

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיהו' מן

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IN magic and astrology we have discovered two features common to idolatrous heathenism, and to the religion of the oral law. We have seen that it pervades the Talmud and the writings of the subsequent rabbies, and that it has tinctured the language of every-day life. It occurs, therefore, as might be expected, incidentally when the oral law treats of other things; and we are induced to notice one passage of this kind, not only because it proves that faith in astrology is an essential element in the religion of the oral law, but because it sets before us another feature of resemblance to heathenism. In treating of the virtues of amulets, and of the tests, whereby to try them and those that write the following passage occurs:—

אמר רב שמא קמיטא לי חלה קמיטא לחלה גבר לחלה לחלה וימני אחמדו גברא ואחמדו קמיטא לחלה לחלה גבר דוד דוד וימנא גברא אחמדו קמיט' לא אחמדו דוד קמיטא לחלה גבר קמיטא אחמדו גברא לא אחמדו בני רב שמא חלה קמיט' לדוד גברא מאי קמיט' דאי לא אחמדו גבר אחמדו או לא אחמדו מי אמרין דא וסי ליה או דילמא מלא גברא הוא דקא מקבל כתבא חיקו וכו' :

“Rav Papa says, I am certain in the case of three amulets for three men; where three copies of one amulet have cured three times, then both the writer and the amulet are approved. In the case of three amulets for three men, where each performs only one cure, then the writer is approved, the amulet is not approved. In the case of one amulet for three men, then the amulet is approved, the writer is not approved. But Rav. Papa asks, What is to be the decision when there are three amulets for one man? The amulet is certainly not approved, the writer may or may not be. Shall we say that he cured him? Or was it perhaps the influence of the stars, belonging to that man, that had an affinity for that which was written? That must remain undecided.” (Shabbath, fol. 61, col. 2.) Here we have the influence of the stars again, and that not in the case of the heathen, but in the case of Israelites. The whole passage refers to none but Israelites. The question, from which this digression about amulets arose, was whether it is lawful to wear amulets on the Sabbath-day, a question concerning the Jews, and them only. In this question, then, we find the doctrine of Sidereal influ-

ence mixed up, or rather so certainly pre-supposed as to prevent the solution of a doubt. A case is supposed where a man has been cured by the help of three amulets, and thence arises a doubt as to whether the maker may be considered as an approved writer of amulets; and upon this case R. Papa does not venture to decide, because it is possible that the cure may be owing to the influence of the stars. How can there be a stronger proof of faith in the power of the stars over Israelites as well as over other persons?

This passage proves incontrovertibly that the heathen notion of astrology is inseparably interwoven with the religious system of the oral law, but it also presents to our consideration another circumstance equally startling, and that is, that the oral law sanctions the use of amulets or charms, as a cure for or defence against sickness and other evils. What, is it possible, that the Jews who think that their religion is the true religion revealed by God to Moses, and whose chief objection to Christianity is the fear lest it should lead them to strange gods, is it possible that this people should still entertain the old heathen notion concerning amulets? Yes, whilst the followers of Jesus of Nazareth have learned from him to renounce this superstitious and wicked practice, the Jews, taught by those who rejected and crucified him, still believe in the oral law which teaches the manner of making and using charms. But perhaps some one will say, it occurs only in the Gemara, but not in the Mishna. This is at all times but a poor apology for the oral law, or rather an open confession that the greatest part of that law is indefensible, but it will not serve here. The doctrine of amulets proceeds from the Mishna, which says,—

לא בקמיט בוכן שאינו מן המומחה :

“It is not lawful to go forth on the Sabbath-day with an amulet unless it be from an approved person.” The Gemara then takes up this commandment, and comments thus upon it,—

אמר רב שמא לא חיסא עד רמומחא גברא וממדו קמיט אלא מן רמומחא גברא אע"ל דלא מימדא קמיט דיקא נמי דקתינא ולא בקמיט בוכן שאינו מן המומחה ולא קתינא בוכן שאינו מומדו ש"מ ח"ל איחוד קמיט מומחה כל שריטא ושנה ושלש אהוד קמיט של כתב ואהוד קמיט

