

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם. ירמיהו' טז

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That the traditions of the Talmudists abound with the most absurd and incredible stories, is a matter of notoriety. But when a Talmudist is pressed with any one of these, as a proof that the oral law is not from God, he has a ready answer. It is an allegory, and contains the most profound and mysterious wisdom. It would be very easy to show from the books printed in Jewish-German, for the edification of the women and the unlearned, and where the legends are related as undoubted matter of fact, that this is a mere come-off. But we have other evidence that is indisputable. The liturgy of the synagogue alludes to many as to authentic history, and we would not believe any one who should dare to assert, that the Rabbinites, in prayer, utter with their lips, what they do not believe in their heart. In the pentecost prayers, from which we have already quoted, we find allusion to an anecdote recorded of Adam,

הכלית כל פועל רום והחזונים • שבעי לימים הנמינים •
ראשון למקרא ומינים • קדוש לארצי האדונים • צבי קדוש
שבת שאננים • פרת מרין יציר מלפנים • ענתה שריה
וכפרה פנים •

which D. Levi thus translates, "It (the Sabbath-day) is the end of all work above and beneath; it is accounted the seventh among the days; the first convocation of seasons; holy to the Lord of hosts; a glorious holy Sabbath to those who rest thereon; it redeemed the first created man from judgment; he chanted a song, and appeased the wrath of God." (fol. 81.) Here two important circumstances, not mentioned by Moses, are alluded to. First, that the Sabbath redeemed Adam from judgment, and secondly, that his song appeased the wrath of God. They are found in the traditions of the rabbies at full length, and are related as follows:—

בשבע שעות ביום בשר שבת נכנס אדם הראשון בגן
עד והיו מלאכי השרת מקלסין אותו ומכניסין אותו לבגן
עד ובין השמשות' בשר שבת נורש ויצא והיו מלאכי
השר' קוראין עליו ואומרין אדם ביקר בל ילין נמשל
בבהמות נדמו כבהמה נדמה אין כתיב אלא כבהמות
נדמו • שיהיה באיום השבת ונעשה סיניגור לאדם הראשון
אמר לפניו רבן העולם בשבת ימי המעשה לא נהרג דרג
בעולם ובי אהה מתחילו זו הוא קדושתו וזו היא ברכתי
שנאמר יברך אלהים את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו ויבטו'
יום השבת נוצל אדם מריני' של גזינים וראה אדם כזה

של שבת אמר לא להגם בך הק' בה את השבת וקדש
אתו החדיל משודר ומזמר ליום השבת שנאמר מזמור
שיר ליום השבת • רבי שמשאל אומר המזמור הזה
אדם הראשון אמרו ונשכה בכל הדורות עד שבת משה
הדשו וגר

"At the seventh hour of the day, on the eve of the Sabbath, the first Adam was introduced into Paradise; and the ministering angels were engaged in lauding and introducing him. But between the suns, on the eve of the Sabbath, he was driven out, and went forth; and the ministering angels were calling to him, and saying, 'Adam being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.' It is not written, 'like a beast that perishes,' but 'like the beasts that perish;' i. e., they both. The Sabbath-day came, and became an advocate for the first Adam. It said before God, Lord of the world, in the six days of the creation, nothing in the world was killed, and wilt thou begin with me? Is this my sanctification, and is this my blessing, as it is said, 'And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.' Therefore by the merit of the Sabbath-day Adam was delivered from the judgment of hell; and when Adam saw the power of the Sabbath, he said, It was not for nothing, that the Holy One, blessed be He, blessed and sanctified it, so he began singing and chanting to the Sabbath-day, as it is said, 'A psalm or song to or for the Sabbath-day.' (Ps. xcii. 1.) Rabbi Ishmael says, This psalm was said by the first Adam, but was forgotten in all the generations, until Moses came and restored it." (Pirke Eleazar, fol. 13, col. 3.) The Yalkut Shimoni gives the story substantially the same, excepting that when Adam said, "A psalm or song to the sabbath-day," the Sabbath reproved him, and said, "Dost thou sing hymns to me? Come and let us both sing hymns to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.'" (Ps. xcii. 1.) This, then, is the story which the prayer-book of the synagogue authenticates, by interweaving, in its addresses to the God of Israel, the above-quoted words concerning the Sabbath, "It redeemed the first created man from judgment; he chanted a song, and appeased the wrath of God." From first to last it bears the plain marks of mendacity. It misrepresents the merciful

