

# נתיבות עולם

עדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות שלם · ירמיהו טז

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How a nation, so acute and so fond of learning as the Jews, should ever have been imposed upon by so clumsy an imposture as that of the oral law, is truly astonishing. The exceeding folly of some of its ordinances, the incredibility of the legends with which it abounds, the extravagant pretensions of its doctors, the grinding tyranny of its despotic tribunals, all seem calculated to awaken doubt in the mind of the most credulous, and the most ignorant. But the utter want of evidence to support its claims ought to be sufficient to open the eyes of even superstition itself. To establish the genuineness of an oral tradition, an unbroken chain of witnesses, from the rise of the tradition to the present time, is indispensably necessary. The succession of persons who received it from their predecessors, and transmitted it to their followers, must be clearly and accurately made out; and the want of a single link, or the existence of a single chasm in the chain of transmission is quite sufficient to discredit the whole, and to invalidate the claims to genuineness. To prove the genuineness of the *תורה שבעל פה*, oral law, it is necessary not only to point out a succession of persons, but a succession of Sanhedrins, for, as we have seen, the Sanhedrin was regarded as the foundation and pillar of tradition. If a single chasm in history exists, where a Sanhedrin cannot be pointed out, or if the assigned succession be inconsistent with the written and inspired records of the people, the claims of the oral law are invalidated, and the Jewish nation convicted as the abettors of a pious fraud, or the unwitting dupes of an imposture. Now we have already shown that the Sanhedrin was not instituted by Moses, and was never heard of until after the Greek conquest of the land of Israel; and hence it inevitably follows, that the oral law is totally destitute of that chain of testimony, by which alone its genuineness could be established. From Moses to the Maccabees there is one continued chasm, an immense and impassable abyss, which separates between modern Judaism and truth. But as the rabbies have endeavoured to fill up the yawning gulph, or rather to build a bridge in the air for the purpose of passing it, we think it necessary to examine the success of their efforts. They say, that a chain of testimony, such as is

wanted, does actually exist, and have endeavoured to point out the various links. If this prove fallacious, then the last and only hope of modern Judaism is gone; to prove the fallacy does not require much argument. The chain of testimony, as pointed out by the rabbies themselves, is inconsistent with history, and wants continuity even at the very commencement. The first part of the succession is thus described—

אף על פי שלא נכתבה תורה שבעל פה למדה משה רבינו כולה בבית דינו לשבעים וקנים האלעזר ופנחס ויהושע שלשתן קבלו ממשה · וליהושע שהיה תלמידו של משה רבינו מסר תורה שבעל פה וצוהו עליה · וכן יהושע כל ימי חייו למד על פה · וקנים רבים קבלו מיהושע · וקבל עלי כן הקנים ומסנחים :

“Although the oral law was not written, Moses our master taught it all in his Council to the seventy elders; Eleazar also, and Phinehas, and Joshua, all three, received it from Moses. But to Joshua, who was the disciple of Moses our master, he delivered the oral law, and gave him a charge concerning it. In like manner Joshua taught it by word of mouth all the days of his life; and many elders received it from Joshua, and Eli received it from the elders, and from Phinehas.” (Preface to the *Yad Hachazakah*.) Now here the want of continuity begins, immediately after the third link in the chain. That Joshua should inherit the oral law from Moses is very likely, if there was any to be inherited, but who was Joshua's successor the rabbies cannot tell us. It is not enough to say that the elders received it from Joshua; who were the elders, and who was the next president of the Sanhedrin, and who was the president after that? To make out a chain of witnesses, we must at least have their names, but ought to know, besides, their character, their piety, their probity, before we can depend upon their testimony. The absence of this detail shows that the rabbies had no information on the subject, and were merely trying to make up a story to impose upon the credulous. It is self-evident that if they had possessed an accurate detail, they would have given it; but as they do not, we must infer that they had it not; and as the Bible gives no information on the subject, we must assert, that the chain of testimony terminates at the second link. So far are the rabbies from being able to prove a succession of Sanhedrins from the