של עקין בין בדולה שיש בו סכנה בין שאין בו סכנה ; ולא שכמה כבר והדולה לרפואה אלא אמילו לא אדורו והדולה אלא שהיא ממששח' נכפין והדולה שלא יאדורו שר :

“ Rav. Papa says, do not think that it is necessary that both the man and the amulet must be approved ; it is enough if the man be approved, even though the amulet be not approved. The proof is, that the Mishna says, ‘ Unless the amulet be from an approved person,’ but does not say, ‘ Unless the amulet be approved,’ from which it is plain. Our rabbies have taught thus, What is an approved amulet? Any amulet that has effected a cure, and done so twice or thrice. The doctrine holds good, whether the amulet be a written one, or made of roots—whether the man be dangerously ill or not—not only if he be epileptic, but that he may not become epileptic.” (Shabbath, fol. 61, col. 1.) From this it appears that there are two sorts of amulets, one containing some written words, the other made of roots of various kinds, and it is equally plain that the object of wearing them was either to prevent sickness or to effect a cure. On the Sabbath those only are lawful, which have been manufactured by a man, who has already established his character for making efficacious amulets, or which have been already tried and proved to be so. This is the doctrine of the Talmud, and let every Jew remember that this doctrine is not extracted from the legendary part, but from those laws which are binding upon the consciences of all who acknowledge an oral law. And this is not any private opinion of our own, as may be seen by referring to any compilation where the laws are collected, as for instance the Jad Hachazakah, where this law is thus expressed:—

ויצאין בקמיע מומחה ויא' זה הוא קמיע מומחה זה שרפא לשלש בני אדם או שפעשו אדם שרפא שלשה בני אדם בקמיעין אחרים .

“ It is lawful to go out with an approved amulet. What is an approved amulet? One that has cured three persons, or has been made by a man who has cured three persons with other amulets.” (Hilchoth Shabbath, c. xix. 14.) The Arbah Turim enters more at length into the subject, thus—

אין יוצאים בקמיע שאינו מומחה ואם הוא מומחה יוצאין בו לא שטא איתמדי גברא ולא קמיע כגון שכתב לדש אחד בני אגרי' ורפאו שלשתן דאיתמדי גברא לאדורו לדש בכל פעם שיכתבו אבל לא שאר לדש' וגם אין הקמיע מומחה אם יכתבו אדור' לא שטא איתמדי קמיע ולא גבר' כגון שכתב לדש אחד דאגרת אדורו ורפאו בו שלשה פעמים שארחה אגרת מומח' לכל אדם: וכל'ש איתמדי גברא וקמיע כגון שכתב לדש אחד בני אגרות: וכל אחד הועילה לג' אנשי' או לאדם אחד שלשה פעמים איתמדי גברא ללדש זה בכל אגרת שיכתבו ואיתמדי אגרות הללו לכל אדם: אבל אם כתב ג' קמיעים לאדם אחד ורפאו ג' פעמים לא איתמדי גברא ולא קמיע: ומותר לצאת בקמיע מומחה לא שטא הוא של כתב או

של עקין בין בדולה שיש בו סכנה בין שאין בו סכנה ; ולא שכמה כבר והדולה לרפואה אלא אמילו לא אדורו והדולה אלא שהיא ממששח' נכפין והדולה שלא יאדורו שר :

“ It is not lawful to go out in an amulet, which is not approved, but if it be approved, it is lawful. Whether it be the man or the amulet which is approved, makes no difference ; for instance, if a man have written one and the same charm in three copies, and all three have effected a cure, the man is approved with respect to that charm every time that he writes it, but not with respect to other charms ; neither is the amulet approved if written by another. There is also no difference in the case, when the amulet is approved, but the man not so ; for instance, if a man write one charm, and only one copy, and has with it effected a cure three times, then that copy is approved for every man. A third case is, when both the man and the amulet are approved ; for instance, if a man write one charm in three copies, and each has been of use to three men or to one man three times, then the man is approved with respect to this charm in every copy which he may write, and these copies are considered as approved for the use of all men. But if he have written three different amulets for one man, and have cured him three times, then neither the man nor the amulet is approved. Further, it is lawful to go out with an approved amulet, whether it be a writing or one made of roots, and whether the man be dangerously ill or not. Neither is it necessary that he should have been already epileptic, and now makes use of it for a cure. On the contrary, if he be of an epileptic family, and wear it as a preventive, it is lawful.” (Orach Chaim, sec. 301.) There can be no mistake here. This is Jewish law binding upon all who acknowledge tradition. Neither is it a doubtful or passing notice ; on the contrary, the different cases are all enumerated, and every particular specified. The oral law here gives the most unqualified sanction to the use of amulets or charms, and that even on the Sabbath-day. That such charms are near akin to magic or witchcraft is plain from the nature and purpose of the manufacture, and from the undisguised use of the word which “ charm ;” but there is a passage in Rashi's commentary on another Talmudic treatise, which puts this beyond all doubt ; we therefore give both the text and the commentary—

