

# נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתבות עולם ירמיהו טז

"THE OLD PATHS."—Jer. vi. 16.

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It is an indisputable fact, that the modern Jews have entirely cast off the laws of Moses respecting the priests of the family of Levi, and have chosen and appointed to themselves other teachers, of whom Moses says nothing. What was the cause of such extraordinary conduct in those who profess a great zeal for the law of Moses, we do not now profess to inquire; but we think that every Jew ought to have a very good reason for thus wilfully, systematically, and continually transgressing the commandments of God. He ought, at the very least, be able to show that the doctrines of these new teachers are far superior to those of the religious teachers appointed by Moses; and that the superabundant excellence and wisdom of Rabbinic teaching does, at least, justify the change which they have made in the Mosaic law. We have had occasion in these papers to consider the nature of the new doctrine chosen instead of the law of Moses, and to us it certainly appears that "The Old Paths" were better. To-day we propose to illustrate the Rabbinic notions of the Deity, and do not intend by any means to select the most objectionable representations contained in the Rabbinical writings, but shall confine ourselves to a few well-known passages, which are intended to explain to us the mode in which God spends his time. Concerning the day, the rabbies say that it is spent in the following manner:—

שתי עשר' שעות היו היום שלש הראשונות הק'בה יושב ועוסק בתורה שניות יושב וזן את כל העולם כולו כיון שרואה שנתהי' עולם נליה עומד מכ' הדין ויושב על כסא רהמים שלשיות יושב וזן את כל העולם כולו מקריני ראמים עד ביצי כינים ורביעות יושב ומשחק עם לוייתן שנ' לוייתן זה יצרת לשחק בו וכו' :

"The day has twelve hours. The first three, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and occupies himself in the law. The second, he sits and judges the whole world. When he perceives that the world deserves utter destruction, He stands up from the throne of judgment, and sits on the throne of mercy. The third, he sits, and feeds all the world, from the horns of the unicorns to the eggs of the vermin. In the fourth, he sits and plays with Leviathan, for it is said (Psalm civ. 26.), 'The Leviathan whom thou hast formed to

play therewith.'" (Avodah Zarah, fol. iii., col. 2.) In another place we have an account of the manner in which the night is spent:— רבי אליעזר אומר שלש משמרות היו הלילה ועל כל משמר ומשמר יושב הק'בה ושואג כארי שנאמר ה' ממרום ישאן ממעון קדשו יתן קולו ושואג ישאן על נהרו :

"Rabbi Eliezer says, The night has three watches, and at every watch, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion, for it is said, 'The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; roaring he shall roar upon his habitation.'" (Jer. xxv. 30.) And again, a little lower down, the same assertion is made in the name of two other rabbies, and the cause of God's roaring assigned.

אמר רב יצחק בר שמואל משמיה דרב שלש משמרות היו הלילה ועל כל משמר ומשמר יושב הק'בה ושואג כארי ואומר אני שדורבתי את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתיו את בני לבן אומות היעלם :

"Rabbi Isaac, the son of Samuel, says, in the name of Rav, The night has three watches, and at every watch, the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion, and says, Woe is me that I have laid desolate my house, and burned my sanctuary, and sent my children into captivity amongst the nations of the world." (Berachoth, fol. iii., col. 1.) Now we ask every reasonable man whether this is a representation worthy of the Creator of heaven and earth? We are told here, first, that God is like a man in observing day and night—that he has set times for different employments, and a time for amusement. We are told, secondly, that instead of comprehending all things past, present, and to come, at all times, and instead of upholding all things by the continual fiat of his omnipotent rule, that he is obliged to consider each thing in succession; and that, like a poor frail child of man, He can do only one thing at a time. And thirdly, we are here informed, that the Divine Being sits all night, and mourns like a child, over an act which he rashly committed, but now wishes to have undone. Is this a fit representation of Deity, or is it awful blasphemy? How different is the description given by Moses—"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations. Before the

mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (Ps. xc. 1—4); and again, that other beautiful passage of the Psalmist, "Of old Thou hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old like a garment: and as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." (Ps. cii. 25—27.) In both these passages, unchangeableness, entire freedom from all vicissitude and succession, is presented to our view as the prominent feature in the character of Deity. Whereas, the God whom the rabbies describe, is a being subject to the same alterations as ourselves, and liable to change, in its worst form, that is, to that change of will which ensues on disappointed expectations. They say, that their God destroyed his temple and sent his children into captivity, and that now he is very sorry for it, and vents the bitterness of his grief in lamentations compared to the roaring of a lion. Such a deity is no more like the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, than Jeroboam's calves. He may not have a graven image, but he has nevertheless an idol, not indeed of gold or silver, but of the imagination. Nothing can be more different than the Being described by the rabbies, and that God declared in Moses and the Prophets. And yet on this very point, where the oral law errs so grievously, Christianity maintains the truth. The New Testament declares unto us the same Being revealed in the Old. It says, "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James i. 17.)

But the rabbies falsely ascribe to God not only variableness, but imperfect knowledge also. They say, that He spends a fourth part of the day in the study of the law. Now either God knows the law, or he does not. If he does know the law, then study is useless; and if he does not, then his knowledge is imperfect, and either supposition is altogether unworthy of the Deity. Indeed it is very difficult to argue against a doctrine so monstrous, or to show the full absurdity where the subject is so grave and sacred. But we put it to the good sense of every Israelite, and ask him whether he can believe that the God of knowledge studies in his own law? Is not such an assertion a blasphemous falsehood, and does it not show that those who made it were themselves utterly devoid of all true knowledge of God? Some persons endeavour to excuse this blasphemy by saying that the

words are not to be taken literally, and that the rabbies employed oriental figures. But this will not save the credit of the oral law; for if we admit the figure, we cannot excuse the blasphemy contained in the assertion, that God studies the law one fourth of every day. No man that has any reverence for his Creator would venture to use such language, not even in the way of a parable. It proves in every case that those rabbies were totally devoid of that reverence which is due to God, and therefore most unfit teachers of religion. But, further, if these passages be figurative, what is the real sense? What is meant by studying in the law, or playing with Leviathan, or uttering complaints at the beginning of every watch in the night; or what is intended by ascribing to God one sort of employment in the day and the other in the night? It is not enough to say that these are all figures conveying the most profound wisdom; this assertion must be proved by showing what this wisdom is. Let the Rabbinites explain these figures satisfactorily, and they will then have some chance of being believed, though even that would not amount to a proof, that the authors of these passages intended that they should be understood mystically. It is a certain fact that many of the rabbies have understood these and similar passages literally. In the commentary on the assertion, "That in the second three hours God sits and judges the world," we are told, that some believed this so firmly as to think that on this very account the additional form of prayer, called מוסף, was prescribed.

יש אומרי' כי לך תקנו בקדושה מוסף לומר  
ממקומו הוא ישן כי סתם מוסף בשני' בא ואז הוא  
ישב דין ואנו מחמלין שישה מכאן דין לשבח  
בכא רחמים :

"Some say, that on this account the words 'Let him turn from his place,' have been appointed in the sanctification of the Musaph, for this part of the prayer generally occurs in the second three hours, when he is sitting in judgment, and that we pray that he may turn from the throne of judgment, and sit on the throne of mercy." Those who held this opinion plainly thought, that the hours were literal hours, and that the distribution of the day into four different employments was not figurative, but real. These persons, therefore, believed that God studies in the law, that he plays with Leviathan, and observes the distinction of day and night. And it must be confessed that, if they believed in the Talmud, they had good reason for this literal interpretation, as the corresponding passage, respecting God's roaring like a lion at every watch of the night, cannot be explained figuratively, if it be taken in connexion with its context. The context contains a discussion about real, not figurative night-watches. The question

proposed by the Mishna is, Until what hour of the night is it lawful to perform the evening-reading of the Sh'mah Israel (Hear, O Israel). R. Eliezer says, It is lawful until the end of the first watch. The Gemara then considers what the rabbi could mean by this definition—

