

נתיבות עולם

עמדו על דרכים וראו ושאלו לנתיבות עולם. ירמיה' ו' טז

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WHEN God gave Israel the law, by the hand of Moses, he also gave them several tests, whereby they might at all times try themselves, and know to a certainty, whether they were really obedient or not—and whether the laws, to which they yielded obedience, were really the laws given by Moses. One of these tests is found in the following words:

—"Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep, therefore, and do them, for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. iv. 5.). By the help of these words, Israel may know at any time whether they are really keeping the laws of Moses. They have only to consult their own experience, and determine whether they are honoured by all nations on account of their wisdom. Moses promises that a reputation for wisdom, and the honour that accompanies it, shall be the reward of obedience. If therefore the Jews at this present time are obedient, this promise must be in daily fulfilment. But, if they are not honoured and respected for their wisdom, then we must conclude, that they are deficient in obedience, and further, that the laws to which they are at present so devoted are not the laws of Moses. Now it is a certain fact, that admiration for the wisdom of Israel has not been the prevailing sentiment amongst the nations of the world for the last two thousand years. The Jewish people has been most deplorably underrated. Their genius and their literature have been ignorantly undervalued, and the folly of the authors of the oral law has been unjustly visited upon each and every individual of the nation. We grant the injustice and the impiety of such hasty judgments, but cannot deny the fact, and the fact proves that the laws to which Israel now yields obedience are not the laws of Moses. They now obey the commands of the oral law, and the nations have heard of the statutes thereof, but no one says, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Some may, perhaps, ascribe this to prejudice, and no doubt there are cases where prejudice has much to do with the decision, but this is not our case. Our prepossessions are all in favour of the Jews,

and yet we cannot help questioning the wisdom of those, who make such laws as the following a part of their religion:—

אין לשון העיסה בדלב ואם לא כל הדת אסורה
מפני הרגל עבירה. שמא יאכל בה בשר. ואין משין
אם התורה באליה ואם מש כל הדת אסורה עד שיסיק
אם התורה שמא בה דלב. ואם שנה בצורת הדת עד
שתהיה נכרת כדי שלא יאכל בה לא בשר ולא דלב
דרי זה מותר:

"It is not lawful to knead the dough with milk, and if it be done, all the bread is unlawful, lest this should lead to further transgression, and it should be eaten with meat. It is also unlawful to smear the oven with the tail of a sheep; and if it be done, all the bread is unlawful, lest milk should be eaten with it. But, if some change be made in the form of the bread whereby it may be recognised, so as that neither meat nor milk should be eaten with it, then it is lawful" (Hilchoth Maakhaloth Asuroth, c. ix. 22.). We do not wish to persuade the Jews either to knead dough with milk, or to smear an oven with the tail of a sheep, but when we remember all the poverty and want that is in the world, we cannot help asking, What is there so sinful in either of the above actions, as to make such bread unlawful for the use of God's people? Has God forbidden it? or has he so strictly prohibited the use of meat and milk together, as to make this excess of caution necessary? Neither the one nor the other. The law of God as given by Moses, allows the use of meat and milk together. It forbids only one particular case, the boiling of a kid in its mother's milk: and to this the rabbies have, without any authority, added all these other commands, and thus burdened the conscience, and made religion an intricate and difficult science intelligible only to the learned, and not always to them. What wisdom is there in forbidding what God did not think necessary to forbid? What wisdom is there in neglecting or disregarding the revealed will of God, and giving up the conscience to the guidance of weak and fallible men like ourselves? But above all, what wisdom is there in oppressing and tormenting the poor? The oral law says—

מי שאלו גבינה או דלב חתלה מותר לאכול אדרי
בשר מדי.
מי שאכל בשר בחתלה בין בשר בהמה בין בשר
עוף לא יאכל אדרי דלב עד שיהיה ביניהן כדי שיעור
תעודה אחרת הדוא כמו שש שטות מפני הבשר של
בין השנים שאינו כר בקינות:

"He that eats cheese or milk first, may eat meat immediately after.

