

THE OUTCOME

CHAPTER 14

THE PRAYER BOOK

The ordinary man had not much use for the philosophers. 'Look at them!' is the indignant summing up of a fifteenth-century theologian, one of the refugees torn from home and country by the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492,

'Look at these people! They boast that they have knowledge of God through their philosophy. But they throw off the yoke of the Law and the yoke of the precepts; they are estranged from their Father in Heaven; they mock and laugh in their hearts at those who keep the Law and the precepts; they are the generation of whom it is said that it curses its father and does not bless its mother.

'Unto you I call, men of the exile from Spain, we who were driven out because of the burden and the number of our sins—these boasters of their knowledge "changed their glory" [i.e. accepted another religion, cf. Jer. ii, 11] on the day of bitterness almost every one of them. It was the women and the uneducated masses who gave up their lives and possessions for the Hallowing of the Name.'

Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) tells an illuminating story of his master, the neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen. Cohen, who was very interested in Judaism and its theoretical basis, was once asked by a fellow worshipper in Synagogue one Friday evening to explain to him his conception of God. Cohen complied, and, when he had finished, his interlocutor said simply: 'But where

is the creator of the world?' The philosopher (says Rosenzweig) wept; and this is perhaps the fate of every philosopher when confronted with the plain man.

The plain man's religion is reflected most simply in his prayer book, and we shall turn to it in order to see what it can teach us of the nature of Judaism.

We may notice first the general attitude of Judaism to prayer as such.

The Talmud says: 'No man should pray a longer prayer than Moses our teacher of whom it is said, "And Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights"; and no man should pray a shorter prayer than Moses our teacher of whom it is said that he prayed [Num. xii, 13; the Hebrew is five monosyllables]: "Heal her, O God, I beseech thee."'

These limits were adhered to fairly. On the Day of Atonement, in the old-type service, prayers go on night and day; but there is recorded too the five-word prayer of a shepherd before breaking bread: 'Blessed be the All-merciful, giver of this crust', which has passed into Halachah. So prayer may be in five words or for forty days and nights—'it is all one', the passage in the Talmud continues; 'a man may pray at length or a man may pray briefly, *provided only that he incline his heart*'. Thus prayer lies not in the count of words but in the inclining of the heart. It is the 'service of the heart'. A folk story tells of an ignoramus who was heard in Synagogue on the Day of Atonement going over and over the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. When remonstrated with, he said: 'God will understand.'

A multitude of aphorisms attest the attitude taught to prayer. I take those prefaced to a standard edition (by S. Baer) of the traditional Prayer Book in the Ashkenazic rite:

'One prayer is more beloved of God than a hundred good deeds and than all the sacrifices together.'

'When you pray, know before whom you stand.'

'He who prays must see himself as if the Divine Presence were before him, as it is written: "I set God before me alway."'

‘He who makes his prayer a set thing, his prayer is not supplication.’

‘When thou prayest, make not thy prayer a set thing but [an appeal for] mercy and supplication before God.’

‘He who prays must incline his heart to Heaven.’

‘He who prays must set his eyes below and his heart above.’

‘It is forbidden to raise one’s voice when one prays.’

‘He who makes his voice loud in prayer is one of those of little faith.’

‘The Holy One, blessed be he, requires the heart.’

These maxims, we are told, should be in a man’s mind whenever he prays. Prayer is to be the free expression of the spirit of devotion. We have seen Maimonides (above, p. 90) laying it down as Halachah that it must not be entered on during fatigue or business pre-occupation; for prayer the mind must be fresh and clear. So too Nachmanides:

‘When thou prayest, remove all worldly considerations from thine heart. Set thy heart right before God, cleanse thine inmost thoughts and meditate before uttering thy devotions. Act thus all thy days, in all things, and thou wilt not sin. By this course thy deeds will all be upright, and thy prayer pure and clean, innocent and devout, and acceptable before the Lord.’
(*Ethical Wills*, p. 98)

Originally, there would seem to have been no fixed form of prayer. The objections to it however gradually gave way to the exigencies of the times, and what were originally the fluid utterances of a leader in prayer crystallized finally into a prayer book. Yet even today there are preserved in the Synagogue on the solemn days of the New Year and the Day of Atonement the private prayer of the old readers (‘opening their lips in prayer and supplication to entreat and implore the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords’) that they ‘trip not in their tongue nor err in their speech’:

‘Teach them what they shall say, instruct them what they shall speak. . . .

