

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות שלם. ירמיהו טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—JER. vi. 16.

NUMBER 39.]

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1836.

[PRICE ONE-PENNY.]

THE object of our late numbers has been to point out the inconsistency and precariousness of the various hopes, which the oral law holds out to its advocates, and the consequent inadequacy of a religion which leaves its professors without a reasonable hope of eternal happiness. In the course of our observations, the subject of almsgiving twice presented itself prominently to our notice; first, as a means of compensating for the sins and omissions of the past year; and secondly, as a means of promoting the repose of departed souls; from which it appears that the oral law considers this duty as most important and beneficial both to the living and the dead. The object of the present paper shall therefore be, to inquire into the Rabbinic doctrine of almsgiving, and to compare it with the law and the prophets. The duty and extent of almsgiving are thus defined:—

מצוה עשה ליתן צדקה לעני ישראל כפי מה שראוי לעני. אם היתה יד הנותן משגת, שנאמר פתח ופתח את ידך לו ונאמר החזקת בן גר ותושב ודי עמך ונאמר ודי אדוך עמך; וכל הרוחה עני מבקש והעלים עיניו מסנו ולא נתן לו צדקה עבר בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקטוף את ידך מאדוך האביון; לפי מה שהזכיר העני אהה מצוה ליתן לו. אם אין לו כבוד מכסים אחרו. אם אין לו כלי בית קונין לו. אם אין לו אשה משיאין אחרו. ואם היתה אשה משיאין אחרה לאיש. אפילו היה דרכו של זה העני לרכוב על הסוס ועבר רץ לפניו והעני יד מסכסו קונין לו סוס לרכוב עליו ועבר לדרך לפניו שנאמר די מסכסו אשר יחסרו לו מצוה אהה להשלים החסרו ואין אהה מצוה לעשור; יתום שבא להשיאו אשה. שוכרין לו בית ומציעים לו מסה וכל כלי תשישו ואחר כך משיאין לו אשה; בא העני ושאל די מסכסו ואין יד הנותן משגת נתנין לו כפי השגת יד וכמה עד המשיט נכסיו מצוה סך המבורך; ואחר מעשרה בנכסו בינוני. סתות מיכן עץ רעה;

harden thine heart nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother.' (Deut. xv. 7.) According as the poor hath need, thou art commanded to give. If he has no clothing, he is to be clothed; if he has no furniture, it is to be bought for him; if he has no wife, he is to be helped to marry one; if a woman, she is to be assisted in getting a husband: yea, if it had been the poor man's custom to ride upon a horse, and to have a servant running before him—but he is now come down in the world,—it is a duty to buy him a horse to ride, and a servant to run before him, for it is said, 'Sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth,' (Deut. xv. 8); and thou art commanded perfectly to relieve his want, but not to make him rich. If an orphan apply for assistance in order to marry, it is a duty to hire a house for him, and to provide all necessary furniture, and afterwards to help him to marry. If a poor man come and ask for relief, and the giver has not as much as he wants, he ought to give what his means afford. How much? He that gives a fifth of his property fulfils the commandment well. He that gives one part in ten fulfils it in a middling manner. He that gives less must be regarded as a person with an evil eye." (Hilchoth Matt'noth Aniim, cvii. 1—5.) In this definition of the nature and extent of the duty of almsgiving, there is much that is good and worthy of our admiration, especially in this selfish and money-loving age, when poverty is regarded, if not punished, as a crime, and the poor are, by many, considered as unworthy of all domestic comfort. Without binding ourselves to the approval of all the details here specified, we must acknowledge, that the spirit of this passage is agreeable to the idea of true charity, and, if universally acted upon, would do more for the happiness of mankind than some theories now afloat. But though ready to admire and to acknowledge the general beauty and excellence of this passage, we must also remark that the main feature of charity is, by the Rabbinical system, excluded. God commands that this help should extend beyond the narrow limits of selfishness and nationality, to "the stranger and the sojourner," but the oral law neutralizes the mercifulness of God's commandment by making the word stranger signify a proselyte to Judaism. The original Hebrew word גר (*Ger*) plainly means a

"It is an affirmative precept to give alms to the poor of Israel, according as the poor have need, if in the power of the giver; for it is said, 'Thou shalt open thine hand wide to him,' (Deut. xv. 8); and again, 'Thou shalt relieve him, a proselyte\* or a sojourner, that he may live with thee;' and again, 'That thy brother may live with thee.' (Lev. xxv. 35, 36.) Whosoever sees a poor man begging, and shuts his eyes against him, and does not give him alms, transgresses a negative precept; for it is said, 'Thou shalt not

