

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיהו טז

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CONSCIENTIOUS adherence to the dictates of true religion is one of the noblest traits that can adorn the human character, and this trait has appeared in its most vivid light in not a few of the Israelite nation. Elijah the prophet, for instance, is a bright example of religious constancy. At a time when all Israel had forsaken the true God, and zealously professed a false religion, neither the allurements of self-interest, nor the power of universal example, nor the natural desire of self-preservation, could draw him aside from the paths of truth and righteousness. Daniel and his three friends in Babylon exhibit the same unwavering firmness in the assertion of truth. The Royal dainties could not prevail upon them to partake of food offered to idols. The fiery furnace could not terrify Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to commit idolatry; the lions' den possessed no terrors that could move Daniel to omit the worship of his God. But as constancy for the truth ennobles and adorns, in the very same degree an obstinate perseverance in error diminishes from man's moral or intellectual value. It shows either that his moral perception is so blunted as to be unable to discern between truth and error, or his moral taste so perverted as not to care for the difference—or that there is some intellectual deficiency which renders the moral powers inoperative. It leads to the suspicion that there is something wrong either with the head or the heart. There is, however, a class of persons, who persevere in error, not because the head is weak, or the heart sick, but because they have never fairly beheld the light of truth. They have grown up in a mist of error, and circumstances have prevented them from emerging into a purer atmosphere. To this class, we would hope, the professors of modern Judaism belong. That they have been for centuries in error is certain. Many incontestable proofs of this have been already advanced; *The Rabbinic laws concerning שחיטה, or the slaughtering of animals*, will add another link to the chain of evidence. The Rabbins have an idea that wherever they may be wrong, in this doctrine they are infallibly in the right; and yet, if the force of education did not afford some aid, it would be impossible to imagine how they can be deceived by a doctrine so manifestly false, and

so entirely devoid of Scriptural foundation. In the first place, the slaughtering of beasts is, like eating, of every-day and universal concernment—a matter that affects the poor and unlearned as much as the studious; and yet the Rabbinic rules are so many and so intricate that either a man must be learned himself, or employ a man of competent learning, to perform this business; or, he must, in spite of himself, turn Pythagorean and renounce the use of animal food. The oral law gives the following outline of what is to be understood by the word שחיטה or slaughtering:—

וביחוד וזו האמורה בתורה סתם צריך לפרש אורה ולידע באי זה מקום מן הבהמה שחושבין וכמה שיעור השחיטה ונאי זה דבר שחושבין ומי שחושבין ודיכין שחושבין וכיצד שחושבין ומה הן הדברים המספיקין את השחיטה ומי הוא השוחט ועל כל הדברים האלו צוונו בתורה ואמר תבזה מנקהד וכי כאשר צוריך ואלכל בשעריך וכי:

"It is absolutely necessary to explain the killing (or slaughtering mentioned in the law), and to know, in what part of the beast one slaughters—what is the measure of the slaughtering—with what implement one slaughters—when—where—and how one slaughters—what things they are which invalidate the act of slaughtering—and who is permitted to slaughter. Concerning all these things, He has commanded us in the law where it is said, 'Then thou shalt kill of thy herd and of thy flock, which the Lord hath given thee, as I have commanded thee, and thou shalt eat in thy gates whatsoever thy soul lusteth after.' (Deut. xii. 21.)" (Jad Hachazakah, Hilchoth Shechitah, c. i. 4.) Here we have at once a list of eight particulars, which must first be known, but then most of these again require a long and learned explanation; for instance the first is thus defined:—

ואי זה הוא מקום שחיטה בקנה משפרי כוננו לומטה עד ראש כנף הריאה כשחמשוך ובהמה צוירה לרעות זה הוא מקום השחיטה בקנה וכל שנכנז המקום הזה מבוזק נקרא צויר; אנסה הבהמה עצמה ומשכה צוירה ודרכה או שאינם השוחט את הסימנין ומשכן למעלה ושוחט במקום שחיטה בצויר ונמצאת השחיטה בקנה או בושט שלא במקום שחיטה דרי זה טעם נבלה:

"On what part of the animal is the slaughtering to be effected? On the wind-pipe, from the edge of the uvula downwards as far as

the top of the extremity of the lungs, as these parts are situated when the beast stretches out its neck to feed : this is the place of the slaughtering in the wind-pipe ; and all the part outside which answers to this place, is called the neck. If the beast forces itself, and stretches out its neck much, or if the slaughterer has forced the sinews, and drawn them upwards, and he slaughters at the right part of the neck, but afterwards it is found that the wind-pipe or the œsophagus is not cut at the right place, then it is a doubtful case of carrion." (Ibid. 7.) In like manner, the *measure of the slaughtering* is accurately defined, and must be as accurately attended to, or else the slaughtering must be considered unlawful, and then it becomes unlawful for the Rabbins to eat it. But the most care is required in examining the knife, which may be of any material that will cut, on condition that there be no gap in it.

אבל אם היה כמו הלם בחזרו של דבר ששוחטין בו ואפילו היה התלם קסון ביותר שחיטתו פסולה :

"But if there be anything like a furrow in the edge of the implement wherewith the slaughtering is effected, even though the furrow be the least possible, the slaughtering is unlawful." The slaughterer is therefore required to examine the knife before and after the act ; for if a gap be found in it after the slaughtering, it is doubtful whether the beast is not to be considered carrion.

לפיכך השחטש בהמות רבות או עופות רבים צריך לבדוק בין כל אחת ואחת : שאם לא בודק ובודק אדורנה ונמצאת סכין פגומה הרי הכל ספק גבולות ואפי' הראשונה :

"Therefore he that has to slaughter many beasts or many fowls, must examine the knife after each ; for if he does not, but examines at the end, and the knife is found to have a gap, then all are to be considered as doubtful carrion, even the first." (Ibid. 24.) From these few particulars, it appears that great care, and not a little study and practice, are required in order to slaughter an animal for food according to the oral law, and that it is very easy, by mistake or want of knowledge, to make the meat unfit for Rabbinic eating : but then, besides all this, there are the five circumstances which invalidate the slaughtering altogether.

חמשה דברים מפסדים את השחיטה : ועיקר הליכות שחיטה להודיר בכל אחת מהן : ואלו הן שדייה : רסח : חלדה : הגרמה ועיקר :

"There are five things which invalidate the slaughtering : and the most important thing respecting the constitutions of slaughtering is, to attend to each one of them, and these are a certain length before the act is completed. 2d, If the throat be cut at a single blow, as with a sword. 3d, If the knife enters too

deep, and is hidden. 4th, When the knife slips up or down from the right place. 5th, When the wind-pipe or œsophagus is torn and comes out, before the act is completed." (Ibid. c. iii.) These five essentials of Rabbinic slaughtering lead again to endless questions and definitions ; so that, putting all together, it is much to be doubted whether a beast ever was, or ever will be, rightly slaughtered according to the oral law. And yet these things, of which there is not the slightest mention in the Mosaic law, are tied like a heavy burden about the necks of the poor and the ignorant, and are most oppressive to their bodies and their souls. The rich may not, perhaps, feel the oppression, but the poor sigh and groan under the load ; and no man considers their sorrow, or stretches out a hand to help them. In the first place, the intricacy of the act always makes Rabbinic meat a great deal dearer than other meat, so that the poor man and his family, who can at any time, or under any circumstances, afford to buy but little food, are compelled by the oral law to do with still less, and in many cases to do without it altogether. Let any one visit the haunts of the poor Jews in this city, or enter their abodes, and he will find many a wretched family pining away for want of proper food ; and yet it is too dear to procure a sufficiency ; and if any benevolent Christian should wish to assist them, offer them some of his own, or give them a ticket to some of those institutions which distribute meat to the poor, the starving family would not dare to accept it, even if their conscience allowed them, or if they did, would inevitably draw down upon themselves a storm of persecution, and be treated as if they had committed the greatest crimes : yea, if the oral law had power, the poor starving creatures, that had partaken of Christian bounty, would be flogged for satisfying the wants of nature.