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time of Joshua to their own, that they are compelled to make a grand leap from Joshua to Eli, and thus to leave a chasm of more than two hundred years, which of itself is sufficient to overthrow the claims of the oral law, and to stamp the Jews as the most credulous of men if they believe without any evidence. It is true that the rabbies endeavour to stop up this great cavity with a great falsehood. They say that Eli received the oral law from Joshua's elders, and from Phinehas; which assertion implies that all these persons lived to be about three hundred years old! And yet, if it were true, would not be sufficient to make out the proof, for which the succession of Sanhedrins is absolutely necessary, and especially for this period. From the book of Judges, it appears, that in the interval between Joshua and Eli, and even in the next generation after Joshua's death, the people forsook the law of Moses, even the written law, and gave themselves up to idolatry. Thus we read—"And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. . . . And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim." (Judges ii. 8—11.) Now, here the inspired writer says that Joshua and all that generation died, which expressly contradicts the Rabbinic assertion that Joshua's elders lived to the time of Eli; and, further, he says, that the Israelites turned aside to idols: where was the Sanhedrin at that time? If it existed, why did it not stop the torrent of corruption, and punish the transgressors? And why was it necessary for God to raise up Judges to do the Sanhedrin's work? We do not once read of the Sanhedrin, or any other council, helping Israel. In the book of Judges, deliverance is ascribed solely to the judges whom God raised up. "When the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. . . . And it came to pass when the judge was dead, that they returned and corrupted themselves more than their fathers." (Ibid. 18, 19.) Indeed, that saying so often repeated in the book of Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes," shows that there was no Sanhedrin either. If any council of the kind, armed with such despotic power, had existed, the children of Israel could not have done that which was right in their own eyes. Whether, then, we look at the Bible or at the Rabbinic account, we have a period of more than two hundred years, during which there

is no evidence at all either for the existence of the Sanhedrin or of the oral law. The chain of testimony, therefore, offered by the rabbies, is not complete; and is, moreover, unworthy of credit, as it contains a gross falsehood concerning the age to which Joshua's elders lived. A little more examination will show us that it contains more than one falsehood. After telling us that David received the oral law from Samuel and his council, it thus proceeds:—

ואחיה השילוני מיוצאי מצרים היה לוי היה  
ושמע משה והיה קטן בימי משה והוא קבל  
מדוד ובית דינו ואלהיו קיבל מאחיה השילוני ובית  
דינו

"Ahijah the Shilonite was one of those who came out of Egypt, and a Levite, and he heard the oral law from Moses: but he was little in the days of Moses, and received the oral law from David and his council. And Elijah received from Ahijah the Shilonite and his council." Now, in the first place, this statement is very absurd. To suppose that one, who had heard the law from Moses, should at last receive it from David, is contrary to probability: but to assert that Ahijah was a little boy in the time of Moses, and that he lived until the reign of Solomon, that is, above five hundred years, is manifestly a falsehood, and, whether wilful or not, completely destroys the credibility of this attempt at a succession of witnesses. If involuntary, and the result of error, it shows that the rabbies who have transmitted this story were so weak in intellect as to swallow any improbability; and that as they transmitted one lie, they may have transmitted more. But if voluntary, no one will argue that the testimony of wilful liars is worth much. This last attempt, therefore, to prop up the authority of the oral law is vain.

But this Rabbinic chain of testimony goes on to tell us that, amongst others, the oral law passed through Jeremiah the prophet.

ורמיה קיבל מצפניה ובית דינו וברוך בן נריה  
קיבל מירמיה ובית דינו

"Jeremiah received from Zephaniah and his council, and Baruch the son of Neriah received from Jeremiah and his council." Now, if this means that Jeremiah was the נשיא, or President of the Sanhedrin, it is plainly false. The whole history of Jeremiah shows us that he was not the powerful head of a despotic and irresistible council, but an unprotected and persecuted man. Had he been president of a tribunal so dreadful, and whose sentence of excommunication was in itself sufficient to protect him, the people and the princes would never have dared to reject his words as they did, much less to make an attempt on his life. But if, on the other hand, it be said that Jeremiah's council does not mean the Sanhedrin, then we have another chasm in the succession of Sanhedrins, and

consequently the proof fails again. But this chain of evidence is not only contrary to fact, and to the inspired writings of the prophets; it is also inconsistent with the oral law itself, for it asserts that two proselytes form a part of the chain of transmission.

