

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיה ו' שז'

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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BOTH Jew and Gentile will agree that true religion is the fear of the Lord, but the difficulty is how are we to know it, and what are the marks that will help us to distinguish the true from the false? The Word of God gives many, of which at present we select this one:—

ראשית חכמה יראה ידוד :

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm cxi. 10.) True religion, as the Bible teaches, does not only better the heart, but also improves the understanding; whereas false religion not only corrupts, but also makes its votaries foolish. This is the uniform representation of the Bible, and thus we read of true religion, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." (Psalm xix. 7.) And again the wisest of men says, "Then shalt thou understand righteousness, judgment, and equity; yea every good path. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant to thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee." (Prov. ii. 9—11.) The votaries of false religion are on the contrary described as devoid of all wisdom. "They are altogether brutish and foolish; the stock is a doctrine of vanities." (Jer. x. 8.) And, again, "None considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also, I have baked bread on the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh and eaten it; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isaiah xlii. 19, 20.) According to these passages of Scripture wisdom is a test of true religion, and folly of a false one, let us then apply this test to the religion of the oral law, does it commend itself to the understanding by its wisdom, and the wisdom of its teachers? It is true, that it speaks well of itself, and calls all its doctors חכמים "Wise men," but the chapter on amulets, quite fresh in the memory of our readers, excites some doubts upon the subject, though of these we considered only the theory. The histories, which the Talmud gives of the Rabbinical practice with regard to such charms,

lead to the inevitable conclusion that wisdom is not one of the characteristics of the oral law. Take for example the following direction to stop a bleeding at the nose:—

לדמא דאחי מנחורא ליהו גברא כחן דשמיא לוי וליכרוב ליה לוי למסרע ואי לא ליתו איניש מעלמא וניכרוב ליה אנא פפי שילא בר סומק למסרע ואי לא ניכרוב ליה הכי טעם דלי במי כסף טעם לי במי פגם ואי לא ליתיה עקרא דסאססא ואשלא דרומייא עתיקא וקורסא ומוריקא וסומקא דלילבא ונקלינהו בחדי חדיי ליהו גבא דעמרא וניגול תרזי פתול' ולשמש בדלא וניגבל בקסמא דרין וניתיב בנחוריה ואי לא ליתו אמת הכים דאולא ממורחו מפי מערב וניסע דר כרע לאחי גיסא דוד כרע לאחי גיסא מינא בדיה דימינא מחותי כרעא דשמאליה ובדיה דשמאלא מחותי כרעא דימיניה וניגול תרזי פתולא דעמרא וניסמש בפינא וניתיב בנחוריה ואי לא ליתיה תותא מחורב וניירו מיא לישרו עליה ולימרו כי הכי דספקי הני מיא ליספק דכי דשלא בר פלוראי :

"For a bleeding at the nose, let a man be brought who is a priest, and whose name is Levi, and let him write the word Levi backwards. If this cannot be done, get a layman, and let him write the following words backwards:—'Ana pipi Shila bar sumki,'* or let him write these words, 'Taam dli bemi keseph, taam li bemi paggan,'† or let him take a root of grass, and the cord of an old bed, and paper and saffron, and the red part of the inside of a palm-tree, and let him burn them together, and let him take some wool, and twist two threads, and let him dip them in vinegar, and then roll them in the ashes, and put them into his nose. Or let him look out for a small stream of water that flows from east to west, and let him go and stand with one leg on each side of it, and let him take with his right hand some mud from under his left foot, and with his left hand from under his right foot, and let him twist two threads of wool, and dip them in the mud, and put them into his nostrils. Or let him be placed under a spout, and let water be brought and poured upon him, and let them say, 'As this water ceases to flow, so let the blood of M., the son of the woman N., also cease.'" (Gittin, fol. 69, col. 1.) Now we ask any Jew of common sense, whether this passage savours most of wisdom or folly? Vinegar

* The only explanation which Rashi gives of these words is "דש דרוא," "It is a charm."
† "דש דרוא" "It is a charm." Rashi.

and water may be very useful in such a case, or even mud, if used in sufficient quantity, might stop up the nose, and therefore stop the bleeding too, but what manner of benefit can proceed from the word Levi written backwards, or from those words which Rashi pronounces to be magical? Why is the mud of water flowing from east to west more efficacious, and why is it to be taken with the right hand from under the left foot, and with the left hand from under the right foot? Plainly because the authors of this passage thought there was some charm or magic power, and their minds were so overpowered by superstition, as to lead them to disregard the plain words of Moses forbidding all magic. It cannot be pretended that this is a rare case, the Talmud abounds in such remedies, all equally wise. For instance take the following mode of treatment for the scratch or bite of a mad dog:—