נכר ששחט אף על פי ששחט בפני ישראל בסכין ישה ואפילו היה קמן שחיטתו נבלה ולוקה אכילהתו כן החורה שנאמר וקרא לך ואכלה מובחו :

"If a Gentile slaughters, even though he does it in the presence of an Israelite, with a proper knife, his slaughtering is carrion ; and he that eats of it is to be flogged according to the written law, for it is said, 'And one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice.' (Exod. xxxiv. 15.)" Yea, the oral law goes so far as to extend this rule even to the case of a Gentile who is not an idolater.

וגדר גרול גדרו דברו שאפילו בו שאינו עובר ע"ז שחיטתו נבלה :

"A very strong fence has been made round this matter, so that the slaughtering even of a Gentile, who is not an idolater, is carrion." (Ibid., c. iv. 11, 12.) It is hardly necessary to say, that the above quotation from the oral law is now-a-days altogether out of place.

Moses was not speaking of Christians nor of the inhabitants of these countries, but of the nations of Canaan. He had been declaring the words of the Lord, "Behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite." And then adds, "Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice." (Exod. xxxiv. 11—15.) So then according to the oral law, because Moses forbade the Israelites to partake of the idolatrous sacrifices of the Hivites and the Jebusites, a poor famished creature here in London is not to touch Christian meat, nor to partake of Christian bounty. A more cruel or oppressive law could hardly have been devised. It is all very well for the rich, but it is very little short of murder to the poor. It binds their consciences with fetters of iron, so that even when relief is offered, many turn from good and wholesome food sent to them by a kind Providence; and if a spark of light has visited the mind of some victim of poverty, and he thinks it lawful to bring home the Christian bounty to save the lives of his starving children, fear prevents him. Perhaps his wife is still enveloped in all the darkness of superstition, and would spurn the proffered relief as an unclean thing, or perhaps his children might innocently betray him, and draw down all the weight of rabbinic indignation. A grosser insult has rarely been offered to the Majesty of heaven, than to call good and proper food, the work of his hands, carrion. A mistake in the slaughtering, an ignorance of the rabbinic art, a Gentile hand, is to be sufficient to turn the bounty of Almighty God into an unclean thing, and to deprive the poor of their daily food. How can the Jews expect God's blessing so long as this state of things continues—how can they be surprised if poverty and want, and wretchedness and scorn, tread close upon their heels, when they themselves spurn God's bounty from them with disdain? As nations deal with God and his word, so he deals with them, כִּדּוּ כִמְדוּ, measure for measure; and therefore, so long as the oral law teaches them to scorn his bounty, and to deprive the poor of their food—so long as the cries of the poor ascend and enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts, so long must they expect to feel the rod of his indignation. The times of ignorance and superstition God winked at; but those times have passed away. Good or bad, there is a stir in the world—there is a shaking of all old opinions, true and false; and from its effects the Jews have not escaped. There are many who, for themselves and their families, have renounced Rabbinism—who eat Gentile food, and know

that in doing so they commit no sin. These are the persons who are most guilty in looking upon the misery of their poor brethren without pity or concern, and without an effort to deliver them. The rabbinic zealot who would persecute his brother for eating meat not slaughtered according to rabbinic precept is in comparison innocent. He conscientiously thinks that he is doing right; but for the man, who himself openly transgresses the oral law, and yet sees the faces of his brethren ground by that system, without a sentiment of pity, there is no excuse. If he had the common feelings of humanity, he would rise up, fearless of all consequences, and cry out with all his might against those principles which have been and are the curse of his nation. He would stand forth as the advocate and defender of the poor—yea, and he would have God's blessing. But so long as this class of anti-rabbinic Jews remain silent, whether from fear or from interest, or from indifference, let them not boast of their superior light. Let them not look with self-complacency on the poor victims of superstition. They are themselves less respectable and more guilty. They are conniving at what they know to be falsehood. They are with their eyes open consenting to oppression and starvation. They are, by their silence, helping to strengthen and confirm a system of anti-social intolerance, which has been the source of all the calamities which their nation has endured for eighteen centuries. What can be more pernicious than to teach the ignorant that the food which their neighbours eat is carrion, so unfit for the nourishment of a rabbinist that he ought to die, and suffer his family to die of want, rather than eat it? Is it likely to produce kindly feeling on either side, considering that the mass of mankind is not actuated by the dictates of reason or the precepts of the Bible? On the one side it is likely to produce proud contempt, and on the other a spirit of retaliation. Every Jew that wishes well to his nation, and knows that these Rabbinic principles are false, is bound to protest against them. He ought not to be a poor selfish thing, insensible to the wants and the sufferings of others, but should do what in him lies, to assert what he knows to be the truth. And is it necessary to remind such of the misery which these Rabbinic principles are still working in every part of the world? Here in London the poor are suffering. In the various towns of England many Jews are suffering. In some places a single Jewish family is found, generally poor, and the father ignorant of the Rabbinic art of slaughtering: such persons are compelled to abstain altogether from animal food, or to do violence to their conscience. The poor Jews who go out to the

