

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם ירמיהו טז

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If men would only employ in religion a little of that common sense and earnestness, which they find so necessary for the affairs of this life, they would by God's blessing soon arrive at the truth. For example, if the father of a family should find, that by following the advice of a physician, sickness and death were constant guests, he would soon look out for another; and he would be much quickened in his measures, if this physician's counsel had produced the same results in the house of his father and his grandfather. He would not think it any shame, under such circumstances, to change his father's physician for another; on the contrary, he would think, and most men would agree with him, that it would be both a sin and a shame to retain him. Now let Israel make the application to their spiritual physicians the Scribes, Pharisees, and Rabbies. For many centuries they have punctually followed their advice, and the consequence has been one misfortune after another, and centuries of exile from the land which God gave to their fathers; the very contrary of that which God has promised. God has said, if the Jews will obey the religion of Moses, that they shall be restored to their land: "It shall come to pass.... if thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thy heart and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all nations," &c. (Deut. xxx. 2, 3.) The Jews have obeyed the commands of the Rabbies, and have not been gathered; what is the conclusion? Either that God's promise has failed, which is impossible, or that the religion of the Rabbies is not the religion of Moses. Such is the inevitable conclusion from the words of Moses and the facts of the case; let it then lead the sufferers to examine the religion which they have hitherto professed. A very little examination will convince any reasonable man, that it is a fearful corruption of divine truth, a compilation made by men who professed to be astrologers and magicians. Let not the Jews think that our opinion is the result of prejudice. It has been deliberately formed on evidence furnished by the oral law itself. If we are wrong, let

the Rabbies prove the contrary. Let them, for example, explain the following law of modern Judaism.

מי שנשכו עקב או נחש מותר ללחוש על מקום הנשיכה ואם בשבת כדי לישב דעתו ולחזק לבו אף על פי שאין דובר מועיל כלום הואל ומסוכן הוא הדבר לו כי שלא תסרוך דעתו עליו:

"If any person be bitten by a scorpion or a serpent, it is lawful to charm the place of the bite, even on the Sabbath-day, in order to quiet his mind, and to encourage his heart, although it is a thing utterly profane. Because the man is in danger, they have pronounced this lawful for him that his mind may not be distracted." (Hilchoth Accum. c. xi. 11.) Here the Rabbies have allowed what God has absolutely forbidden. The men who profess such reverence for the Sabbath allow it to be profaned by magic, which is one of the works of the devil. Rambam, whose words we have just quoted, felt that it was both wicked and foolish, and has therefore endeavoured to furnish an excuse, saying that it is of no use, and is only allowed to quiet the mind of the sufferer. But that does not alter the unlawfulness. Besides, what sort of opinion could Rambam and the Rabbies have had of the Jews, when they say that magic is permitted in order to quiet their minds? They evidently supposed that the Jews were a weak and superstitious people, who believed so firmly in charms, that the use of them would quiet the mind; and so ignorant or careless about God's commandments, that they could be comforted by their transgression. The excuse, therefore, only makes the case worse. It takes for granted that the professors of the oral law are ignorant and superstitious; and then to quiet their minds allows the transgression of the law of Moses, and that on the Sabbath-day. But this excuse is altogether Rambam's invention. The original passage in the Talmud says nothing about quieting the man's mind, it simply says—

ולחושין לחישה נחשים ועקבין בשבת:

"It is lawful to charm serpents and scorpions on the Sabbath-day." (Sanhedrin, fol. 101, col. 1.) And Rushi's commentary on the passage

בשבל שלא יזיק:

"That they may not do injury." This man, then, who spent his life in the study of the Talmud, knew nothing of Rambam's apology. He plainly believed that by charming serpents on the Sabbath, they might be prevented from doing harm, and that on this account, and not for the purpose of quieting the mind, they were permitted so to do. This was also the opinion of that famous expounder of Jewish law, the Baal Turim, for after quoting Rambam's words, he adds—