character of God, as if he would have destroyed Adam, had it not been the Sabbath-day. It ascribes a certain degree of merit to Adam, who had been guilty of the most inexcusable ingratitude to his Divine Benefactor. And it directly contradicts the narrative of Moses, who ascribes the mercy vouchsafed to the spontaneous overflowings of the grace of God. Besides all this, it is perfectly ludicrous to imagine that Adam, just driven out of Paradise for his disobedience, with the curse of the Almighty resting upon him, goaded by the pangs of a guilty conscience, and his whole frame undergoing the mighty transition from immortality to corruption—it is perfectly ludicrous to imagine that he could be in a fit mood to sit down and compose a poem. Indeed the rabbies themselves have not left this story a fair appearance of credibility, for on the very same page of the Yalkut, where this origin of the ninety-second Psalm is described, another equally veracious incident, in the life of Adam, is assigned as the occasion of its composition.

אמר רבי לוי המומר הזה אדם הראשון אמרו פגע אדם
הראשון בקין אמר ליה מה נעשה בדין אמלילה עשיתי
תשובה ותמטרת התחיל אדם הראשון מססה על פניו
אמר כך הוא גירל כחה של תשובה ולא הייתי יודע מיד
עמד אדם הראשון ואמר מומר

“Rabbi Levi says, this hymn was said by the first Adam. Adam happened to meet Cain, and said to him, What has been done in the matter of thy judgment? He replied, I have repented, and been reconciled. Adam began to strike his forehead with his hand, and said, So great is the power of repentance, and I did not know it! Immediately the first Adam stood, and said this Psalm.” Thus, on the showing of the traditions themselves, this legend, formally adopted in the prayers of the synagogue, is a falsehood. Can this be acceptable worship? Is it reasonable worship? Is the legend itself, in any of its features, worthy of that great people, that received the law of God at Sinai? This is the religion of the High-priests and Pharisees who rejected Jesus of Nazareth, and this the wisdom of those who condemned Him, and that fully accounts for their conduct. Men, who had let loose their imaginations into the regions of romance and fiction, were not likely to love the sober truth inculcated by Jesus and his disciples. Their appetites were vitiated, and they were not satisfied with the unadorned narrative of Moses. They had lost all relish for the simple majesty of the “oracles of God.” We appeal to the native acuteness, and unsophisticated feeling of every right-minded Jew, and ask whether it is not a melancholy spectacle to behold the wise men of Israel thus trifling with the sin of Adam, that sad event, the source of all our woes?

Very different is the tone in which the New Testament speaks both of it, and of the mind of God in reference to it. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of Him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if, through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.” (Romans v. 12—15.) But whatever the Jews may think of the New Testament representation, we have here shown that their liturgy contains an absurd legend, borrowed from tradition ages ago, and which remains there to this day. But, alas! the very next sentence of the prayer, from which we have quoted, contains two more.

סיומה לאות ולעד בין אב לבנים • נצור יצארתך כחור
נבונים • משא בלי להוציא מבנים • למדללה מיתות
רבים • סרת ורגימת אבנים • דרעה הא לך במן מימים
קדמונים • שמומו לא רר בה ממעשים • חזברי אוב בה לא
נענים • וזכר כי בה ישבות נרר צפונים

“It (the Sabbath) is noted as a sign and a witness between the heavenly Father and his children: observe its removals, as taught by the wise men, not to bring out a load from within; death is pronounced against those that profane it, either by excision or stoned with stones; by the manna it was well known unto thee in ancient days, for on the Sabbath that food did not descend; *the necromancers were not answered on it; remember that on it the incomprehensible river resteth.*” Amongst the other honours of the Sabbath-day, and the other testimonies to its sacredness, this prayer recounts two miracles. The one, that necromancers could not bring up the dead on that day; the other, the weekly Sabbatarian rest of the river Sambation. The first of these miracles has been left by D. Levi without notice or explanation. He thought, perhaps, that it would not do in English. But to the second, the resting “of the incomprehensible river” he has attached the following note.

“This denotes the river סמבטון, said to rest on the Sabbath from throwing up stones, &c. which it does all the week. See Sanhedrin, fol. lxx. 2; Yalkut on Isaiah, fol. lii. 1; Pesikta, Tanchuma, sect. כי חסא. See also Shalsheth Hakkabala, and Juchsin.”