שמעיה ואבטליון גירי הדנוק וביה דינא קיבלו מיהודה ושמתון וביה דינא הלל ושמיא וביה דינא קיבלו משמעיה ואבטליון וביה דינא

“Shemaiah and Abtalion, proselytes of righteousness, and their council, received from Judah and Simon and their council. Hillel and Shammai and their council received from Shemaiah and Abtalion and their council.” Now, according to the oral law, it is unlawful for proselytes to be members of any council or tribunal. Respecting the Supreme Council, it is expressly said—

אין מעמידין בסנהדרין אלא כהנים לויים וישראלים המיוחדים הרואים להשיא לכהונה שנאמר והחיצוני שם עמך בזמן לך בזהבמה וביראה וביחס:

“None are to be made members of the Sanhedrin except priests and Levites, and Israelites of so good a genealogy as to be fit to intermarry with the priests; for it is said, ‘And they shall stand there with thee,’ (Numb. xi. 16.) i. e. like unto thee in wisdom, in piety, and in genealogy.” (Hilchoth Sanhedrin, c. ii. 1.) And even of an inferior tribunal it is said—

בית דין של שלשה שדיה אחד מהם גר הוי הו סכול.

“A tribunal of three, one of whom is a proselyte, is unlawful.” (Ibid. 9.) If then, it was unlawful for a proselyte to be a member of the Sanhedrin, or any other tribunal, how is it that we find two at the head of one of these councils through which the oral law was transmitted? If the decisions of the oral law be valid, that council was illegitimate, and therefore totally incompetent to the transmission of tradition, and then we have a break in the chain of testimony even at that end which is nearest to the rabbies. But if that council be considered competent, then the oral law which condemns it cannot contain the true tradition. But in either case, the genuineness of the law is overthrown.

The sum of what we have said is this:— That even if we were to give up our other arguments against the authority of the Sanhedrin and the oral law, and were willing to rest this question on the testimony of the rabbies themselves, the defectiveness, inconsistency, and falsehood manifested in that testimony, would be sufficient to throw discredit on all their claims. They have not only no proof from Scripture, but are not able themselves to find in tradition an unbroken chain of testimony. They fail at the very outset. After producing two links, they leave a chasm of above two hundred years unaccounted for. When they take it up

again, they are convicted of gross falsehood in asserting that men lived, after the deluge, to the age of five hundred years: and are not able even to make out a story that will agree with the oral law itself. The most favourable ground, then, that can be taken for the defence of the oral law proves untenable. But if to this we add the arguments contained in the former papers, and remember that the Sanhedrin is in direct opposition to the law of Moses, is never mentioned in any of the sacred books, nor heard of until the Greek language was spoken in the land of Israel, every support is taken from the oral law, and it sinks down to the level of a mere imposture, of which the Jewish people have been the dupes and the victims. How long they will remain so, it is for themselves to consider. The times of blind faith, such as modern Judaism requires, are gone by; the Jews can therefore no longer remain the blind followers of the superstitious and ambitious rabbies. Either they must honestly confess that they and their fathers have been deceived for the last eighteen hundred years, and earnestly set about seeking that truth which they lost; or they must be content to be regarded either as interested upholders of error, or reckless despisers of truth. No one, who at all knows the nation, will ever believe that they are so weak in understanding as to be unable, under present circumstances, to detect the clumsy pretensions of the oral law. Some Jews may, indeed, still obstinately refuse to investigate the evidences of their paternal religion, and persist in professing Judaism simply because their fathers did so before them; but such persons must be content to acknowledge that their faith is not that of a rational being, or that their religion will not stand the test of reason. All who will take the trouble to investigate, must, if they be honest men, make up their minds to renounce the religion of the rabbies. There is not any one argument, either of internal or external evidence, in its behalf, on which a man of ordinary understanding can rest for a moment. The only shadow of a basis on which to support the oral law is the doctrine of the Sanhedrin, but this, as we have seen, disappears so soon as we approach the illusion. Instead of giving authority to the other parts of the oral law, the doctrine of a Sanhedrin appears one of the most objectionable of its many errors, for it bears upon its front the stamp of selfishness and ambition. It was an invention of men, who aimed not only at a spiritual dominion, but also at a secular despotism. The Sanhedrin was merely the engine whereby the rabbies hoped to get all the power, both of Church and State, into their own hands, and thereby distinguishes the Rabbinical religion in the most striking manner from that of Jesus of Nazareth. Chris-