ה'ד חמשה דברים מאמרו בלב שומה מו פתח וריוו
 נוסף ואינו סרווח חנב מנה לו על ירכויו ומדוך
 בצדי דרכים וש אומרים אף נובה ואין קלו נשמע
 כמאי הוי רב אמר נשים ששפיות משוקות בו ושמואל
 אמר רחא רעה שורה עליו מאי ביניהו איכא למקטליה
 דרב' הנוק תגי כתי' שמואל ששהונוק איתו אף הורגן
 איתו אלא דבר הנוק דדייק ביה מסתכן דנכח ליה
 מיית דדייק ביה מסתכן מאי תקטילי נשלח מאניה
 ונידושו רב הונא בריה דרב ירמיה דאמר רב' ליה
 בשוקא שלחמינו למאניה ורדשו אמר קיימתי בעצמי
 והחכמה חזיה בעליה דנכח ליה מאיה מאי תקטילי אמר
 אביי נתיי משכח דאמ' דריכרא וניכתוב עלי אמנ סלמיא
 בר פלמיא אמשכא דאמא ריכרא כריבנא ערך כתיי כתיי
 קלירוס ואמרי ליה קבדי קבדי קלירוס זה זה ד' צבאות
 אמר סתן סלה ושלחמינו למאניא לקברימו ב' קברי עד
 תריסר ירדו שחא ופקמינו ונקלימו בחנור' ונברירמו
 לקטמי' אורשת דרכי' הניק תריס' ירדו שחא כי שתי מיא
 לא לישתי אלא בנובתא דנחשא דלמ' הוי בבואה ושדא
 ליתסכן כי הא דאב' בר מרח' הוא אמר בר מנומי עבדא
 ליה אימיה גוברתא ודהבא :

"The rabbies have handed down the tradition, that there are five things to be observed of a mad dog: his mouth is open, his saliva flows, his ears hang down, his tail is between his legs, and he goes by the sides of the ways. Some say also, that he barks, but his voice is not heard. What is the cause of his madness? Rav says, it proceeds from this, that the witches are making their sport with him. Samuel says, it is an evil spirit that rests upon him. What is the difference? The difference is this, that in the latter case he is to be killed by some missile weapon. The tradition* agrees with Samuel, for it says, In killing him no other mode is to be used but the casting of some missile weapon. If a mad dog scratch any one, he is in danger; but if he bite him he will die. In case of a

* The Barethta.

scratch there is danger; what then is the remedy? Let the man cast off his clothes and run away. Rav Huna, the son of Rav Joshua, was once scratched in the street by one of them; he immediately cast off his clothes and ran away. He also says, I fulfilled in myself those words, 'Wisdom giveth life to them that have it.' (Eccles. vii. 12.) In case of a bite the man will die; what then is the remedy? Abai says, He must take the skin of a male adder, and write upon it these words, 'I, M., the son of the woman N., upon the skin of a male adder, I write against thee, Kanti, Kanti, Klirus.' Some say, 'Kandi, Kandi, Klurus, Jah, Jah, Lord of Hosts, Amen, Amen, Selah.' Let him also cast off his clothes, and bury them in the grave-yard for twelve months of the year; then let him take them up and burn them in an oven, and let him scatter the ashes at the parting of the roads. But during these twelve months of the year, when he drinks water, let him drink out of nothing but a brass tube, lest he should see the phantom-form of the demon and be endangered. This was tried by Abba, the son of Martha, who is the same as Abba the son of Manjumi. His mother made a golden tube for him." (Joma, fol. 83, col. i.) This is a very plain case of the use of an amulet and of magic, but whether it be a proof of profound wisdom, we leave to the judgment of the reader. What good can the poor man get from certain words written on the skin of a male adder? or from first burying and then burning his clothes, and scattering the ashes on the cross-roads? It cannot be pretended that this is medical treatment, and still less that it is the treatment commanded by the Word of God. If it had pleased God to command all this, we should not only submit, but gladly recommend this recipe in every similar case. T. God Almighty no man can prescribe. He chooses what means he pleases, and may do so because his omnipotence can render them effectual. He healed the Israelites bitten by the fiery serpents by the sight of the brazen image, and he cured Naaman's leprosy by bathing in the waters of Jordan. Whatever then be the means which He prescribes, our highest wisdom is to make use of them. But as he has not prescribed the means recommended by the Talmud, but forbidden them in his general prohibition of magic, we must say that the man who uses them has bid adieu to all true wisdom. No wonder, then, if his own inventions are stamped with folly. But what will our readers think of the cause of canine madness here assigned? "Rav says, It proceeds from the witches who are making their sport with him. Samuel says, It is an evil spirit that rests upon him." Rav believed, then, that God, whose mercies