D. Levi himself thus acknowledges, that no allegory is here intended, but that the Jews do really believe that there is a river that throws up stones all the week, and rests

on the Sabbath-day. Many and various are the accounts which the rabbies give of it, but we shall confine ourselves to one or other of D. Levi's references, which also throw light upon the subject of the necromancers.

האך שאלה זו שאל מותרות רשות הרשות את ר"ע אמר לו ומה יום מימים אמר לו ומה גבר מגוברין א"ל דמרי צבי שבת נמי דמרי צבי אמר ליה הכי קאמיני לך מי ימרי דהאדני שבתא אמר לו נדר שבמין יוכיח בעל אויב יוכיח קבר של אביו יוכיח שאין מעלה עשן בשבת :

"Turnus Rufus, the wicked, also proposed this question to R. Akiva, saying, Why is the Sabbath-day better than other days? He replied, Why art thou greater than other men? He answered, So is the will of my Master. The rabbi said, So is it with the Sabbath, such is the will of God. Turnus Rufus said, But I mean to say, who will prove to me that this day is the Sabbath-day? The rabbi answered, The river Sambation will prove this; — a necromancer will prove this; — the grave of thy father will prove this, for the smoke does not ascend from it on the Sabbath." (Sanhed. fol. 65, col. 2.) In his commentary upon this passage, Rashi says of the Sambation,

כד אדור של אבנים ובגל ימות השבת שומחן הרוחן ובוים השבת שוקם וכו' :

"The Sambation is a certain river of stones, which rolls along all the days of the week, but on the Sabbath-day it is perfectly still." He also explains to us what is meant by the smoke not ascending from the grave on the Sabbath-day, in the following note :

קבר של אביו דמדרגות רשות כל ימות השנה היה מעלה עשן שהיה נדח ונשרף ובשבת פושע יגידם שוברין :

"On all the other days of the year a smoke ascended from the grave of the father of Turnus Rufus, for he was suffering the judgment of burning, but on the Sabbath-day, the sinners in hell have rest." Whether Turnus Rufus saw the smoke or not, the Talmud does not inform us, but the Bereshith Rabba, another work of equal credibility in such matters of fact, tells the story a little more at length, and informs us that he was not satisfied with the argument drawn from the river Sambation. R. Akiva therefore advised him to cite his father from the dead on the Sabbath and the other days, and that this experiment would convince him. To this Turnus Rufus consented, and the results are described in the following words:—

וסלק כל יומא דשבתא . ובשבתא לא סלק . בחד שבתא אסקיה אמר ליה אבא מן דמיתת אימבעדיה יהודי ארזתא . כמיני מה עליה כל ימות השבת ושבת לא עליה . א"ל כל מי שאינו משמר את השבת אצלם ברצונו סאן הוא משמר אותו בעל כרחו . אמר לו וכי בעל ש לכם שאתם עמלים כל ימות השבת . ובשבת אתם נדחין . אמר לו כל ימות השבת אתי בדיוני . ובשבת אתי נדחין :

"His father came up every day of the week, but on the Sabbath-day he did not come up. On the first day of the week he brought him up again, and said to him, Father, hast thou been made a Jew since thy death? why is it that thou comest up on all the other days of the week, but not on Sabbath? He replied, Whosoever will not keep the Sabbath voluntarily in your world, must keep it here in spite of himself. He then said, Father, have you then got work on the other days of the week, and rest on the Sabbath? The father replied, On the other days of the week we are judged, but on the Sabbath we are at rest." (Bereshith Rabba, fol. 9, col. 4.) Such are the legends which the Jewish Prayer-book, on the solemn feast of Pentecost, stamps with all the authority of authentic history. Is it necessary to prove to the Jews of England that both these stories are utterly untrue? Is it necessary to say, that there is not, and never was, such a river as the Sambation? Within a century the world has been explored in every direction. From Cooke to Kotzebue the globe has been many times circumnavigated, but none has brought us any tidings of the Sambation. Since the times of Benjamin of Tudela, and Abraham Peritsol, there has been a host of adventurous travellers, but none had the luck to behold the miraculous torrent of the Sambation. In this very city Jews are occasionally found from every part of the world, but from the banks of the Sambation no messenger has yet arrived. The whole account is a fiction, and is unworthy of a place in the prayers of the Jews of England. The same may be said of the necromancers, who obtain no answer on the Sabbath-day. It is nothing more than a clever fiction. By the law of Moses necromancy is forbidden to the Jews, and therefore the inventor well knew that no pious Jew would ever make the experiment, either on the Sabbath or the other days. The story of Turnus Rufus, and his father, as told in the Bereshith Rabba, is plainly contrary, even to the assertions of the oral law itself. The father is made to say, "Whosoever will not keep the Sabbath voluntarily in your world, must keep it here, in spite of himself;" which implies that all, who do not keep the Jewish Sabbath, must be punished in the flames of hell; whereas the oral law says that the observance of the Sabbath is not required of the sons of Noah. When this prayer was introduced into the liturgy of the synagogue we know not, but there it now stands, and in one short paragraph contains three downright falsehoods. David Levi himself points us to R. Akiva as the author of the last two; and accordingly the Talmud records the original reference to the business of the necromancers and the river Sambation, as proceeding from the mouth of that great Rabbi. This brings us back to