מאי קסבר רבי אליעזר אי קסבר ג' משמרות הוי הלילה לימא עד ארבע שעות ואי קסבר ארבע משמרות הוי הלילה לימא עד שלש שעות לעולם קסבר שלש משמרות הוי הלילה והא קמ"ל איכא משמרות ברקיע ואיכ' משמרות בארעא דתניא וכו' :

“What did R. Eliezer mean? If he meant that the night had three watches, he ought to have said until the fourth hour: but if he meant that the night has four watches, he ought to have said until the third hour. There can be no doubt that he meant that the night has three watches, and intended to say, that there are watches in heaven and watches upon earth, for the Barceitha says, &c.”—

And then follows the passage, saying, that in each watch God roars like a lion. It cannot, then, be pretended that the night-watches here are figurative or mystical. It is expressly said that there are the same watches in heaven and earth, and the whole question is about the real distribution of time. The following context is equally unequivocal. R. Eliezer, immediately after saying that in each watch God roars like a lion, goes on to give the signs whereby each watch may be recognised even in the dark.

וסימן דלרב משמרה ראשונה חמור נודע שניידה כלבים צועקים שלישית תינוק יונק משדי אמו ואשה מסמרת עם בעלה :

“The sign of the thing is—In the first watch the ass brays; in the second watch the dogs bark; in the third watch the infant sucks at its mother's breast, and the wife talks with her husband.” This is plain matter-of-fact way of speaking, and proves, beyond a doubt, that the whole passage is to be taken literally. And if any doubt at all remained, it is entirely removed, a little lower down on the page, by an anecdote told by the veracious R. Jose. He says, that he once went into one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray, and that whilst he was engaged in prayer, the Prophet Elijah came to the entrance of the ruin, and very civilly waited for him until he had concluded, when they had some conversation together. Amongst other particulars, R. Jose relates as follows:—

ואמר לי בני מה קול שמעת בחורבה זו ואמרתי לו שמעתי בת קול שמנדמה כיונה ואמרתי אי שחרבת את ביתי ושפרתי את היכלי ההללתי את בני לבין האומות ואמר לי דודך ראיך לא שעה זו בלבד אומרת כך אלא בכל יום ויום שלש פעמים אומר כך ולא זו בלבד אלא בשעה שישורא נכנסין לבתי נכנסית ולבתי מירשות ועונין אמן דא שמ' רבא מבורך דק' בה מנענע ראשו ואומר אשרי המלך

שמקלטן אחרו בביתו כך מה לו לאג שהלגה את בניו :

“And he (Elias) said to me, What sort of a voice didst thou hear in the ruin? I said to him, I heard a Bath Kol cooing like a dove, and saying, Woe is me that I have desolated my house, and burnt my sanctuary, and sent my children into captivity amongst the nations. And he said unto me, As thou livest, and thy head liveth, it is not at this hour only, but three times every day the voice says these words. And not only so, but when the Israelites enter the synagogues, and the houses of study, and say, ‘Amen, may his great name be blessed,’ the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes his head, and says, Blessed is the King who is praised in his house; but what profit has the father who sends his children into captivity.” &c. Here we have the testimony of R. Jose to the truth of the fact, that God does thus complain in the manner described above, and we have the Prophet Elijah swearing that this happens three times every day. It is plain, therefore, that the authors of the Talmud knew of no mystical interpretation and intended none. It was their simple belief that God observed the three watches of the night, and at the beginning of each roared like a lion. And if this passage must be taken literally, why should the other passage respecting the distribution and employments of the day be taken figuratively? The literal interpretation of the one furnishes a strong argument for the literal interpretation of the other. And it is certainly of no use to ascribe a mystical sense to the one, whilst the other is interpreted literally. The advocates of the oral law gain nothing by it, for the one is not more absurd nor more unworthy of the Deity than the other. Nothing can exceed the folly of representing God as observing the night-watches, and roaring like a lion for grief, because he sent Israel into captivity. Nothing can be more blasphemous than the assertion that God does not foresee the results of his own actions, and that he is afterwards obliged to sit down and mourn over what he has done. This one passage, which cannot be explained away, is quite sufficient to show that the rabbies were utterly ignorant of the nature of God; and that, however they might be acquainted with the letter of the Law and the Prophets, they knew nothing of the real meaning of their writings. This one excess of folly and absurdity entirely overthrows all the claims and pretensions of the oral law in which it is found.