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'They lead thy people before thy presence and from the midst of them they approach thee: the eyes of thy people are fixed upon them, and their eyes are bent on thee. . . . Unto thee in Heaven they lift up their eyes, pouring forth their hearts like water before thee; and do thou hear them from Heaven. . . .'

Or again:

'I will hope in God; I will beseech his presence; I will ask of him the answer of the tongue. . . . The preparations of the heart belong to man; but the answer of the tongue is from God. O Lord, open thou my lips and my mouth shall declare thy praise.'

These are clearly appeals for personal inspiration in prayer; and it is to be noted that, apart from the fixed and universally accepted 'Shema' and 'Eighteen Benedictions' to be described below, there is a continuous tradition of opposition to set forms:

'Pray not as a matter of rote, for prayer is the service of the heart. If thy child address thee, and speak not from his heart, art thou not angry? How then shalt thou, insignificant wight, act in the presence of the King of the universe? Be not as a servant to whom hath been committed for his own good an important work and he hath spoilt it! How shall such a one stand before the King? How excellent would it be to ask pardon for praying "Pardon us" without sincerity!

'Relax not confession for thy sins morning and evening, nor omit to remember Zion and Jerusalem¹ with a broken heart and bitter tears. And when thou recitest the verse which bids thee love the Lord thy God,² speak as one ready to deliver up life and substance for His sanctification, thus fulfilling in thy person the words of the Singer: "For Thy sake are we killed every day."

'Yet have a whole-hearted confidence in Him, and believe in His special providence, for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, and He regards all the ways of

¹ 'And to Jerusalem, thy city, return in mercy and dwell therein as thou hast spoken; rebuild it soon in our days as an everlasting building . . . And let our eyes behold thy return in mercy to Zion . . .' (P.B., pp. 49, 51) The admonition to remember Jerusalem is from Jer. li, 50.

² 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might' (Deut. vi, 5), the second verse of the 'Shema'.

a man. Day and night let thy lips make mention of Him. When thou liest down luxuriate in His love, and in thy dream thou wilt find it. When thou awakest thou wilt delight in Him, and He will direct thy paths.

‘So fulfil all thy virtuous acts in the spirit of humbly walking before Him. This is the service which He has chosen, this the service acceptable in His sight.’ (*Ethical Wills*, pp. 194–5)

This passage is from the ‘Rule’ or ‘Paths of Life’ of one of the greatest medieval Codists, Asher ben Yehiel (the ‘Rosh’, c. 1250–1327). We may add a few further instances from Abraham’s collection.¹ The first is from Jonah Landsofer, an eighteenth-century writer of scrolls of the Law who combined Kabbalism with an interest in Euclid:

‘The great principle is that the purpose of man’s creation is the service of God. Of that service the root is fixed in man’s innermost being, with the heart as watchman over it. Prayer, in its highest sense, is this heart-service, a complete absorption, which no pre-occupation invades. This degree is not reached by one in a thousand of those who are weighed down by human cares. They may understand the meaning of the words which they utter, and yet fail to attain to the love which should accompany them. Therefore, on all happenings, write for yourselves some new prayer, keeping it, however, carefully within lawful lines. Let it be pieced together from verses of the Psalms. . . . Let each of you pray to God for a contrite and understanding heart, from which ill-will and envy shall be far. Let each pray for sustenance, that it may be won honestly without the crushing anxiety which drives out higher things. Above all, let each pray for loyalty and virtue in his offspring, for power to avoid sin. Let him pray that God may implant in his heart the love of Him, and in his home peace. . . .