are over all his works, allows wicked women to torment his creatures, and to inflict upon them a dreadful malady to make sport for themselves. Is this wise, is it according to Scripture? This is the doctrine of the oral law; and if Jesus of Nazareth had not protested against it, and taught a true doctrine by asserting the truth of Scripture, this would be the universal doctrine and practice of the Jews. Whoever believes the Talmud, must believe in this and all the other follies which it contains. Whoever rejects these things, confesses that the Talmud contains what is false and foolish, and thereby shakes or rather overthrows its authority. Some person will perhaps say that similar superstitions and follies have been found amongst Christians. We grant that this has been the case wherever Christians have departed from the written Word of God, but can any thing similar be found in the New Testament? That book is our standard of Christianity. As you say that the oral law is of divine authority, we say that the New Testament is of divine authority. We point out to you these follies, not in individual Jews, but in your book of authority. If you would make out a parallel case, you must do the same. But you cannot. The New Testament has nothing of the kind; and it is for you to explain how this happens, that the New Testament, which you believe to be false, is entirely free from every thing of the kind.

Further, we ask every right-minded Israelite, whether he is not shocked at that profanation of the reverend and holy names of God, which is here not only countenanced but prescribed. What can a devout Jew think either of the man or the book that tells us to write the names,

יה יה יהוה צבאות :

“Jah, Jah, the LORD of Hosts,” by the side of such nonsense as Kanti, Kanti, Klurus? Would he say that this is consistent with true religion? And yet this profane use of the name of God for magical purposes, is not rare in the Talmud. The following is another instance:—

אמר רבה אשתמי לי נחתי ימא האי גלא ומטבע
לספנה מיהוי כי צוצית דרומא היורתי ברישא ומדינן
ליה באלותא דחקק עליה אדיה אמר אדיה דה' צבאות
אמן אמן סלה ויניח אמר רבה אשתמי לי נחתי ימא
בין גלא לגלא תלת מאה פסטי וממא דדא היה אולין
בארזא דלינן גלא עד דחוקין בי מירבטניה דרובי' וזמא
הויא בי מבור ארבעין גריי בור' דחדלא ואי דלינן פטי
מקלין מרבלי' ורסי ליה גלא קלא לחבי' תביחתי שבק
מדיי בעלמא דלא ששחתי דבתי אמא ונאבדי' א'ל פוק
דזי גברתי' דמרדך מלא חוסי' דלא ולא עברי שני' האתי'
לא תיראי נאם ה' אם משני לא תדלו אשר שמוי חל'
גבל לים חוק עולם לא יעברנו :

“Rabbah says, They that go down to the

sea have told me, that when a wave is going to overwhelm a ship, sparks of white light are seen on its head. But if we strike it with a staff on which are graved the words, ‘I am that I am, Jah, Lord of Hosts, Amen, Amen, Selah,’ it subsides. They that go down to the sea have told me, that the distance between one wave and another, is three hundred miles. It happened once that we were making a voyage, and we raised a wave until we saw the resting-place of the least of all the stars. It was large enough to sow forty bushels of mustard seed, and if we had raised it more we should have been burned by the vapour of the star. One wave raised its voice and called to its companion, O, companion, hast thou left any thing in the world that thou hast not overflowed? Come, and let us destroy it. It replied, Come and see the power of thy Lord. I could not overpass the sand even a hair's-breadth, for it is written, ‘Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree that it cannot pass it?’ (Jer. v. 22.)” (Bava Bathra, fol. 73, col. 1.) Here is the same profanation of the peculiar and holy names of God; it is to be engraved on a staff either to lay or to raise the waves. But besides the profanity, just consider the folly of this whole story. In the first place, it ascribes to men, no matter whether they are good or wicked, absolute power over the waves of the sea. Anybody can engrave those names of God upon a staff, anybody can use the staff to strike the sea, and thus a wicked man, without either faith, fear, or love of God, may make and use an instrument which almost invests him with omnipotence. Is it possible that any son of Israel can be so credulous as to believe such manifest absurdity? But this story reminds us again of the utter disregard of truth which characterises the Talmud. Here we are told that, by power of this magic staff, a wave was raised so high as to enable those travellers to see the resting-place of the smallest of all the stars, and that so distinctly, too, as to be able to make a good guess at its measure. The slightest knowledge of modern astronomy is sufficient to show not only the improbability, but the utter impossibility of any thing of the kind. The least of the stars visible to the naked eye is at an almost immeasurable distance from the earth, so as to make it perfectly ludicrous to talk of a wave being raised to such a height. All the water on the face of the globe would be far from sufficient for the formation of one such wave. But the Talmud intimates that they had the power of raising it still higher, and were prevented only by the fear of being searched. But the Talmud is not satisfied with these wonders, it goes on to describe a

