

Ethics of the Talmud.

CHAPTER I.

All things are foreordained by Providence save the conduct of man. Whatever the Almighty doeth, is done for our best. The balm was created by God before the wound.

Do your duty and leave the consequences thereof with Him who has commanded it. Bless God for evil as well as for good. God tries one man with riches and another with poverty; it requires no less moral strength to escape the dangers of riches than to resist the temptations of poverty.

They asked Wisdom: When a man sins what shall his punishment be? Wisdom replied: The soul that sinneth shall die. The Law was asked: What shall be the penalty of him that sins? Law answered: Let him offer a sacrifice for his atonement. God was asked: What is the sinner's punishment? He answered: Let him repent and he shall live.

Wisdom may be compared to water; as water leaves the heights and gathers in the depths, so is wisdom received from on high and preserved by a lowly soul. Whatever good you do, do it with a rejoicing heart.

Woe to him that does evil, in order to bring about good; for his very merits rises to accuse him. Say not: I have done good with what belongs to me; you give only of that which has been lent to you. You ought,

therefore, to render thanks to God for enabling you to do good. The greater the man; the greater are the passions which he holds in subjection.

Sin, at first, is a mere cobweb, in the end it becomes a strong rope. At first sin is an indifferent stranger, that happens to pass by, later on a welcome guest, and at last the master of the house. The sinners are in the power of their passions, the pious have the passions in their power. He that in his youth made himself the slave of his passions, cannot help serving and obeying them also in his old age. Commit a sin twice and you will think it perfectly allowable. Sin hardens the heart of man. Which are the strange gods in the heart of man? His evil passions!

“The Lord hath appeared unto you that you may fear before him and not sin.” To fear God means to be shamedfaced; he who is ashamed will not easily commit sin. There is a great difference between him who is ashamed before his own self and him who is only ashamed before others. It is a good sign in a man to be capable of being ashamed.

The dying benediction of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zackai to his disciples was: “I pray for you that the fear of Heaven may be as strong upon you as the fear of man. You avoid sin before the face of the latter, avoid it before the face of the All-seeing.”

If you feel ashamed of the wrong you have done, God will forgive you all your sins.

I would rather appear all my life a fool in the eyes of man, than to be for one single moment a sinner before God. He that sins in secret, denies God. “The spirit returns to God who gave it”; return to Him thy soul as He gave it to thee; thou shalt give it back to him as pure as thou hast received it.

CHAPTER II.

Give not way to anger, lest thou sin. The man that is given to anger, destroys his own house. Man ought to be soft and pliant like the reed, and not hard and unbending like the cedar.

Three kinds of men are pleasing to God; those that are longsuffering, those that are temperate and those that are ever open to conviction. Three kinds of men do not enjoy their life; the fainthearted, the wrathful and the gloomy.

Pride is idolatry; love of mankind is piety. Pride has many faults for companions. The proud is made sad by every breath of opposition. The proud is sensitive; he that is sensitive is foolish.

Not the place honors the man, but the man the place. He that humbles himself will be exalted by God; he that exalts himself will be exalted by God; he that exalts himself will be humbled by Him.

He that grows impatient with the slow pace of time, will be thrust aside by time; he that patiently bides his time, will be advanced by time. He that diminishes his own honor in order to increase the glory of God, his honor will wax along with the glory of God.

Behold how greatly esteemed the meek are of God! He that is of an humble spirit is spoken of in Scripture as having offered all the sacrifices, for it is said: "The sacrifices of God are a broken heart." Strive not after honor at the cost of a fellowman's shame.

Before you lie down in the evening, banish from your heart whatsoever grudge you bear against a fellowman, saying: I forgive all that have offended me. Be thou rather of those that are cursed, not of those who curse; of them that are persecuted, not of them that persecute.

Whosoever does not persecute them that persecute him ; whosoever takes an offense in silence ; he who does good because of love ; he who is cheerful under his sufferings —they are the friends of God, and of them the Scripture says, "And they shall shine forth as does the sun at noonday."

CHAPTER III.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," means, thou shalt love Him with all the forces of thy nature, of thy physical as well as of thy spiritual nature. Thou shalt serve the Lord thy God with an undivided heart ; thou shalt serve Him by being at peace with thyself, thy sensual nature not striving against, but yielding willingly to the command of thy spiritual nature.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul," means, even if he demands thy soul, requiring thee to yield thy life for His glory, thou shalt do it with love.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy might," means, whatever measure He metes out to thee, be it joy or sorrow, thou shalt love Him. Fulfill the commandments of the Lord through love, for it is one thing to obey Him through love and quite another thing through fear. Fear in love and love in fear. It is only towards God that fear and love may thus blend. Love therefore God as Abraham did, striving like him to spread the love of God among men. Endeavor to gain the love of men by departing from every sin and doing injustice to no man without distinction of nationality or creed. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," is to be interpreted thus : Let thy conduct be such, that men will come to love God through thee.

Men praise and exalt him who not only searches the Law and knows its contents ; but who also is just in all his dealings and kind towards all men. Of such a man they say : Blessed is he that knows the Law, blessed his father that has educated, blessed the teacher that has instructed him ! Behold yon servant of God who knows and observes His commandments ; how beautiful are his words, how lovely his ways ! To him may be applied the words of Isaiah : “ He said to me, Israel thou art my servant, through whom I am glorified.”

“ Kind and just is the Lord, therefore showeth He to sinners the way ; ” He is kind because He is just—just because He is kind.

“ Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself ; ” this is the fundamental principle of religion. What thou wouldst not have others do unto thee, do not unto others, upon this rule rests the whole Law. He that wrests the right of the stranger, wrests also the right of the Most High. He that lifts up his hand against his fellowman, is a wicked man. He who puts his fellowman to shame in public, commits a sin as grievous as murder.

He that hates his fellowman is a brother to the murderer ; for hatred oftentimes leads to murder. He that calumniates his fellowman denies God. Put no man to shame, lest thou be put to shame.

Do battle for the right, though the object be but a penny's worth. The receiver of stolen goods is as bad as the thief.

Beware of partisan hatred and partisan passions, for on account of these sins was Jerusalem destroyed. Cling to the spirit rather than to the letter of the Law, Jerusalem was destroyed because its inhabitants stuck too tenaciously to the full letter of the Law.