‘Every day a different form of words must be used, lest by familiarity the prayers lose their spontaneity.’ (*Ethical Wills*, pp. 286–8)

¹ Above, p. 151.

A contemporary of Landsofer, Moses Hasid, also a Kabbalist, favoured on the other hand the use of the accepted rite; but in general he preferred study to prayer:

‘As regards prayer, I counsel limitation to set forms as contained in the prayer-books. It is not desirable to recite many additional supplications. They monopolize the time which should be devoted to the study of the Torah. Even at the midnight exercises, I prefer to pray the less so as to read the more.’ (*Ethical Wills*, pp. 290–1)

The founder of the popular mystical movement known as Hassidism, Israel Baal-Shem (1700–60), has the following:

‘A man may be on a journey, and thus unable to pray in his usual fashion. At such times he must find a mode of service other than prayer. Let him not allow this to oppress his spirit, for it is God’s will that service of Him takes now one form, now another. Accordingly, when starting on a journey, or entering on converse with his friends, he should hold himself ready to serve in relation to the opportunity.

‘For a man, wherever he is or whatsoever he does, must concentrate his thoughts on the Divine Presence, full of love for it, yearning for its love. And his recurrent thought must be: “When shall I be worthy of the indwelling in me of the Light of the Divine Presence?”’ (*Ethical Wills*, p. 298)

However strong and persistent the repugnance to set forms and attitudes in prayer, the conception that there should be regular prayer at definite periods of the day goes back to very early times. The Biblical Daniel (vi, 10) prayed three times a day; and the tradition asserts that the ‘supplication even, morning and noon-day’ of Psalm lv, 17 refers to the three regular times of daily prayer. The Talmud says these were instituted by the Patriarchs. This means presumably that their origin is unknown; and it should be remarked that the opening passage of the Mishnah asks: ‘From what time in the evening is the Shema recited’, it being taken for granted that the Shema is recited, and in the evening. A similar assumption colours the

treatment which follows immediately (chapter iv) of 'prayer'. The reference is to the (now) set Eighteen (really nineteen) Benedictions of the 'standing' daily prayer which, with the Shema, forms the central structure of the traditional prayer-book as used today; but here too no word is said of their origin or antecedents.

Our present concern however is not with the history of the Prayer Book but with the nature of Judaism. We shall ask therefore what light these and other portions of the Prayer Book throw on Judaism's conception of God and the world and human life in general and the vocation of Jewry in particular. What virtues does it emphasize; what ends and objects does it approve, what motives does it appeal to, what religious ideas does it seek to inculcate? We may start with the 'Shema' itself.

The Shema ('Hear!') is so called from its first word '*Hear*' ['Shema'] O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.' We do not know when this verse (Deut. vi, 4) was adopted as the slogan or rallying cry of Judaism. As generally understood, it is an affirmation of the unity of God and as such it has become to all intents and purposes a confession of faith, being used in that sense at the conclusion of the service of the Day of Atonement and on the bed of death. We have already seen its traditional interpretation (above, p. 80) that the God of Judaism is the God of all; but the parallels from the prophets (Zeph. iii, 9; Zech. xiv, 9) given by the commentators on the verse in its original context suggest that this is a hope for the future rather than a fact of the present. In any case it is not a bare theological statement but an expression of confidence in the future unity of mankind under the one God.

But this single verse is not the Shema of the Mishnah and the Prayer Book. The Shema is the whole paragraph (Deut. vi, 4-9) ('Hear, O Israel. . . . And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them. . . . And thou shalt write them on the doorposts of thy house') together with the two passages Deut. xi, 13-21 ('And it shall come to pass,

if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul . . .') and Numbers xv, 37-41 (. . . 'bid them make a fringe upon the corners of their garments . . . that ye may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and not go about after your own heart and your own eyes after which ye use to go astray . . . and be holy unto your God . . .'). No date is known for the selection of the passages, and the selection itself is accepted without question. There are however reasons offered both for the selection and for the order in which they are read, and these are illuminating.

