are kept in bondage to the intolerance of by-gone generations. But some will say, We acknowledge that these prayers are contrary to the Bible. Remember, then, that in making this acknowledgment, you admit that the synagogue—yea, the whole nation of the Jews has been in error for many centuries. And if the Jewish nation has been universally mistaken upon so simple, yet essential, a point of religion as true charity, it is highly probable that they are mistaken on other points too, especially those that are more difficult and less obvious to human reason. But above all, remember that whilst the whole system of the oral law, in its precepts and prayers, has taught you to curse your enemies, Jesus of Nazareth has taught us to bless. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them

which despitefully use you and persecute you.” (Matt. v. 43, 44.) “Bless them which curse you, bless and curse not.” (Rom. xii. 14.) But some Israelites may still think that it is unfair to judge the oral law by this one service for the passover. Such an one we would remind of the blessing of the Epicureans, as it is called, which he is bound to say—

בכל תפלה שבכל יום :

“in every prayer, every day.” (Hilchoth T'phillah, c. ii. 2.)

למלשינים אל חדי תקוה וכל עשרי רשעה טרנע יאבדו  
הדמים מדרה יכרתו והגנבים במדרה בימינו ברוך איהו  
” שער ארבים ומכניע דמים :

“O let the slanderers have no hope: all the wicked be annihilated speedily, and all the tyrants be cut off quickly: humble thou them quickly in our days. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who destroyed our enemies.” (Daily Prayers, fol. 36.) Here is the same utter want of mercy. No desire for their amendment, no prayer for their conversion, but an invocation of sudden wrath and destruction. And this the synagogue prescribes not on its feasts only, but every day; yea, and every time of prayer is to be marked by the voice of malediction. There is also another command relating to this daily malediction, which illustrates still farther the spirit of the oral law.

שליח צבור שטעה ונבדל ולא ידע מדין יחזיל ושהה  
שעה יצמוד אחר תחתיו ' ואם טעה בברכת האפיקורסין  
אין ממוהין לו אלא מיד יצמוד אחר תחתיו שטא  
אפיקורסות נוקח בו :

“If the reader in the synagogue should make a mistake, or be confused and not know where to begin, and delay for an hour, then let another rise up in his stead. But if he made the mistake with regard to the blessing of the Epicureans, he is not to be waited for, but let another instantly rise up in his stead, for perhaps he is infected with Epicureanism.” (Ibid. c. x. 3.) According to this law, if the reader go wrong in invoking a blessing, or offering up an intercessory prayer for mercy, such a petition may be delayed for a whole hour. But if this malediction should be the place of his mistake, there is to be no delay and no postponement. If the reader cannot offer it in time, another is to rise up immediately, and cry to heaven for a curse.

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