הנו רבנן שמוני' תלמידי' יהו' להלל הוקן שלשים מדון וארס שחשד' עליהן שיכיה כמשה רבינו שלשים מדון וארס שחשדמד' להן דמכה כיהושע בן נון עשרים בנוני' גדל שבכולן יזנתן בן שזאל קמן שבכולן ר"ם אמרו עליו על רבן יוחנן בן באי שלא הכיח מקרא ומשנא גמרא הלכות הגזרות דקדוקין תורה דקדוקין סופרי' וקלן חכומין וגבור' שבות והקפדות וגמטריא ומשלוח טובנים

ומסלף שועלים שיחזקו שדים וקלים ושיחזקו מלאכי
 שדה וכו' :

“Our rabbies have handed down the tradition that Hillel the elder had eighty disciples, of whom thirty were as worthy as Moses our master to have the Shechinah resting upon them. Thirty others were as worthy as Joshua the son of Nun that for them the sun should stand still. Twenty were in the middle rank, of whom the greatest was Jonathan the son of Uzziel; and the least of all was Rabbi Johanan ben Zachai. Of this last-named rabbi it is said, that he did not leave unstudied the Bible or the Mishna, Gemara, the constitutions, the Agadoth, the niceties of the law and the Scribes, the argument, *a fortiori*, and from similar premises, the theory of the change of the moon, Gematria, the parables taken from grapes and from foxes, the language of demons, the language of palm-trees, and the language of the ministering angels,” &c. (Bava Bathra, fol. 134, col. 1.) This was pretty well, considering that he was the least of the eighty; what then must have been the knowledge of the others? This tradition alone, from its gross exaggeration, would be sufficient to mark the character of the rabbies as false witnesses. It is plainly a fable, such as one might expect in the Arabian Nights' entertainments, but not in a law that professes to have come from God. It is another proof that the account of the oral law is a mere fiction. But our object in quoting the passage here, is to point out its connexion with charms and amulets. It tells us that this rabbi understood the language of the ministering angels; now what use was this? Rashi tells us in his commentary, להשיבם to conjure or to adjure them; that is, to compel them to serve him, when he adjured them; that is, by their means to act the part of a conjuror. It may perhaps be said, these were the good angels, with whom a holy man might hold converse, but we are also told that he understood “the language of demons.” What was the object of this? Rashi answers again—

להשיבם ונפסק מיניה לעשות קמיו לרשעו :

“For the purpose of adjuring them: and hence it follows that amulets may be made in order to effect cures.” From this it appears that the Talmud allows a man to have converse with evil spirits, and that this precedent establishes the lawfulness of amulets. And this is the religion of the oral law, these the doctrines and practices of the men who rejected Jesus of Nazareth! Here is real heathenism, not one shade of which appears in the New Testament. Oh! how different is this from the doctrine of Moses and the prophets. The oral law sends sick men to seek help in amulets and charms, but not to the God

of Israel. Now what difference is there between this and the conduct of Ahabaziah, when he fell down through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and was sick? “He sent messengers, and said unto them, Go inquire of Beelzebub, the God of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease. But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the King of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Beelzebub the God of Ekron?” (2 Kings i. 2, 3.) And so it may still be said to Israel, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to amulets and charms in order to get cured of your diseases? Moses points to God as the great physician; he says, “Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers. And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness.” (Deut. vii. 12—15.) God himself says—

אני יהוה רופאיך :