The *first* passage, we are told in the Mishnah, is the 'Acceptance of the yoke of Heaven' (that is, the confession of the sovereignty of God), the *second*, the 'Acceptance of the yoke of the precepts'; and they are read in that order because the acceptance of the sovereignty of God comes first. Without God, the precepts are meaningless.

And again: the *first* passage tells us to learn and to teach; the *second* to teach and to act; the *third* only to act. They are therefore recited in that order. Action depends on teaching, teaching on learning. The duty of learning comes first, but the end and fruit of learning is action.

Or yet again: 'And it shall come to pass if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments . . . to love the Lord your God' (the first sentence of the *second* passage): 'Thou must not say: I shall learn in order that I may become rich, in order that I may be called Rabbi, in order that I may receive reward. Scripture says, *to love the Lord your God and to serve him*: whatsoever you do, do only from love.'

This account of the second passage is of especial interest. On the face of it the passage is an appeal to sanctions: the fear of punishment and the hope of reward. But on the interpretation proffered it is something very different. It is a warning to remember that whatever the factual consequence may be, the true end and object of the practice of the commandments is

the love of God. They are the way in which the love of God is expressed and fostered. In themselves they are not the end.

A similar point emerges from the use of the *third* passage. The wearing of the 'fringes' (still seen in the 'prayer shawls' of the Synagogue) is instituted in order to arouse the mind to the commandments and their purpose. This purpose, the passage tells us, is to keep men from following the desire of their eyes and to urge them to the life of holiness; and the act of wearing the fringes reminds them that this, the living of the life of holiness, was the purpose of the original act of salvation from Egypt too. Thus to the theology and morals of the first two passages, the third adds ceremony and history.

We have then in the Shema as traditionally understood a summary of the general teachings of Judaism; and it is of great interest to observe that according to the Halachah it may be recited in any language [“Hear” in any language that you can hear in’], not only or necessarily in Hebrew. These were the essentials, and essentials must be made clear and grasped through any possible medium. Language is only a channel of communication; and although the Shema is always publicly recited in Hebrew, the fact that the Mishnah itself allows its recital in all languages underlines its basic character.

The importance of the Shema emerges (by contrast) from another consideration altogether. The Shema is not obviously the centre of Judaism. *Prima facie* one would have thought the position was held by the Ten Words ('Commandments') from Sinai. And yet the Ten Words never attained in traditional Judaism the pre-eminent position of the Shema.

The Mishnah tells us that the Ten Words were originally recited in the Temple service like the Shema. When however the 'Minim' ('heretics', cf. above, p. 122) received the wrong impression that the Ten Words constituted the whole of Judaism as enunciated at Sinai, the practice was discontinued. The recital of the Shema, on the contrary, remained obligatory, and the difference between it and the Ten Words is instructive.

Apart from the first (in the reckoning of Judaism the sentence 'I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage' is a Word by itself, the *second* Word commencing immediately after and being made up of verses 3, 4, 5 and 6 together), the Ten are, as they are called in English, commandments. But the Shema, like Judaism, is more than a command or series of commands. It inculcates the doctrines of the unity of God and of the love of God, the duty of learning and of teaching, and the ideal of holiness as embodied in the commandments. These, and not specific precepts however important in themselves, express the nature of Judaism; and it is noteworthy that whereas the Talmudic teachers found all the Ten in the Shema, they never tried to find the Shema in the Ten.