\* Literally, "a stranger."

stranger, as may be seen in the words of Moses—

ואהבתם את הדגר כי גרים הייתם במצרים :  
 "Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deut. x. 19.) It is certain that the Israelites were not proselytes, but strangers; this word, *Ger*, therefore, signifies stranger, not proselyte; and yet the oral law says that no one can be a *Ger* without sacrifice, circumcision and baptism, or now, that there is no temple, without the two last requisites:

ומפני זהה שאין שם קרבן צריך מילה ומבילה ומשיבני בית ומקדש יביא יקבני; גי ששל ולא שבל או שבל ולא מל אינו גר עד שימול ויטבול :

"At the present time when there is no sacrifice, circumcision and baptism are necessary, and when the temple is rebuilt, he must bring a sacrifice. A *Ger* who is circumcised but not baptized, or baptized but not circumcised, is not a *Ger*, until he be both baptized and circumcised." (Hilchoth Issure Biah, c. xiii. 5, 6.) This Rabbinical definition of what is meant by *Ger*, restricts the exercise of charity within a much narrower limit than that prescribed by God, and does, in fact, destroy one of the most beautiful features of the Mosaic law, namely, the merciful provision which it makes for the relief of the stranger. The law of Moses has the spirit of its divine Author. He calls himself "a jealous God," and it may well be called a jealous law, watching carefully over every departure from truth, and punishing it rigorously: and yet, like God himself, this just jealousy is tempered with mercy, and beams with love. The oral law, on the contrary, is an envious and vindictive code, and its zeal degenerates into narrow-hearted bigotry. It would not only punish the idolater, but exclude every stranger from the pale of charity, unless he be a proselyte; and an Israelite too, if he had in any wise dared to transgress the Rabbinical commands. A remarkable instance of this hatred, to those whom it considers apostates, occurs in these laws respecting almsgiving: The oral law says, that the most meritorious exercise of charity is, the ransoming of captives.

מדין שבאים קודם לריכסת עניים ולחטות ואין לך מצדה גדולה מפדיון שבאים

"The ransoming of captives goes before the feeding and clothing of the poor, and there is no commandment so great as this." (Hilchoth Matt'noth Aniam, c. 8.) And yet if a brother Israelite should deviate from the Rabbinical commands, the oral law makes it unlawful to ransom him, at the same time that it enjoins the ransom of a slave if he be a proselyte.

עבד שנשבה הואיל ושבול לשם עבודה וקבל עליו מצדה פורץ אורו כמשרא שנשבה ושביו שחומר אסיל למצדה אחת כנוח שיהיה אורל נבלה להצניע וכיפא בו אכור לשדונו :

"A slave who is in captivity because he

has received the baptism of slaves, and taken upon himself the commandments, is to be redeemed. But as to a captive who has altered even one commandment, if for instance he has eaten forbidden food in order to vex, it is forbidden to ransom such an one." (Ibid.) Thus the oral law forbids all compassion even to an Israelite, if he is not of the Rabbinical religion. The conduct which it prescribes towards poor Gentiles, "for the sake of the ways of peace," כמו דורי שלום, we have considered long since; but the prohibition to receive alms of the Gentiles, deserves notice here, as it furnishes another proof of the contracted views of the rabbies, and the falsehood of the oral law.

אכור לישראל לימול בצדקה מן הגרים בפרדמאי ואם אינו יכול לזכות בצדקה של ישראל ואינו יכול לימול מן הגרים בצדקה דרי זה מותר ומלך או שד מן הגרים ששלח ממוך לישראל לצדקה אין מחוייבין אחרו משום שלום מלכות אלא נושלין ממנו רינתן לעמי גרים בשדו כרי שלא ישמע המלך :