"He that eats meat first, whether it be the meat of a beast or of a fowl, must not eat milk after it, until the regular time between two meals, that is six hours, shall have elapsed; because of the meat which remains between the teeth, and which is not got out by wiping." (Ibid. 26, 28.) Now in the case of the rich or the affluent, who can procure a good and sufficient meal of meat, and can therefore wait for six hours, this may be no great hardship, though even in that case, we must protest against the unauthorised burden imposed upon the conscience; but when applied to the needy and the destitute, this law becomes an intolerable yoke. Just suppose the father of a starving family who goes forth to beg assistance from the charitable. He receives a small portion of meat, and hastens back to divide it with his wife and children. They partake of the relief, but it is not sufficient to supply their wants. He therefore goes forth again, and some friend of the poor gives him some milk or cheese, he brings it home with thankfulness, but dare not touch it himself nor give it to his children—they have already fasted many an hour—they are still weak with hunger—a little of the milk or the cheese would recruit exhausted nature—the children cry and entreat their father, but no—they must still endure the pangs of hunger for six hours more, for though God allows this food, the rabbies have forbidden it. Is there wisdom in this? Is God honoured by such a religion, which counts his permission as nothing, and exalts the authority of the rabbies above that of God himself? And may we not ask the same question of the following law? דואכל גביית דגנים או חלב שחלבו גור ואין הישראלי רואהו מכין אותו מכת מרדות והחמאה מקצת הגאונים התיירוהו שהרי לא גורו על החמאה ודלב שמה אינו עומד ומקץ' חונאנים אסורה מכלי ציציתו חלב שישאר בה:

"He that eats Gentile cheese, or milk which a Gentile has milked, but the Israelite did not see him, is to be flogged with the flogging of rebellion. But, as to the butter, some of the Gaons, have pronounced it lawful, because there is no express decision about it, and because unclean milk will not set. Others of the Gaons on the contrary, have pronounced it unlawful, on account of the small drops of milk which remain in it." (Joreh Deah, 116.) Here we have the same total want of consideration for the poor, and the same fierce and cruel spirit. Just suppose, again, the case of a destitute Jewish family, where the father is laid on a bed of sickness, and unable to earn daily bread for his children. The mother, weary with tending the sick couch of her husband, and her heart, half-broken with the children's cry for bread, goes to solicit help from the almoners of the Synagogue. She

obtains eighteenpence per month, but finds that on this small sum it is impossible for a family to subsist; she then goes to individuals of her nation, and gets what she can, but still not sufficient to supply the wants of her children, and of her sick husband. In her distress, she goes to some Christian neighbours, who give her some milk and cheese. The pangs of hunger, and the affections of a wife and mother overcome her superstition, she carries this bounty home and partakes of it along with her husband and children. Has she thereby committed a sin; has she violated any one precept of the Mosaic law; has she blasphemed the name of her God? Let reason, let the Law and the Prophets answer, and they will say, No: she has done her duty. But what does the oral law say? It says, that she has committed a dreadful sin. And what is to be her punishment, and that of her husband and children? Flogging—the flogging of rebellion. If the oral law had power, it would lead them forth to the place of execution, and there inflict stripes without number and without mercy. The bystanders and those attracted by the cries would ask, What dreadful crime has this family committed? and the answer would be, To save themselves from starvation they dared to eat Gentile cheese and milk. Gentiles would ask again, What, is this the law? Does Judaism teach that so innocent an action is to be punished with such severity? and being answered in the affirmative, would go away exclaiming, "What a merciful religion! Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!" No: they would retire in horror, thanking God that they are not Jews, and that God has preserved them from so dreadful a delusion, and from such iniquitous cruelty. What, then, do our Jewish readers think of this law, and the religion of which it is a part? It is certain that there are multitudes of Jews in this city who live in the constant violation of this command; who constantly use milk supplied by Gentiles, and yet pretend to profess Judaism as their religion. Let all such ask themselves, by what authority they transgress a command sanctioned by so severe a punishment. Is it because they think it irrational, or unwarranted by the law of Moses? If so, they attack at once the authority of the whole system of Judaism. If the oral law can be proved to be absurd, or unjust, or cruel, in any one particular, its value as a divine tradition is utterly destroyed. Let them, then, be consistent; if they reject Judaism, let them say so, let them not pretend to have the Jewish religion, when they have it not. Let them honestly confess that their reason, directed by Scripture, has led them to reject it; and let them fulfil the consequent duty of endeavour-