conversation between two waves. The commentator, who evidently believed every word of the story, suggests that this conversation was carried on by the angels presiding over the waves.

רמי ליה גלא נחן קולו כלומר צעק כדוגמא הוהוּם אַל
הוהוּם קורא ושמי מלאכים הממונים עליהם הם :

“The wave lifted up its voice, that is, it cried, and so we find, ‘Deep calleth unto deep.’ And perhaps this means the angels who were set over them.” The commentator, it appears, had no doubt of the truth of the story, and how should he have, if he believed in the Divine authority of the Talmud? But we ask our readers do they believe this story—and if they do not, why not? . Because it is too absurd, and too far beyond the bounds of possibility. Can, then, a book that swarms with similar accounts be from God? By what means did all these things about magic, astrology, amulets, magical cures, and staves, get into the Talmud? No doubt they were put in by the authors. Either, then, the authors believed in all these things, or they did not. If they did not believe in them, then they were evidently bad men, who deliberately wrote falsehood. But if they did believe these things, then, though not guilty of wilful falsehood, they were credulous, superstitious persons, who had no clear idea of the religion of Moses and the prophets; and in either case, they are most unsafe guides in religion. It is for the Jews of the present day to consider whether they will still adhere to a system that involves the belief of so many incredibilities, and sanctions the profanation of the names of God for the purposes of magic. Eighteen centuries are surely long enough to have remained in such thick darkness. Those who have been brought up in such a system ought now, at least, to arise and ask what have they and their forefathers been about all this while? And how it is that the New Testament, which they have rejected, is entirely free from such deformities? Something has been decidedly wrong, or the chosen people of God could not have remained so long in captivity, unheeded and unhelped by the Holy One of Israel. An exhibition of the doctrines of the oral law explains the cause. Israel has departed from the religion of Moses, and pertinaciously adhered to a system compounded of human inventions, and idolatrous

heathenism. They call Moses their master, and say that the oral law is derived from him, but if we may from the work, form a conjecture about the author, it is much more probably a tradition from the magicians of Egypt or the witch of Endor. And if it had been handed down as such—if the Israelites had presented the Talmud to the world and their posterity as part of the heavy yoke of Egypt, we should not have been astonished at the universality of its reception. But that Israel should ever have been so far imposed upon, as to believe that Moses or the prophets ever had any thing to do with the oral law appears almost inexplicable. However unwilling one may be to apply to fellow-sinners any prophecy that contains a denunciation of God’s wrath, one cannot help asking, was it of this that the prophet said, “The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith I cannot, for it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith I am not learned.” (Isaiah xxix. 10—12.) This question is, however, far more important to Israel than to us, and to them we leave the answer. Some will still persist in the assertion that this heathenish compound is the highest wisdom. The great majority of the nation is devoted to the Talmud, which is still the cistern whence the synagogues endeavour to draw the waters of life. The multitude does it in ignorance, they are, therefore, not so culpable. But there are many that know better, what then is the reason that they do not strain every nerve to deliver their brethren? These few do not suffer the oral law to interfere either with their business or their convenience. They profane the Sabbath, eat Gentile food, carry on their business on fasts and festivals. If they do all this on principle, why not protest against error? Is it because they are indifferent to the welfare of their brethren? If indifference be the only fruit of this intellectual progress, instead of rising above, they have sunk below superstition itself.

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