colonies to seek employment are in the same case, and are precluded from taking such situations as require them to partake of the food of their employers. Even if they can buy an animal, they are not allowed to kill it for themselves.

ישראל שאינו יודע חמשה דברים שמססדין את השחיטה וכיצא בהן מדלכות שחיטה שבארנו ושמו בניו לבין עצמו אסור לאכול משחיטתו. לא הוא ולא אחרים. דהרי זו קרובה לספק בגולה והאוכל ממנה כותב מכין איתו מכה מרובה :

"If an Israelite does not know the five things which invalidate the act of slaughtering, as we have explained, and slaughters by himself, it is unlawful to eat of his slaughtering, both for himself and others; for this case is much the same as that of doubtful carrion, and he that eats of it a quantity equal to an olive, is to be flogged with the flogging of rebellion." (*Ibid.*, c. iv.) Such is the mercy of the oral law, and such its justice. It punishes the eating of what God has allowed, with the same severity that it would visit a grave crime. It makes no provision for those numerous cases of distress which we have mentioned. Whether one of its disciples has or has not food, it never considers. Without reflection and without mercy it sentences every one, who eats meat not rabbinically slaughtered, to be flogged. But, besides the cruelty, what is the effect upon the minds of its votaries? It teaches them that to transgress this mere human observance is a sin of the deepest die, more dreadful far than many which God has forbidden. A Rabbinist would be more grieved to hear that his son had transgressed the law of slaughtering, than to find that he had been guilty of falsehood. Its tendency is directly to draw off the mind from the weightier matters of the law, judgment, justice, and mercy, and to flatter the ill-informed that they are good Jews, if only they abstain from meat not slaughtered according to Rabbinic art.

Let not any Jew imagine that we wish him lightly to transgress the law of Moses, or to eat of food which the law of God has forbidden. We now speak of that which Moses has allowed. If a Jew should see meat offered to idols, or be invited to partake of an idolatrous feast, let him abstain—let him

refuse, and protest as strongly as he will and can against the sinfulness of such conduct. But where does Moses forbid the poor to partake of meat slaughtered by a Gentile worshipper of the true God, or by an Israelite who has not learned the Rabbinic art? Certainly not in that passage to which the oral law refers. Moses gives a general permission to every Israelite, without exception, to kill and eat. "Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee." (*Deut.* xii. 15.) He makes no mention of any mysteries connected with the art of slaughtering, the ignorance of which would disqualify. Why then should a Jew be prevented from doing what Moses has allowed—why should he be flogged with the flogging of rebellion, or avow that that mode and measure of punishment is impracticable—why should he be persecuted for satisfying the cravings of nature, and endeavouring to supply the wants of his family? There is not room now to show fully how groundless the Rabbinic commands are; but the one fact of their cruelty and oppression of the poor is sufficient to show that they are not from God. Is it possible that any man in his senses can believe that God would sentence a poor famishing creature to be flogged without mercy for doing what the letter of the law allows him to do? or, that that All-wise Being, who foresees and foreknows all things, would give a system of laws respecting food, which must expose a large portion of his chosen people to want and starvation? The worshippers of some cruel heathen deity might possibly be led to believe such things, but the disciple of Moses and the Prophets knows that God is a God of mercy. Let, then, every one who has got the sacred books contrast their doctrines with those of the rabbies. But, above all, let those Israelites, who reject the Rabbinic laws concerning the slaughtering of meat, show that they have not done it from levity nor indifference, but upon principle. Let them explain to their brethren the reasons and the motives by which they are actuated, and let them protest, by word and deed, against such cruelty, oppression, and intolerance.

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