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"Judaism a Dual System"

A SERMON  
PREACHED BY THE

Rev Dr. Hermann Gollancz M.A. Dr. Lit.

RABBI.

ש"ק פ' תולדות

November 24<sup>th</sup> 5661-1900

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# Judaism a Dual System.



## A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE,

ON

SABBATH הולדת ז' NOVEMBER 24th., 5661—1900.

BY THE

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## Judaism a Dual System.

Our Sages made use of an apparently curious expression, when they said with reference to the Patriarchs:—  
“Abraham ordained the Morning Prayer, Isaac the Afternoon Prayer, and Jacob the Evening Prayer.”<sup>1)</sup>  
And they adduce the words of Scripture in support of their assertion:—  
וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-  
עָמַד שָׁם, וַאֲיִן עֲמִידָה אֵלֶּא תְּפִלָּה

“Abraham rose up early in the morning unto the place where he stood before the Lord”<sup>2)</sup>—he stood there for the purpose of offering the Morning Prayer.

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לִשְׂוֵה בְּשָׂדֵהוּ, וַאֲיִן שִׁיחָה אֵלֶּא תְּפִלָּה

“Isaac went forth to meditate in the field”<sup>3)</sup>: as he meditated upon the setting sun, he prayed unto the Creator of the hosts of heaven.

וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם וַיִּלֵּן שָׁם, וַאֲיִן פְּגִיעָה אֵלֶּא תְּפִלָּה

“And Jacob lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night”<sup>4)</sup>: he lighted upon this place, in order to entreat Heaven in prayer, before he set out upon the dark eve of his wandering career.

1) Talmud T. Berachoth, . 26 b.

2) Genesis XXII, 3.

3) Ibid. XXIV, 63.

4) Ibid. XXVIII, 11.

We have, on a former occasion and in another place, incidentally shown in what sense the words of our Sages may be understood: "Abraham ordained the *Morning Prayer*"; for we witnessed in Abraham the *rise* of Religious Truth, the *dawn*, as it were, of the Religious Idea in man, the *Morning-Prayer*, so to speak, of the world's infant state.

And if we regard Abraham as representing the *beginning* of true religious thought, what more natural than to regard Isaac—heir to Abraham's possessions and promises—as representing the *growth and development* of the Religious Idea among mankind?

Let us, therefore, in continuation of our subject, occupy ourselves this day with a scene in the life of Isaac, the Patriarch.

We take our text from the portion of the day—Genesis, Ch. XXVI. verses 19—22. ויחפרו עבדי יצחק בנהל וימצאו שם באר מים חיים: ויריבו רעי גרר עם רעי יצחק לאמר לנו המים ויקרא שם הבאר עשק כי התעשקו עמו: ויחפרו באר אחרת ויריבו גם עליה ויקרא שמה שטנה: ויעתק משם ויחפר באר אחרת ולא רבו עליה ויקרא שמה רחבות ויאמר כי עתה הרחיב ה' לנו ופרינו בארץ:



“And Isaac’s servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of living water.

And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdmen, saying, the water is our’s: and he called the name of the well Esek: because they strove with him.

And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.

And he removed from thence, and digged another well, and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, “For now the Lord hath given us enlargement, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

In these simple words of Holy Writ, we are introduced into the history of the contention between the herdmen of Gerar and the herdmen of Isaac. On the face of the narrative itself, the subject of dispute was clearly the right of possession to some material advantages, namely the wells of springing water which had been opened or re-opened in the valley of Gerar.

But, brethren, without gainsaying the importance and blessing of such a possession as water, especially in an Eastern clime, I would this day bid you read with me between the lines, and direct your attention to a blessing of yet greater value—to a well-spring of living water, which is, at least, as refreshing and requisite for mankind as its material symbol.

You are doubtless well aware of the saying of the Sages: **אֵין מַיִם אֱלֹהֵי תוֹרָה** “the purest draughts are

those supplied by the Torah.”<sup>1)</sup> In very deed, “He who devotes himself heart and soul to the dictates of Religion, will, in course of time, render himself an ever-increasing fountain and a never-ceasing stream of knowledge and of power”<sup>2)</sup>; for, while the gift of water can but minister to our wants in this world, the greatness of the Torah, of Religious Truth, consists, in this, “that it giveth life to its adherents, both in this world and in the world to come”<sup>3)</sup> גדולה תורה שהיא נותנת חיים לעושיה בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא :

After these introductory remarks, I need scarcely say that it is not my intention to ask you to transplant yourselves thousands of miles away in space, or thousands of years back in time; to bid your eyes dwell upon an Eastern Scene, the valley, the well, the rival claimants with their Oriental associations of dress and speech. The scene lies nearer home: in point of time it may be applied to modern days; and it is with your mental eye that I would bid you look upon the spiritual well of human existence, upon the Jewish Religion in particular.