מי שרדפי' אחריו נחש או עקרב מותר לחנני כד שלא יזיקוהו כבוד הרמ' לנכח הלוהש על המכה וקורא פסוק מן התורה וכן הקורא על התינוק שלא יבעת או מנחם ס'צ' או הפליץ על הקטן לא ר' להם שהם בכלל הגרים ומנחשים אלא שהם בכלל הנתנים בתורה שעושין דברי תורה ופועל הנוף ואינו אלא תועלת הנפש ור' מ' דוקא בלחוש על המכה ומזכיר שם שמים ודוק אחרו הוא שאין לו חלק ע"ה אבל אם אינו דוק לא חמ' כלי הוא ומיהו איסורא אימא בלחוש פסוק על המכה אפילו בלא ריקקה ובלא הזכרת שם שמים: ואם יש בו סכנה נשפות הכל מותר ומותר לקרא פסוק להגן כגון בלילה על מסתו:

"If any person be pursued by a serpent or a scorpion, it is lawful to charm it to prevent it from doing injury. Rambam has written, He that charms a wound, or reads a verse from the law (as a charm), and also he that reads over an infant that it may not be afraid, or who lays a roll of the law or phylacteries upon a child, are not only to be accounted as one of the charmers and magicians, but as of the deniers of the law, for they use the words of the law as medicine for the body, whereas it is only a medicine for the soul. R. Isaac says absolutely, that he who charms a wound, mentioning at the same time the name of God and spitting, is the charmer of whom it is said that he has no share in the world to come: but if he does not spit, the matter is not so grave. It is, however, forbidden to use a verse as a charm over a wound, even though there be no spitting nor mentioning the name of God. *But if life be in danger, every thing is lawful*; and it is lawful to read a verse as a defence, for instance at night in bed." (Toreh Deah. § 179.) From this it is pretty plain that the charming of serpents was allowed, not as Rambam says to quiet the mind of him that had been bitten, but to prevent injury, for it is allowed before the man is bitten at all, if he be only pursued by a serpent or scorpion. But what a picture does this whole passage give us of the religious state of the Rabbinic Jews, both rabbies and people. Here you have the people described, not by Christians, but by the rabbies themselves, as sunk in the depths of superstition, using a sopher torah, a roll of the law, or phylacteries as a sort of charm for the benefit of children, and you have the rabbies

forbidding this at one time, but allowing what is equally forbidden by God, to charm serpents, and in case of danger declaring that "Every thing is lawful," that is, allowing them to do what will make them, according to Rambam's opinion, charmers, magicians, and deniers of the law. And this is the Jewish religion, and this is what the Jews have gained by rejecting Christianity. We, poor Gentiles, who cannot trace our pedigree to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, should be ashamed of such follies. And if such wicked heathenish practices were to be found in our religious books, we would not let an hour pass over until we had lifted up our voice and protested against them, and should use every lawful means to deliver our children from such ungodliness and error.

We have now given quotations from the two great digests of Jewish law on the subject of using charms, but it is worth while to consider the context of the original passage, upon which these laws are based, as that will prove that the Talmud has not been misrepresented by its compilers.

חנן רבנן סבין וממשיכין בני מעין בשבת ולחושין לחישה נחשים ועקרבין בשבת ומעבדין כלי על גב העין בשבת אמר רבנן שמעון בן גמליאל במה דברים אמורים בכלל הנישל אבל בכלל שאינו אמור ואין שואלין בדבר שדים בשבת ר' יוסי ואמר אף בחול אמר רב הונא אין הלכה כר' יוסי ואף ר' יוסי לא אמרה אלא משום סכנה כי הוא רוב יצדק בר יוסף דאביביל בארזא ואחמב' ליה ניכס סקע ארזא ותלמידי:

"Our rabbies have handed down the tradition that it is lawful to anoint and rub the stomach (of a sick man) on the Sabbath, also to charm serpents and scorpions on the Sabbath: also to pass an instrument across the eye on the Sabbath. R. Simeon, the son of Gamaliel, says, that this only applies to an instrument which may be moved,\* but with one that may not be moved, it is unlawful. But it is unlawful on the Sabbath to make inquiry of demons. R. Jose says, this is also unlawful on week days. Rav. Huna says, the decision is not according to R. Jose: and R. Jose himself said this only on account of danger, for that is what occurred in the case of R. Isaac, the son of Joseph, who was swallowed up in a cedar tree, but a miracle was wrought for him—the cedar opened, and cast him out." (Sanhedrin, fol. 101, col. 1.) We have here, first the charming of serpents; we ask, then, could the Talmudic doctors really believe in such folly or allow such wickedness on the Sabbath? Is there any misunderstanding, or does the context show, that they were men of that superstitious turn of mind to justify this idea? The context is all of a piece, for after permitting the

\* Such as a key, a ring, or a knife.—Rashi.

charming of serpents, it goes on to discuss the lawfulness of asking counsel of demons, and here Rashi shall explain what this means.