the time immediately succeeding the rejection of Jesus of Nazareth, and shows us the superstition and the falsehood of those who rejected him. Either R. Akiva invented these things himself, and then he is guilty of deliberate falsehood, or he received these accounts from others who went before him, and then he was a superstitious man, and the guilt of inventing falsehood is thrown back on the earlier rabbies. What is to be thought then of the wisdom of those men who were weak enough to believe, or wicked enough to invent such absurd fables? Yet these are the men who opposed Christianity, and this is the system which a large portion of the Jewish nation has preferred for 1700 years. That the Rabbinical Jews have firmly believed these legends is plain. They occur in the Talmud, whose authority is regarded as divine. They are repeated by Rashi, Ramban, Bechai, and a whole host of the most esteemed Jewish writers. They have formed a part of the synagogue service for centuries, and are still found in the prayer-books of the English Jews, to testify that they are not yet emancipated from the chains of superstition. If they had been, if any considerable number of Jews had been convinced of the falsehood of these stories, they would never have suffered them to remain in the worship of God. It is utterly impossible to suppose that men would sanction the solemn propagation of falsehood, and yet whenever the Pentecost prayers are read or printed, there the fables of Behemoth and Leviathan, Adam and the Sabbath, Turnus Rufus and the Sambation, are solemnly accredited to the world as worthy of all belief and honour. The fact that they constitute a part of a solemn address to Almighty God, and that not from an individual, but from the congregation of Israel, gives them a sanction that nothing else could confer. The foreign Jew who comes to England from some country where there is not so much light, might, if he found such fables struck out of the English synagogue service, obtain a little light, and go back to his countrymen with the news, that the enlightened English Jews have rejected all these absurdities; and thus the moral emancipation of the nation might be prepared throughout the world. But no; the superstitious Talmudist from Turkey, or from Barbary, or the North, arrives in England, goes to the synagogue, and finds the same fables and the same superstitions that he had learned in

his less-favoured native land, and returns as he came. Perhaps he takes with him a copy of the synagogue prayers, printed in London, and exhibits to his countrymen Behemoth and Leviathan, the necromancers and the Sambation, adorned with all the beauty of English printing, paper, and binding. There is surely a great and solemn responsibility resting on those Israelites who do not believe these fables, to protest against their admission into the prayers of the Synagogue. The honour of the nation, the welfare of their brethren, and the glory of God, all call for such a public protestation. The Jewish nation is a great and intellectual people, highly gifted by God with those powers that adorn and dignify humanity. But this is not the estimate formed by the world at large. Why not? Because the world at large knows only the fables and absurdities of the Talmud, but is ignorant of the real monuments of Jewish genius. What can be said then by an advocate for the Jews, to one who holds the Jewish mind cheap? All arguments will prove powerless as long as these instances of superstition and folly are contained in the Jewish prayers. The objector will still point to them, and say, If you want to know what men really believe, do not look at their controversial works, or their apologetic writings, but examine their prayer-book. Consider not what they say to man, but listen to what they say to God. There they are sincere. What can we answer to this argument? Can we say that all the follies and intolerance of former generations are expunged? No, whether from love or from listlessness, there they abide to this day.

But the honour of the nation is but of small weight compared with its spiritual and temporal prosperity. The English Jews might, by erasing all such passages, and thoroughly reforming their prayer-book, prove a blessing to their brethren scattered through the world. Do the intelligent and enlightened part of the nation really wish to raise their brethren in the moral scale? It must be done by purifying their religious notions. There is an inseparable bond of union between religion and moral virtue. Superstition degrades and enfeebles the mind. But zeal for the glory of God calls still more loudly upon every devout Israelite to vindicate the honour of that revelation, which God consigned to their care, and which is obscured by these fabulous additions.

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