“And Isaac’s servants digged in the valley and found there a well of living water.” (v. 19).

The באר מים חיים “the well of living water” which the servants of Isaac—the followers of the Patri-

1) Talmud T. Baba Kama f. 82 a.

2) Cf. Pirke Aboth, VI. § 1.

3) Ibid § 7.

arch—his descendants, the Jewish people, found in the valley of life, was their precious Religion. Many a time and oft this world in which we live, in which the vicissitudes of earthly existence are made manifest, is styled by the Jewish poets “a vale of tears”<sup>1)</sup> עֵמֶק הַבְּכָא; and what would the world be without the vivifying influence of this sacred well-spring of Religion, without its invigorating draughts, its soothing potions?

But any Religion, even the Jewish Religion, whilst being a very Fountain of Salvation, may at the same time become a source of contention.

“And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdmen, saying, the water is ours, לָנוּ הַמַּיִם (v. 20).

Herein are typified the dissensions and disputes which take their origin in the exercise of Religion. In these words we would recognise the two distinct and well-defined classes of Jews into which the followers of Judaism array themselves.

There is the exclusively *ceremonial* Jew, on the one hand, and the exclusively *spiritual* Jew, on the other; the one who constructs and exercises his Religion according to the moral element, the other according to the national element in the Jewish Code.

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1) Cf. Psalm LXXXIV, 7.

The danger of these attitudes lies not in the fact that these diversities of opinion exist with regard to one and the same object, but that each claims with equal injustice לָנוּ הַמַּיִם “the water is ours.”

One calls the name of the well *Esek*, עֵשֶׂק which, in Hebrew, means either ‘contention’ or ‘occupation’ and ‘study.’

The ceremonial Jew considers that the virtue of his Religion lies in the forms and ceremonies—in the study and practice of its precepts, and thanks his God for the opportunity He has afforded him לְעִסּוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה ‘of occupying himself’ with the ceremonial demands of his Faith.

With this class the *form* in Religion is all-important; and not infrequently the spirit is lost sight of in the attempt to carry out the letter of the law, and to the members of this class their Religion remains as it began, the well *Esek*—a source of occupation, a system of ceremonies.

Then there is the other class—the so-called spiritual or moral Jew.

According to his own confession, the Judaism of which he boasts is lodged and locked in his heart; but most frequently his outward actions would lead us to suspect the truth of his contention.

This other well, this second aspect of Religion, for the possession of which this easy-going, less demonstrative

Jew would scarcely trouble to put forth his claim, might truly be called *Sitnah*, (שׂטְנָה) which means 'obstacle' or 'hindrance', inasmuch as it acts as a hindrance and obstacle, it prevents its professors from realising the true nature of the Jewish Religion, which is far above the rivalries of party measures, and very different from the systems expounded by the herdmen of either side of the contending parties.

If, however, we would find out the true essence of Judaism, it behoves us to look away from the standpoint taken up by the herdmen, to leave to them their narrow views and petty quarrels, their *Esek* and their *Sitnah*—their 'contentions' and their 'obstacles.' And it behoves us to look for instruction to the master of the herdmen himself, to imitate Isaac our forefather, of whom it is said ויעתק משם ויהפר באר אחרת 'and he removed from thence, and digged another well . . . . and he called the name of it Rehoboth" (v. 22).

To find out the nature of true Judaism, we must remove from each of the views expressed by the herdmen, and form a different conception of the well of Judaism—one against which there can be no contention ולא רבו עליה—one which we should call *Rehoboth* a 'comprehensive,' 'wider,' and 'enlarged' view of Religion, one embracing all parties among us, and one which (if we faithfully adhere to it) will suffer us to hold our own ופרינו באדץ "and to be fruitful in the world" (ibid).

The Jewish Religion is a combination of both *form and spirit*, of ceremony and morality, of a national and an ethical system.