דבר שדים שכן עושין כשאובדין שום דבר שואלין במעשה שדים והם מגידים להם ואסור לעשות בשבת משום ממצא הצניץ :

“To make inquiry of demons, is what they do when any thing is lost. They make inquiry by the work of demons, and they tell them, and this is forbidden on the Sabbath, on account of the words, ‘Not finding thine own pleasure.’ (Isaiah lviii. 13).” This is plainly a magical operation, but yet the rabbies do not say that it is unlawful because it is magical, but because it would be attending to one’s own concerns. In like manner, they say it is unlawful on week-days, only on account of the danger. And an instance is given in Rabbi Isaac of what might happen; and here, again, we ask counsel of Rashi, in order to understand what Rabbi Isaac was about. This commentator tells us—

והיה שואל במעשה שדים ובקש השם להזיק ונעשה לו נס ובלעו הארץ :

“He was asking counsel, by means of a demoniacal operation, and the demon sought to do him an injury, but a miracle was wrought for him, and a cedar tree swallowed him.” Such, then, is the context, those men who permit the charming of serpents, also teach the doctrine of asking advice of demons, and give us a practical example in one of their friends. There can, therefore, be no mistake, the one feature of their religious system exactly agrees with the other; and the authors of the oral law represent themselves as patrons and practisers of charms and magic, and therefore to every lover of the Mosaic law, as unwise and ungodly men. It is, however, curious to see how they endeavoured to quiet their own conscience, and that of the people, in a matter so evidently repugnant to the plain words of Scripture. They pretended that there was a holy sort of magic in the practical Cabbala, which men might learn, and then perform the greatest miracles.

אי בעו צדיק ברו עלמא שנאמי כי עתהיכום היו מברלי וגו' רבא רבא גבא שדרה לקמיה ר' זירא היה קא משתעי בהדיה ולא היה קא מהדר ליה א'ל סן זוריא את הדר לעשיין רב הנינא ורב אשעיא הוו ירבי כל מעלי שבחא ועסקי בספר יצירה ומיברו להו עינלא הילתא ואכלי ליה :

“If the righteous wished, they might create the world, for it is written, ‘But your sins separate, &c.’ Rabba created a man, and sent him to Rabbi Zira. He spoke with him, but when the other did not answer him, he said, Thou art from the magicians, return to thy dust. Rav Chanina and Rav Oshaia used to sit every Sabbath eve and study the book

of Jetzirah, and then created for themselves a three-years-old calf, and ate it.” (Sanhedrin, fol. 65, col. 2.) The second miracle is here ascribed to the study of a certain book. In Rashi the first miracle performed by Rabba is ascribed to the same source.

רבא גבא ר' ע" ספר יצירה שמלמדו צורף אחיהו של שום :

“He created the man by means of the book of Jetzirah, for it taught him the combination of the letters of the name of God.” According to this account, these rabbies were much greater men than Moses or any of the prophets, for in the whole Old Testament there is not one such miracle recorded. Moses never created any thing, neither did he perform any of his miracles without the help of God. Either the Lord immediately commended him, or he sought the Lord’s help. But these rabbies acquired the power of omnipotence by studying a particular book, and exercised it either for their amusement or their profit. Rabba created a man, and sent him to Rabbi Zira, not as it appears to do any good, or to glorify God, but simply to show his power, or to act a little bit of waggery; and the other two created a fat calf for themselves every Sabbath eve, that they might have a good dinner. The difference between these miracles and those recorded in Scripture is obvious. The Scripture miracles are either for the glory of God, or the good of man. The Rabbinical miracles are altogether for the glory of man, and the gratification of self. Moses smote the rock, and supplied all Israel with water. The rabbies create a calf, and eat it themselves. No doubt there were many poor people in Israel at the time of Rabbies Oshaia and Chanina, who would have been very glad of a calf for their Sabbath dinner, why did they not create a calf or two for them? This selfish falsehood betrays itself, and bears on its front its own condemnation. The whole doctrine of the combination of the letters in the name of God is a pure invention of men, whose minds had been debased by superstition. There is not a word about it in the whole Bible, and it is derogatory to the honour of God, who is the only Creator.