The Shema is not properly prayer, and the Hebrew phrase given to its recitation (*kriath shema* = the *reading* of the Shema) explains its character. It is a reading from Scripture, and its purpose is to hold before the mind the basic teachings of Judaism. These appear in many other passages, as in the prayer called familiarly (after its first word) *Alenu* [=It is laid upon us; it is our duty]:

'It is our duty to praise the Lord of all things, to ascribe greatness to him who formed the world in the beginning. For we bend the knee and offer worship and thanks before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One blessed be he, who stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. . . . He is our God; there is none else . . . as it is written in his Law, And thou shalt know this day and lay it to thine heart that the Lord he is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.'

This prayer is attributed to the third-century teacher Rab and its original place appears to be in the liturgy for the New Year. It is used now regularly as the concluding prayer of every service in the year, and with its triumphant monosyllabic ending 'There is none else' constitutes an affirmation

of the unity of God. As indeed it was in times of trial. So we read in the chronicler of the Blois massacre and burnings of 1171:

‘And it came to pass, as the flames rose, that they lifted their voices in unison and sang; and the Gentiles said, “We hear your song and know it not, nor have we heard its like except today.” Let the truth be known: the song they heard in that terrible hour was the *Alenu*: “It is our duty to praise the Lord of all.”’

A fuller and less defiant confession of faith is to be found in the Eighteen Benedictions:

‘We will give thanks unto thee and declare thy praise for our lives which are committed unto thy hand, and for our souls which are in thy charge, and for thy miracles which are daily with us, and for thy wonders and thy benefits which are wrought at all times, evening, morning and noon.

‘O thou who art all-good, whose mercies fail not; thou merciful being whose lovingkindnesses never cease, we have ever hoped in thee.

‘Everything that liveth shall give thanks unto thee for ever and shall praise thy name in truth, O God, our salvation and our help.

‘Blessed art thou, O Lord, whose name is All-good and unto whom it is becoming to give thanks.’

A more personal confession (taken from the Jerusalem Talmud) is in the early morning benedictions:

‘Thou wast the same ere the world was created; thou hast been the same since the world hath been created; thou art the same in this world and thou wilt be the same in the world to come. Sanctify thy name upon them that sanctify it, yea, sanctify thy name throughout thy world.’

True, according to the Talmud, this prayer is a prayer of the angels; but its succeeding paragraph in the Prayer Book is not, and it looks like a popular summary of the Judaism of the plain man:

‘Thou art the Lord our God in heaven and on earth. Verily

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thou art the first and thou art the last, and beside thee there is no God.

‘O gather them that hope for thee from the four corners on the earth.

‘Let all the inhabitants of the world perceive and know that thou art God, thou alone, over all the kingdoms of the earth. . . .

‘Our father who art in heaven, deal kindly with us for the sake of thy great name by which we are called.’

This last prayer includes an appeal for the national return and there is much of that in the Prayer Book. Yet its phraseology, here and elsewhere, attests the special nature both of the return itself and of its underlying ground. Jewry is Jewry by virtue of ‘the great name by which it is called’, that is, by virtue of its divine vocation; and it prays for the coming of the day when the divine name witnessed by Jewry will be recognized by all. The final consummation is described in an ancient hymn used now on the solemn Holydays:

*All the world shall come to serve thee
And bless thy glorious name,
And thy righteousness triumphant
The islands shall acclaim;*

*And the peoples shall go seeking
Who knew thee not before,
And the ends of earth shall praise thee,
And tell thy greatness o’er.*

(trans. Zangwill)

So much for the ‘confessional’ aspect of the Prayer Book. We may turn to a second, the doxological as reflected in the ubiquitous ‘blessing’ or ‘benediction’.

The prototype is Biblical:

‘Blessed be thou, O Lord, the God of Israel, our father for ever and ever.

‘Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty: for all that is in the

heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou rulest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great and to give strength unto all.

‘Now therefore O God we thank thee and praise thy glorious name.’