This is the only true meaning of Judaism: properly understood, it is a *Dual System*, which is not easily divisible into its elements: presenting, as it does, different sides to the outward observer, it forms in reality one homogeneous Code.

Who would call a man a *good Jew*, who, while scrupulously discharging the ceremonials of his Faith, fails in the moral duties which this very Faith demands? Who, on the other hand, can call a man a good *Jew*, who faithfully attends to the ethical rules of the Jewish Law-Book, and neglects the ceremonial duties,—the distinctive, national and characteristic demands of Judaism?

When Isaiah, Amos, and other prophets railed against the observance of the forms, it was not against the forms themselves, but against the observance of the form at the sacrifice of the spirit.

The forms of the Jewish Religion are the **י זר זהב סניב** “the golden crown edging” the Altar of our Faith which, while adorning, also protect the sanctity of our Religion, which give point and poetry to our religious beliefs and national aspirations.

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1) Exod. XXX, 3.

The Jewish Religion may, on account of the variety of its parts, be compared to the coat of many colours which Jacob, the patriarch, presented to his son Joseph ;<sup>1)</sup> or as the Midrash Jalkut puts it <sup>2)</sup> שכל הלכות שמסרו שם ועבר ליעקב מסרו לו.

The fact, brethren, that men exist among us, who, owing to the inconveniences which the forms and ceremonies of our religious system entail upon them, would gladly throw them off, proves nothing with regard to the utility or necessity of the due observance of such forms and ceremonies.

A brief survey of a few ceremonies observed by us will go far to prove my contention, that some of the noblest lessons are breathed in, and may be taught by the ceremonial portion of the Jewish Religion—if properly understood and explained.

This consideration is, perhaps, of little importance to such of our brethren who are satisfied to slavishly enact a number of forms, without looking beneath and beyond the acts which, in their opinion, constitute a religious observance ; but it means a great deal to such, who, while anxious to conform to the outward signs and symbols of their Faith, are desirous of being enlightened as to the spiritual sense and teachings underlying and forming the essence of their external worship.

For the sake of clearness, let us now briefly consider these ceremonies under two heads ; first, such as are

1) Gen. XXXVII, 3.

2) § 140

more general, and then some special ceremonies in connection with our chief Festivals.

Does it destroy, I ask, does it not enhance the true spirit of Religion, if (for example) in carrying out the Scriptural command with regard to the **תְּפִלִּין** or '*Fringed Garment*',<sup>1)</sup> we be led to connect with this one act, simple and primitive as it may appear to some—the thought of our submission and loyalty to the entire system of God's commands, the spirit of which should not alone govern our conduct during the solemn moments of the hour of Prayer, but should influence even to a greater degree our every action in the outer world in which we move?

Is the donning of the '*Tephillin*'<sup>2)</sup> a meaningless ceremonial, if we be impressed with the truth taught in the formula which precedes the act of placing them on our arm and forehead? Is not this the lesson? That one portion of the ceremonial is to remind us of God's never shortened and ever out-stretched arm on behalf of His creatures; and that by placing the frontlet between our eyes, near the seat of the brain, we are called upon to make the earnest resolution to render all our powers and faculties subservient to the Will of our Heavenly Father.

The '*Mezuzah*'<sup>3)</sup> which we affix to our doorposts is not to be regarded with a superstitious eye as a talisman

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1) Numbers XV, 37-41.

2) Cf. Deut. VI, 8., XI, 18.

3) Cf. Deut. VI, 9., XI, 20.



against evil, but as a comforting and an admonishing symbol of the truth, that "He, the Guardian of Israel, sleepeth not, nor slumbereth".<sup>1)</sup>

If the recital of the '*Berachoth*,' the 'blessings' preceding or following the enjoyment of some gift of God, kindle the eye of gratitude, and raise our thoughts from the gift to the Giver, can such a recital be called a hollow form, a spiritless ceremony?

Again, the *Dietary Laws*, which might almost be regarded as ultimate laws serving material and hygienic ends, do they not teach us, secondarily, the noble lessons of moderation and self-restraint? Do they not teach us the spiritual truth: "And ye shall sanctify yourselves and be holy . . . and not defile your souls"?<sup>2)</sup>

What Religious System offers such a degree of spiritual thought as the Jewish, which raises the very table at which we partake of our food to the standard of a Heavenly Altar? רבי יוחנן ורבי אלעזר דאמרי תרוייהו בזמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מבפר על אדם ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים שולחנו של אדם מבפר עליו.<sup>3)</sup>

And what about the *Sabbath*, the greatest form of all?