ing to deliver their poor brethren from a bondage so cruel. They must know that these laws about milk and butter, and the art of slaughtering, cut off many a poor Jew from the last refuge of the destitute—the poor-house. Many a one who is now starving with his family, would be glad to have the relief which the parish provides, but he dare not accept of it. Either his conscience, perverted by these Rabinnical statutes, will not permit him, or he is afraid of his brethren, who would think that in going into such an asylum, he had renounced his God. Those who use Gentile milk without scruple, will have much to answer for, if they suffer such oppression and such superstition to continue. It is a vain excuse for any one to say, What can I do? Any one individual, however weak and uninfluential, has it in his power, by God's blessing, to deliver the poor. Let him continually protest against such superstition, let him reason with his brethren. Let him determine to take no rest, until the yoke is torn from the necks of his nation. He will ultimately prevail. He will be the instrument, in God's hand, of effecting a greater deliverance than that from Egypt, inasmuch as the emancipation of the soul is of more importance than that of the body. In this respect, amongst others, Jesus of Nazareth has done more than Moses. If he had not arisen, the oral law would have been universal, and the world have continued either sunk in idolatry or slaves to a cruel superstition. The cruelty of a religion, which commands a man to be flogged for eating that which God permits, is not to be disputed; the prohibition of Gentile bread furnishes another instance of similar inhumanity.

יש דברים שאסור חכמים אף על פי שאין להם עיקר מן הדתה כמו של גרים אפי' לא ישרא' השלקות שמבשלין הגרים ואסור לשחור במשיבת אפי' שאר משקין שאין בהן משום חשש פן כסך וכל אלו דברים אסור משום דתנה וכו'.

"There are some things which the wise men have pronounced unlawful, although they have no foundation for the prohibition in the law, as bread of the Gentiles, even though an Israelite should have baked it for him—and cooked victuals, which the Gentiles have cooked. They have also pronounced it unlawful to drink at a Gentile table, even those drinks, of which there can be no suspicion that wine of libation is mixed with them. And they pronounced these things unlawful, to prevent the possibility of intermarriage," &c. (Ibid. 112.) There are many remarks suggested by this passage, but at present we limit ourselves to the prohibition of Gentile bread. It is here confessed that there is no foundation for it in the law of Moses, and that therefore the rabbies have no authority for the prohibition; and yet a very little consideration

is sufficient to show that great inconvenience may arise. For instance, if a poor Jew is travelling in this country, exhausts his stock of money, and goes to a farm-house to ask relief, he cannot accept any meat—he is not to drink any milk on pain of a flogging. Suppose, then, that the people offer him some home-baked bread, even this is forbidden.

של בעל הבית אסור' לעולם;

"Bread baked by a private house-keeper is eternally forbidden." The poor man, therefore, may starve. But the inhumanity appears still more in the discussion of the question, whether and when it is lawful to eat baker's bread. The rabbies are divided. Some allow it, because the rule is—

מי שהתענה ג' ימים מותר בשר של גרים משום דיי דשם וברוב מקומות גליהונו אין סמל ישראל מצוי והוא כאלו התענה ג' ימים ע"כ. ויש אוסרין אחרו' אלא אם כן התענה ג' ימים משום:

"He that has fasted three days may lawfully eat Gentile bread, and as in many places of our captivity there is no Israelite baker, this case is considered parallel to that of him who has fasted three days. But there are others who say that it is unlawful, unless he has fasted three days, in the strictest sense of the word." (Ibid.) One would think that, in a case of doubt, men that had the fear of God would naturally incline to the side of mercy; but here we find teachers of religion forbidding what God has allowed, unless the victim of poverty has first endured the torment of starvation for three days; and in one case actually determining that a fellow-creature shall die of hunger, rather than suffer their unauthorised traditions to be broken. If a Gentile Government should seize on a number of unfortunate Israelites guilty of no crime, and shut them up in a prison, and then leave them to die of starvation, what just indignation would be excited? Every man would protest against such wanton cruelty, and yet this is just what modern Judaism has done. By forbidding Gentile meat, milk, cheese, and bread, it has consigned hundreds to starvation. There are at this moment numbers of individuals, if not families, pining away in want, whose wants could be relieved, if the oral law did not interpose its iron front, and pronounce starvation lawful, and help from Gentiles unlawful; and yet their brethren, who pride themselves upon their benevolence and humanity, leave them to perish, and suffer the system to remain that it may be a curse to coming generations. It is truly astonishing to see the indifference of those who pride themselves upon their emancipation from superstition, and who themselves eat Gentile bread, and milk, and cheese, and perhaps meat, without any scruple. It is more astonishing still, how the nation at large suffers itself to be deluded by men who do not