The Benediction (whatever it may have been once) is not a bestowal of power or a request for favours. It is the expression of grateful thanks to the Lord of all. As David’s prayer proceeds:

‘But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners as all our fathers were: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding.’

But the thought goes deeper. God is not only the creator and possessor of the material world. He creates and knows the heart of man; and just as he prepares and establishes the physical earth, so he can prepare and establish the heart:

‘I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness.’

‘As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy thy people which are present here to offer willingly unto thee.’

‘O Lord, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Israel our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.’

The greater part of this prayer of David (1 Chron. xxix, 10 ff.), like so much else in the Bible, has passed into the liturgy for which the ‘preparation of the heart unto thee’ is the purpose of the performance of the precepts. David himself goes on to pray:

‘And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies and thy statutes.’

In the Prayer Book it is rather by keeping the commandments, testimonies and statutes, that we slowly perfect the heart. This

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appears clearly in the common formula of benediction: 'Blessed art thou . . . who hast *sanctified us by* thy commandments.' The commandments and their performance are the instruments of sanctification, and the benediction offers thanks to their giver.

But God is more than the giver of commandments, and he is thanked ('blessed') on all the common occasions of life: on rising and retiring, on breaking bread or partaking of other food and drink, on family events and historical occasions, on hearing good or bad news, on witnessing natural wonders, on doing or enjoying anything for the first time. There is a full list (taken from the Talmud) in the Prayer Book. Some are charming, e.g. 'on seeing trees blossoming the first time in the year':

'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast made thy world lacking in nought, but hast produced therein goodly creatures and goodly trees wherewith to give delight unto the children of men'; some are unexpected, e.g., on seeing distinguished Gentile scholars and scientists:

'Blessed art thou O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast given of thy wisdom to flesh and blood.'

A striking one is that pronounced on seeing a place of idolatrous worship:

'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who prolongs his mercy for those who transgress his will.'

Yet from the point of view of the understanding of the nature of Judaism the most instructive 'blessings' are not these for special occasions but the three which constitute the beginning of the early morning prayer.

The first and second concern the body and its external and internal cleanliness and bless God who commanded us to wash the hands and to rid the body of internal impurities. These actions thus become the first of the day, and they are specifically associated with religion. It is 'our God who sanctified us through his commandments', who 'commanded us to wash our hands'; and it is he, too, who 'created in man many orifices

and vessels' of which 'if one be rent or obstructed, it is impossible to exist or to stand before him'. As the Talmud says: 'A man should wash his face, his hands and his feet, every day, for the sake of his maker'; that is to say, since our body is God's work, we honour him by keeping it clean. (In the same spirit Hillel used regularly to take a bath for the glory of God.)

The third of these blessings hardly needs comment. It is for our God 'who commanded us to occupy ourselves with the words of the Law'. This broadens out into a general appeal for knowledge, which is part of the set Eighteen Benedictions:

'Thou favourest man with knowledge and teachest mortals understanding. O favour us with knowledge, understanding and discernment from thee. Blessed art thou, O Lord, gracious Giver of knowledge.'

In accordance with the concrete character of Judaism in general the Prayer Book exalts study and the gift of knowledge not only theoretically. It provides specimens of things to be studied and known. For example, as a part of the early morning service, we find a passage from the early literature which enumerates a whole list of commendable actions: 'honouring father and mother, the practice of charity, timely attendance at the house of study morning and evening, hospitality to wayfarers, visiting the sick, dowering the bride, attending the dead to the grave, devotion in prayer, and making peace between man and his fellow; and the study of the Law which is equal to them all.'

In the same way the leisure of the long Sabbath afternoon in summer is exploited in the Prayer Book according to most rites for the reading of one chapter each week of the five chapters of the small Mishnaic Treatise known as the Ethics of the Fathers, followed by the later sixth chapter on the Acquisition of the Torah.¹ This collection of moral aphorisms is a treasure-house of popular wisdom. Its praise of wisdom itself is especially noteworthy. The student is held up as the ideal man:

¹ Danby, *Mishnah*, pp. 446-58; Judah Goldin, *The Living Talmud, The Wisdom of the Fathers and Its Classical Commentaries*, Mentor Religious Classic, New American Library, 1957.