“I am the LORD that healeth thee.” (Exod. xv. 26.) But the oral law leads men away from God, and tells them to go to an approved man and to get an approved amulet, and for this allows to learn the language of demons, and to compel them by adjuration to be subservient. Where, in all the Old Testament, is there any thing like this? When the widow's son was sick, Elijah did not give her an amulet to make him well, and yet, if there were such things, it might be supposed that he knew of them, and knew how to make them; in short, that he was an approved man and could make an approved amulet; but Elijah's trust was not in such heathen nonsense, but in the God of Israel. Before Him he prostrated himself, and said, “O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.” (1 Kings xvii. 22.) When Hezekiah was sick, we read not that he sent for an approved amulet, but that “He turned his face towards the wall, and prayed unto the Lord.” Not charms, but faith and prayer, are the amulets of the Old Testament, and also of the New. The Lord Jesus Christ wrought many miracles of healing, and multitudes of sick people applied to him for relief, but he never directed them to amulets in order to attain it. His direction is, “Be not afraid, only believe.” (Mark v. 36.) His disciples also wrought great miracles on the sick, but not by amulets. Their confession is, “His name, through faith in his name, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.” (Acts iii. 16.) And their command is, not to wear amulets, but to pray. “Is any sick among you? Let him

call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins they shall be forgiven him. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." (James v. 13—18.) This is the doctrine of the New Testament, exactly agreeing with that of Moses and the prophets, so that you need not fear that Christianity will lead you to heathenism; on the contrary, it will lead you back from the heathenism of magic, and astrology, and amulets, to the God of Israel.

But there is another feature, in this doctrine concerning amulets, which must not be overlooked, and that is that the manufacture of amulets may be made a mere trade for collecting the money of the credulous. If a man get a reputation as an approved manufacturer, the believers in the oral law will naturally apply to him in case of sickness, or other circumstances, where amulets are of service, and of course the remedy is not to be had for nothing. We have known and heard of such things both in the west and in the east. And thus the poor Israelites are led away from the God of Israel, and induced, as the prophet says, "To spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not." But what a testimony does this whole doctrine furnish to the conduct and the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth? His great endeavour was to show the apostacy of the oral law, and to lead the people back from tradition to the Holy Scriptures. Was he right or was he wrong? Which is the religion, of the oral law or of the New Testament, most agreeable to the religion revealed to Moses and the prophets? Is the practice of magic a Mosaic doctrine? Is permission to hold converse with evil demons a Mosaic doctrine? Is astrology a Mosaic doctrine? Is the manufacture of amulets and charms a Mosaic doctrine? No; they are all directly opposed to

the doctrine and commandments of Moses, and the practice of all the holy men of old. Are these things doctrines of the oral law? Yes. Are they the doctrines of the New Testament? No. Christians are taught to abstain from all such things. Then in this, at least, Christianity is more like Mosaism. How long will the Jews suffer themselves to be thus deluded and imposed upon? Many are perhaps ignorant of the details of that system which they profess, but such ignorance is highly culpable. If men profess a religion, they ought to know what it is, and what are its doctrines, and what the practices which it prescribes. Modern Judaism teaches, as the truth of God, all these heathenish notions and practices; it is time, then, for the Jews to inquire whether this be the true religion in which they have continued for so many centuries, and if not, to stand in the ways and ask for the old paths. It is a vain thing for a few individuals of the nation to attempt to deny that these superstitions are an essential portion of modern Judaism. As long as the oral law is acknowledged to be of divine authority, that oral law must itself be taken as the witness for its own doctrines, and the standard of the modern Jewish religion. There is no possible middle course; either Jews must altogether and publicly renounce the Talmud as false, superstitious, and heathenish, or they must be content to be regarded in one of two characters, either as its faithful disciples, who believe all it says, or as timid men-pleasers, who are afraid to confess the truth of God, or to protest against the errors of man, lest they should suffer some worldly loss or inconvenience. But is it possible that cowards, in the cause of God, should be found amongst the people of Gideon, who stood boldly against the idolatry of a whole city, and overthrew the altar of Baal, or amongst the offspring of Hananiah, Mishacl, and Azariah, who dared a fiery furnace, or amidst the countrymen of Daniel who trembled not at the view of the lion's den? No, we will rather believe that all the Jews are still bigoted Talmudists, and that when they cease to be, they will come forward with the spirit of their fathers and the strength of their God to vindicate the truth.

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