agree amongst themselves as to what the law really is. We saw above, that the greatest of the rabbies, even the Gaons themselves, differ as to the lawfulness of Gentile butter;—here we see that they cannot agree as to the lawfulness of Gentile bakers' bread. How is it, then, that the Jews cannot see that their present religion of the oral law is altogether one of uncertainty, and that, therefore, there is no dependence upon it? Here they eat freely, even the strictest, of Gentile bread; but yet, according to some of their greatest men, they are thereby committing a deadly sin. These wise men humanely say, that it is necessary first to fast for three days. Now of what use is an oral law, that cannot even tell us certainly what sort of bread it is unlawful to eat? The Rabbinist boast is, that the oral law teaches them the true meaning of the written law, and thus saves them from all doubtful disputation. But how can that be true, when the oral law has not yet settled when it is lawful to eat Gentile bread? If the rabbies cannot agree on so simple a matter, what trust can be placed in them in difficult questions? The Jews cannot even tell, by the help of their religion, whether they are not committing a sin, and leading their children to commit a sin, when they give them a piece of bread and butter. How, then, can they be satisfied with a religion, where the simplest concerns of life are still a matter of doubt and disputation; and especially where the poor are made to suffer the greatest hardships, whilst, by keeping to Moses and the prophets, they might find relief? But, above all, how can they believe that a religion is divine, or its authors good and pious men, when an innocent action, nay, the fulfilment of a natural duty, is punished with flogging? There is no punishment of which the oral law is so fond; and it would be a curious and interesting employment to furnish a list of all the offences to which it is annexed. Perhaps in nothing does the Talmud differ more from the New Testament. The New Testament has not, in any one case, prescribed so cruel a punishment. The Talmud and all its compendiums prescribe it

on the most trifling occasion. The maxim of the New Testament is that of the Old also, "I will have mercy, not sacrifice." Now, if the practice of mercy be more agreeable in the eyes of God, than even those ceremonial rites which He himself ordained, with what pleasure can he contemplate the religion of the oral law, which punishes even what God has allowed, with unmeasured cruelty? Aben Ezra supposed that this command, "Not to seethe a kid in its mother's milk," was given in order to prevent cruelty even to the brute creation; if this be true, how does God regard the perversion of his mercy, which pretends to keep this command, to spare the brute creation, by dooming hundreds of mankind to starvation, and by flogging those who endeavour to escape from their misery, by eating what He has nowhere forbidden? If God has compassion upon the beasts that perish, what can he think of those teachers of religion, who talk with such composure of a fellow-creature's fasting for three days before he may eat bread sold by a Gentile baker, and who absolutely decide that it is his duty to die, rather than partake of bread baked by a private individual who is not a Jew? We appeal to the good sense of every Israelite to answer these questions. Is it not evident, that the God of mercy must view with indignation, those teachers who thus misrepresent the nature of revealed religion, and who cause his holy name to be blasphemed amongst the ignorant? But if those men are guilty, a portion of their guilt rests upon all those who aid and abet in upholding the system. There can be but little excuse for those who have the Law and the Prophets in their hands, and who therefore ought to know, that the cruelty of the oral law is as contrary to the character of God, as light is to darkness. And there is no excuse at all for those Israelites who themselves despise these Rabbinical laws, and yet by their silence and indifference leave their brethren still in misery. They are answerable for all the dishonour done to God; for all the misery inflicted upon man; and for all the contempt heaped upon the wisdom of Israel.

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