"It is unlawful for an Israelite to receive alms from the Gentiles openly. But if he cannot live by the alms of Israel, and cannot receive it from the Gentiles privately, then it is lawful. If a king or prince of the Gentiles sends money to Israel as alms, it is not to be returned, on account of the peace of the kingdom. On the contrary, it is to be received, but it is to be given to the poor of the Gentiles privately, so that the king may not hear of it." (Ibid.) Here the oral law endeavours to pervert that kindly feeling which should exist between all the families of man, and spurns a demonstration even of love, because it comes from a man of a different religion. At the same time its authors had not the moral courage to do this openly and honestly, and if need be, suffer for conscience sake. They command that the proffered alms should be taken from the king, as if they intended to devote it to the object for which he gave it, and then privately to apply to a totally different purpose. This want of good faith shows abundantly that the oral law does not come from the God of truth. The narrow bigotry of the system thus neutralises all the individual trials of excellence which the oral law contains. They appear beautiful only when viewed apart from their context, but the moment we view them in relation to the other parts of Rabbinism, their beauty is gone. Thus the duty and extent of almsgiving, as prescribed by the oral law, at first sight appears admirable; but the narrow spirit of bigotry by which it is circumscribed, totally destroys its moral value in the sight of God and man. Almsgiving is lovely only when it is the offspring of charity. God looks not at the mere outward act of giving money, but at the heart, and if there be no love there, almsgiving is valueless in his sight. And how can any one pretend that there is a grain of true God-like charity

in a system which turns stranger into proselyte, prohibits to help a brother because he is not of our own religious sentiments, and refuses even to receive a kindness from one of a different religion? Just contrast this with the Christian doctrine, "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; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. v. 44—48.)

But the oral law not only prevents and falsifies the true doctrine concerning charity, but also misleads its followers by teaching them to think that almsgiving is a peculiarly meritorious act, and will atone for other transgressions. Thus it is said—

דייבן אנו להודו במצות צדקה יותר מכל מצות  
עשה. שהצדקה סימן לצידיקות אמרום אבנו שטאמר  
כי ידעו למען אשר יצוה את בניו לעשות צדקה.  
ואין כסא ישראל מחונק דתה ואמרת עומדת אלא  
בצדקה שטאמר בצדקה חנוני. ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא  
בצדקה שטאמר ציון בנשפטת תהודה ושביה בצדקה.  
"We are bound to be more careful respect-

ing this commandment of alms than about any other of all the affirmative precepts, for almsgiving is a characteristic of the righteous seed of our father Abraham, as it is said, 'I know him that he will command his children to do alms.' (Gen. xviii. 19). By almsgiving alone it is that the throne of Israel is established, and that the law of truth standeth, for it is said 'by alms (literally in righteousness) thou shalt be established.' (Isaiah liv. 14). By alms alone it is that Israel shall be delivered, for it is said 'Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with alms (righteousness).' (Isaiah l. 27.) (Ibid. c. x. l.) According to this doctrine, the man who gives alms has the merit of upholding truth in the world and helping to deliver Israel from captivity. But the following passage tells us that it will deliver from the punishment which he deserves, and which is already impending over his head:—

הצדקה רחמה את הגוירות הקשות וברע הצל  
ממות כמו שאמר לצדקה

"Almsgiving annuls the evil decrees, and in famine it delivers from death, as happened to the widow of Sarepta." (Jereh Deah, 347.) And hence it is that, as we have seen, at the approach of the New Year the Rabbins practise almsgiving abundantly, and also, that the survivors offer for the repose of the souls of their deceased relations. The tendency of this

doctrine is obviously pernicious, for it encourages men to persist in sin, under the idea that almsgiving will compensate for all other deficiencies. The doctrine itself is positively false. Where does the law of Moses say that almsgiving can purchase forgiveness? Moses requires obedience to all the commandments, and he enjoins the practice of charity to the poor, but he denounces wrath against all transgression. The doctrine of Moses is not, that obedience to one command will compensate for disobedience to another, but that disobedience to one command will make obedience to others of none effect. The doctrine that the giving of money to the poor can change the course of God's judgment, or alter this sentence, is very little short of blasphemy: for it represents him as an unjust judge who can be bribed, whose severity can be bought off, and whose favour can be purchased with money. A more degrading view of the Divine character can scarcely be imagined. Such conduct in a human judge would stamp him with infamy, and cannot possibly be true of Him who is a God of truth and justice. This one feature of Rabbinic religion is sufficient to prove that it is the invention of men, and of men too without any very exalted notion of justice and equity.