Would any one assert, as far as the Jewish Religion is concerned, that the Sabbath was instituted for self-

1) Psalm CXXI, 4.

2) Levit. XI, 44; *Vide* the entire Chapter.

3) Talmud T. Menachoth f. 97 a; T. Chagiga f. 27.

indulgence and pleasure, and not, as the Rabbis were wont to employ it, as a day of rest from worldly pursuits and cares, a day consecrated to higher devotion, to more saintly conduct?

If we would descend to more special points, and hurriedly run through the chief observances which mark the months of the Jewish Calendar, I would feel inclined to enquire, whether the introduction of the מצות "the unleavened bread" into the Jewish household on Passover, and the removal of all leaven, for which we are enjoined to seek לאור הנהר 'with the strictest scrutiny and precision', whether such an observance should not rouse within us this reflection,—the necessity for removing all moral leaven from our hearts, all moral leaven from our habitations and daily pursuits?

The "*Counting of the Omer*" should teach us a lesson as to the value of Time, and the right use we should make of Life.

The *Flowers* which come to deck our *Feast of Weeks* might well impress upon our minds, that, as far as this earth is concerned, the life between the cradle and the grave is one of blossom and decay.

Are there not some among us who ask: 'Why observe in this heaven-favoured land, in this advanced age, such fasts as the *Ninth of Ab*, seeing that the destruction of

the Temple and our consequent dispersion is, in reality, a blessing, and should be regarded rather as a matter of congratulation for the Hebrew race'?

I would ask in reply: 'Is there, indeed, no necessity to mourn the loss of the Temple, the loss of Canaan, and the loss of our polity; seeing that, even at the present day, the cry of our oppressed brethren calls bitterly unto us from the very dust of some countries of the earth'? No, brethren, it is only the recollection of our sometime glory, of our Kingdom that has gone, of our nationality of which we boasted once, that can rouse within us that sympathy with our downtrodden brethren, which we must grant them, because the world denies it to them.

Again, the sound of the '*Shophar*' or 'Ram's Horn' in the month of Ellul; how sublime its import, preparing, as it should, for the awe-inspiring season which is at hand, and rousing to the consciousness of neglected duties—religious, national, and social!

Does it destroy, I ask once more, does it not enhance the spirituality of our Religion, if, during the Feast of Tabernacles, while sitting under the shade of the rustic booth or '*Succah*,' we be reminded of the contrasting lessons—man's mortality and man's immortality, a lesson which I can hear preached by the leaves which form its very roof? How refreshing and soothing if the *Succah* preach unto us the further lesson of God's ever-watchful Providence amid the storm and stress of life, which often well-nigh shatter the frail tenement of mortality!

To many, perhaps, the taking of the *Palm-Branch* and its characteristic employment during Divine Service on Tabernacles, would seem a useless, even grotesque ceremonial. But if we are taught to connect with the ceremony this reflection, namely, that by pointing to the four corners of the earth, by pointing with the '*Lulab*' above us and about us, we are to bring home to us the idea that God is everywhere in the world, that His All-seeing eye is open to all the wants of His creatures, that our every action is watched and weighed in the balance of Righteousness: then, indeed, in this instance as in many others, a new aspect will be given to apparently meaningless ordinances, life and spirit will be breathed into the dry bones of a seemingly mysterious Ritualism.—

And what more valuable doctrine can be taught to mortal man than this—the Omnipresence of God!

What more rational belief than this? That while God deigns to accept at our hands the various modes and outward means whereby we would worship Him, He would fain look with greater pleasure upon the spirit which needs must accompany this outer worship, which needs must be the essence and motive power of the ceremonies of Judaism. Oh Brethren! remembering this, I would conclude with the prophet's aspiration:

וּשְׂאֵבֶתֶם מַיִם בְּשִׁשׁוֹן מִמַּעֲיֵנֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה

“In joy may you draw the water (of instruction) out of the wells of salvation”! <sup>1)</sup> לֵה' הַיְשׁוּעָה “And unto the Lord to whom Salvation belongeth” I would pray:—

עַל עַמְךָ בְּרַכְתֵּךְ סֵלָה “May Thy Blessing descend upon thy people, Selah”! <sup>2)</sup>

1) Isaiah XII, 3.

2) Psalm III, 9.



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