tanly contains no apparatus for securing to its teachers the dominion of the world ; and therefore the professing followers of Christ, when they aimed at worldly power, were first obliged to invent an oral law of their own. Jesus of Nazareth seeks nothing but the dominion of truth. "When he perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone." (John vi. 15.) His doctrine was, "My kingdom is not of this world." And in like manner he taught his disciples not to seek after worldly power. "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them : and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you : but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister : and whosoever will be chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark x. 42-45.) Jesus and his apostles are perfectly free from the suspicion of making religion subservient to the promotion of ambitious schemes. The teachers of the oral law had, and even now have a temptation to uphold its doctrines, because they make them the absolute rulers of the Jewish people, and this tendency is a strong ground of suspicion. When God sent Moses, he preserved him from all similar imputation, for though he possessed the supreme power during his life, his claims were attested by miracles which could not be denied : and at his decease his children were chief neither in Church nor State. The priesthood remained in the family of Aaron, and the chief magistracy fell to the lot of Joshua. Thus disinterestedness distinguished the characters of Moses and Jesus from those of the rabbies. The doctrine of the Sanhedrin reveals but too plainly the motives by which the authors of the oral law were actuated. Of course we do not mean to ascribe the same motives to all the advocates of the oral law in the present day. Those motives are necessarily confined to those times when Judaism can be realized, and cannot, therefore, be called forth until there is a prospect of restoring the Rabbinic polity. Our object is not to condemn the modern Jews, but to open their eyes to a true view of that system by which they have been so long deluded. And if they should ask us, Where, then, is the truth to be found ? we reply, in Moses and the pro-

phets. For though we are Christians, we firmly believe that true faith in the Old Testament must terminate in Christianity. The only real obstacle in the way of a Jew's receiving Jesus as the Messiah, is the prejudice, that his fathers, who rejected him, must have been in the right ; and this obstacle we are endeavouring to remove. We have already made it appear that they were in the wrong ; and our late papers have removed the strongest objection that they urge, namely, that the sentence of the Sanhedrin was decisive against his claims. We have shown that the Sanhedrin was altogether an unlawful tribunal, not established by Moses, but, as its name intimates, by the Greeks, and modelled by artful and ambitious men for their own purposes : and as the tribunal was unlawful, so was the sentence. Indeed the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was condemned by an unlawful tribunal is a testimony in his favour. It shows that he disapproved of and opposed their unlawful doings. Jesus was not condemned by the friends of Moses, but by his enemies. The religion of Christ was persecuted, not by those who conscientiously kept Moses' commands, but by those who had first defaced every feature of Mosaism. The men who condemned the Lord Jesus were the tyrannical usurpers of an authority which Moses had given to others ; and if Moses himself had appeared amongst them, and asserted the rights of the priests and Levites against the rabbies, they would just as readily have crucified him as the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews, therefore, of the present day, who approve the condemnation of Jesus, unite with the enemies of Moses ; but those who are lovers of the Mosaic law must approve the efforts of Jesus to deliver it from the corruptions of wicked and ambitious men. An unlawful tribunal condemned him for doing what every true Jew must acknowledge to be right. Whether, then, they acknowledge him as the Messiah or not, they must confess that he died a martyr to his zeal for the law of Moses, and are, therefore, bound to reconsider his claims. Jesus was put to death, not because he violated the Mosaic precepts, but because he reproved others for their transgressions—not because he endeavoured to overturn the religion of Moses, but because he resolutely defended its truth against those who were introducing a new religion upon its ruins.

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