But there is another feature in the passage which we cannot pass without notice, and that is, the total disregard of truth which it manifests. R. Jose's story is evidently a barefaced and wilful lie, unless we say, that when he went into the ruin to pray, he fell asleep, and

dreamed that he heard the Bath Kol and had this conversation with Elijah; but either supposition will equally destroy the credit of the Talmud. If it be a lie, it is one of the most profane and wicked lies that can be imagined. We have here a professed teacher of the law telling not only a falsehood about his intercourse with Elijah, but daring falsely to assert that he heard the voice of God mourning over the ruins of the temple. The most profane and wicked lie that can be devised is that which introduces God himself, and trifles with the sacred character of the Deity. If this story be a lie, it overturns the Talmud and the Talmudical religion at once. A religion built upon falsehoods, must itself be necessarily false. But if the other supposition be adopted, that R. Jose mistook a dream for a reality, what shall we say of a religion whose teachers tell their dreams as sacred truths? And what shall we say of the compilers of the Talmud, who were unable to detect the folly and profanity of this narrative, and actually inserted it in their oral law as an undoubted fact? This supposition may save R. Jose from the unhappy character of a liar, but it will not do much towards proving the truth of the oral law; for there it is not given as a dream, but as a fact. R. Jose was silly enough to tell his dream as a reality; and the rabbies to whom he told it were silly enough to believe; and the most learned men of the Rabbinites at that time were silly enough to embody it in their collection of holy and undoubted traditions. We do not mean to ascribe any peculiar degree of folly to the rabbies. Persons calling themselves Christians have been just as foolish, have believed stories just as absurd, and have handed them down as religious truths. But then, we do not receive these legends as a part and parcel of our religion. We are as free to say of them, as of the Talmudic fables, that they are wicked falsehoods. But the modern Jews tell us that the Talmud is a divine book—that it contains their religion, and that without it Moses and the Prophets are unintelligible; and therefore we point out these fables as plain proofs of the falsehood of such an assertion. We wish to direct the Jewish attention to that system which they have called their religion for the last eighteen hundred years, and which they have preferred to Christianity.

We desire that they should consider what they have gained, by expelling the family of Levi from the teacher's office and choosing the rabbies as their religious guides. We ask every Israelite of common sense, whether R. Jose and his companions are trustworthy leaders in the way to salvation; and whether they are still prepared to follow the religion of a man who can only be acquitted of being a liar by admitting that he is a dreamer? Or, whether they still choose to worship the Deity proclaimed by the rabbies—a Deity subject to succession of time—imperfect in knowledge so as to require daily study—requiring amusement, and therefore playing for three hours every day with Leviathan—and liable to disappointment, so as to be obliged to spend the night, in mourning over one of his most deliberate and solemn acts?

We are sure that every Israelite would be sadly offended at being told, that he does not worship the God of his fathers, but a strange god, invented by the imagination of the rabbies; and yet, if he worship the god of the Talmud, it is nothing but the truth. The god of the Talmud is certainly not the God of the Bible. Israelites are often shocked at the folly and wickedness of those whom they see falling down before stocks and stones; and yet, if they receive the oral law, and believe in a Deity who plays with Leviathan, &c., the object of their worship is not a whit more rational. They are just as guilty of idolatry, and the only way in which they can clear themselves from the charge is, by rejecting the oral law, and forsaking that superstition which the rabbies have palmed off upon them as the religion of their fathers. It is a most deplorable and melancholy sight to behold that nation, which once was the sole depository of truth, enslaved by a system so senseless; but it is more melancholy still to think, that there is not one among her sons who has the moral courage to denounce its falsehood, and to vindicate the truth as taught by Moses. The priests, the sons of Levi, were once zealous for the honour of God, and united with Moses in destroying the golden calf; but where are they now, and where is their zeal? Alas! they too, are found amongst the worshippers of the Talmudical deity, and uphold the system which has expelled them from their holy office.

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