Besides, this view of almsgiving takes away all the virtue of obedience and love to God, and turns it into a mere mercenary transaction. The great beauty of almsgiving is that it proceeds from love to God and man, and that its motives be mercy and obedience. But the man, who gives alms in order to atone for other transgressions; or to avert the punishment which he deserves, is not performing an act either of obedience or charity, he is simply making a purchase and driving a bargain which is much to his advantage. He has got money, and with that money he can buy a house, or a horse, or deliverance from punishment. It is, therefore, a simple question of interest. He considers which will be the most profitable investment of his money, and if he decide that deliverance from God's wrath is the most advantageous, he lays it out in almsgiving. Obedience, or love to God or man, is here altogether out of the question. Can any one, who has got the law and the prophets in his hands, imagine that such a doctrine can come from God? or can any reasonable being suppose, that escape from God's wrath, or the enjoyment of his favour depends not upon man's moral worth, but upon his ability to give alms: in a word, that his salvation depends not upon the state of his heart, but the laying out of his money? This one doctrine, if thoroughly believed and acted upon, would overturn the whole law of Moses, and offer life not to the obedient, but to the moneyed.

In this doctrine of almsgiving, however, the

oral law errs at the very foundation. It has chosen the Hebrew word צדקה to stand for "almsgiving," whereas its true signification is "righteousness," as may be easily proved by reference to passages where it cannot possibly signify "almsgiving," as for instance—  
 וצדקה חזקה לנו כי נשכור לעשות את כל הדיבור  
 והוא לשכי ידוה כאשר צונו:

"And it shall be our *righteousness* (not our almsgiving), if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God as he hath commanded us." (Deut. vi. 25.) Here צדקה cannot possibly signify almsgiving. And again,

והאמין ביהוה ויחשבו לו צדקה:  
 "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness (not for almsgiving.)" (Gen. xv. 6.) And again,  
 לך ארני הצדקה ולנו ברושח הדינים

"O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face" (Dan. ix. 7), where it is impossible to say that "Almsgiving belongeth unto the Lord." The oral law is therefore guilty of perverting the meaning of one of the plainest and most commonly repeated words in the Bible, and of course of thereby giving an erroneous sense to the passages where it occurs. Thus it says, as we have seen above, "that by almsgiving the throne of Israel is established and the law of truth standeth," and it proves this assertion by referring to a verse of Isaiah, where the word צדקה occurs, and which signifies "by righteousness shalt thou be established," but which it perverts to mean "by almsgiving thou shalt be established." Here then the oral law is plainly convicted of falsifying the Word of God, and perverting its meaning in order to serve its own purposes and favour its own false doctrine. To teach false doctrine is bad enough, but to pervert the plain sense of Scripture is a great deal worse. Either charge, if proved, would be sufficient to prove that the oral law is a false religion, but here both charges are proved together. The oral law here teaches that almsgiving can do that which it cannot do, namely, bribe God to have mercy; and it supports its false doctrine by interpreting צדקה to signify "alms-

giving," whereas it plainly signifies "righteousness." A religion guilty of such error cannot be from God. It is for the Jews, then, to consider whether they will persist in upholding the truth of a system which opposes the doctrines of Moses and the prophets, and perverts the Word of God. The great boast of the Jews is, that they are faithful to Moses and to the religion of Moses; but this boast is vain so long as they profess Judaism. If Moses were to rise from the dead, and get the oral law into his hands, he would not be able to recognise it as the religion which he left to Israel. And, as to the commands about almsgiving, he would not be able even to translate them, for in his time צדקה signified righteousness.

The Prophet Isaiah would feel equal astonishment if he were to return and learn, that the oral law quoted him as an authority for the assertion, that Zion is to be redeemed, not with righteousness, but with almsgiving. And we doubt not that both Moses and Isaiah would protest as earnestly as we do against a doctrine based upon perversion. But it is extraordinary, if the Rabbins really believe their own doctrine, that Israel can be delivered from captivity by almsgiving, that they should set any bounds to their liberality, or ever stop giving, until the desired redemption be effected. If their doctrine be true, then all that they so earnestly pray for, is entirely in their own power. They know the means, and they possess the means of terminating this long captivity. They need only to give a sufficiency of alms, and, according to the oral law, even Zion itself shall be delivered. How extraordinary then, that they should have suffered so many centuries of misery to pass over their heads, and left their brethren to endure such calamities, when liberality in almsgiving could have put a period to all their sorrows. We think too highly of Israel's charity to suppose for a moment that they would hesitate to make the sacrifice, if they were persuaded of its efficacy. We must therefore infer, that they do not believe in the doctrine, and ask them, why do they profess a religion in which they do not believe?

London:—Sold at the London Society's Office, 16, Exeter-hall, Strand; by James Duncan, Paternoster-row; and B. Wertheim, 57, Aldersgate-street. This publication may be had by applying at No. 5, No. 7, or No. 13, Palestine-place, Bethnal-green.

Macintosh, Printer, 20, Great New-street, London.