The whole Talmudic doctrine of magic does, however, explain the reason why the Scribes and Pharisees were so little moved by the real miracles of Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples. Their minds were fully possessed with faith in the power of cabalistic magic, they therefore were insensible to the real displays of divine power. They were in the same state of mind as Pharaoh and his magicians, who looked on the miracles of Moses as a mere proof of magical skill, and hardened their hearts. Even when they confessed

"This is the finger of God," they were not converted. Pharaoh still persisted in his resistance. And so it was with the Scribes and Pharisees. When the Lord had raised Lazarus from the dead, "then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees in council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles." They acknowledged the fact of the miracles, but did not receive their evidence, for they believed that the study of the book of Jetzirah would enable them to do greater. No miracle, therefore, could convince them. But besides this, their hearts were corrupt, and they had apostatized from the law of Moses; they therefore did not love the truth. They had turned aside to charms and magic, and asking counsel of demons; and when men do this, the understanding becomes darkened, so that it is rendered impervious to the light. Their unbelief, therefore, becomes an evidence to the truth of Christianity. If such transgressors of the law of Moses, and such unblushing relators of falsehood had believed, it would have cast a shade of suspicion over the whole Gospel history. If the men, who say that Rabba created a man, and the two other worthies created a calf every week, had appeared as witnesses for the truth of Christianity, the miracles of the Gospel would have appeared in one category with these most absurd fictions. But when such men appear as the enemies and persecutors of Jesus, it testifies that He was not one of them, and that as they were bad men, and loved a false system, his doctrine must necessarily have had something good in it, or they would not have opposed it.

But this doctrine explains still more clearly the cause of God's wrath against Israel. The Jews boast that since the Babylonian captivity, they have been free from idolatry, but this is not true. They have not made images, that is, they have avoided the form, but they have retained all the substance of idolatrous heathenism. The man who charms a serpent is an idolater, and the religion which permits it is idolatrous and heathenish. The man who asks counsel of demons is an idolater of the worst class, for he does homage to unclean spirits. He turns his back upon the allwise God, who ought to be the counsellor of all his children, and by making demons his advisers, makes them his gods; and yet this is also allowed in the religion of the Rabbies, if it can be done without danger. Those Jews, therefore, who believe in the oral law—that is,

all Jews who make use of the synagogue prayers, have departed from the law and the God of Moses, and have chosen for themselves the doctrines and the gods of the rabbies. How then can God have compassion upon them and gather them? The thing is impossible, until they utterly renounce all these delusions, confess their sin in having followed them so long, and "return and seek the Lord their God and David their king." A long trial has been made of the rabbinical medicine, and it has altogether failed. Wherever the religion of the oral law has been or is predominant, its sway has been marked by the misery of the people. And the first dawn of a happier day has appeared only since the time that a part of the nation burst the fetters of Rabbinic superstition. Compare the state of the German Jews with that of their brethren in Turkey or on the coast of Morocco. Some of the former have abandoned the oral law, and the latter still cling to it with a bigoted devotion; and yet the former have had a blessing in the improvement of their temporal and intellectual condition, and the latter still remain in mental and corporeal slavery. The mere renunciation of Rabbinism has produced these beneficial effects, and if the Jews of Europe go on from the renunciation of error to the attainment of truth, that is, if they return to the religion of Moses and the prophets, the promises of God will be fulfilled, and the nation will be restored to the land of their fathers.

The Rabbinic Jews comfort themselves with the idea, that they cannot have this world and the world to come too; but they confound two things which are perfectly distinct, God's mode of dealing with individuals, and his mode of dealing with nations. Individuals have not only an existence in time, but for eternity. Worldly misfortune to an individual is, therefore, no proof of God's displeasure, because the world is only a part, and that the smallest part, of his existence. But the case of nations is different. They exist only in time, and therefore the rewards and punishments must be temporal, and so God has uniformly promised to the Jewish people temporal prosperity, in case of national obedience, and temporal calamity in the former case. Whenever, therefore, we see Israel exiled from their land and scattered among the nations, we must infer, if Moses has spoken the truth, that it is because they have departed from the God of their fathers.

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