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‘He is called friend, beloved, a lover of the All-present, a lover of mankind: it clothes him in meekness and reverence; it fits him to become just, pious, upright and faithful; it keeps him far from sin, and brings him near to virtue; through him the world enjoys counsel and sound knowledge, understanding and strength. . . .

‘He becomes like a river that flows on with ever-sustained vigour; he becomes modest, long-suffering, and forgiving of insults. . . .

‘This is the way that is becoming for the study of the Torah: a morsel of bread with salt thou must eat, and water by measure thou must drink, thou must sleep upon the ground, and live a life of trouble the while thou toilest in the Torah. . . .

‘In the hour of man’s departure neither silver nor gold nor precious stones nor pearls accompany him, but only Torah and good works, as it is said, When thou walkest it shall lead thee; when thou liest down it shall watch over thee; and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee (Prov. vi, 22): when thou walkest it shall lead thee—in this world; when thou liest down it shall watch over thee—in the grave; and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee—in the world to come.’

We have noticed before (above, pp. 42 ff.) the use by the Prayer Book of the Book of Psalms. Some of them have a fixed appropriateness for specific occasions, e.g. the Psalms cxii–cxviii which constitute the ‘Hallel’ [=Praise] used on the Festivals and which may be the ‘hymn’ referred to in Math. xxvi, 30. The Hallel itself is prefaced by a blessing of the usual type: ‘who hast sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us to read the Hallel’; and the use of the formula leads us to the consideration of the view of tradition inculcated by the Prayer Book. The difficulty is obvious. The formula is used universally, including cases when the action performed cannot be Biblical for the reason that it refers to something *non-Biblical*, e.g. the lighting of the lights on the Maccabean festival celebrating the cleansing of the Temple after its desecration by Antiochus

Epiphanes long after Biblical times.¹ The traditional explanation is drawn from the book of Esther ix, 27–8, where we read that the ‘Jews ordained and took upon them and upon their seed and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep these two days’ [of Purim].

The feast of Purim thus provided a precedent. It is obviously not a part of Pentateuchal law and therefore not, in the strict sense, a Commandment; yet because the community agreed to it, it was accepted as if it had been, and therefore could be held to fall under the traditional formula.

The point is important. The Judaism inculcated by the Prayer Book is historical. It looks on the community of Judaism as a living thing filled with its spirit and authorized to express it. The ‘elders’ or the ‘wise’ embody within themselves something of its original inspiration and power to originate. And not only the ‘elders’ and the ‘wise’. Plain people too have this power. A Talmudic dictum runs: ‘Custom in Israel is Law’; and it is recorded that when, at the time of the appearance in the schools of Jerusalem of the young Hillel, a point of ceremonial law arose which could not be determined by the elders then in authority, Hillel said: Leave the people alone and see what they will do.

Thus the Prayer Book presents an inconsequent amalgam: God and community with bodily cleanliness and the pursuit of knowledge; a territorial nationalism expressed in the constant formula that it is God who is to return to Zion first and determine its character; the sanctification of the Name as a principle of moral action; the universal Messianic future rooted in the particular historical past; lists of specified duties which include the limitless practice of charity and hospitality—it is difficult to extract one ‘system’ from it all. Yet there is no reason why we should try to do so. It is the affirmation of the spiritual which matters, and this we find on all occasions; and what is impressive throughout is the sense that the spiritual informs and directs the

¹ 1 Macc. iv, 52–9.

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material in its search for the holy life. 'At all times let a man fear God as well in private as in public; and let him rise early and say: "Sovereign of all worlds, not because of our righteous acts do we lay our supplications before thee, but because of thine abundant mercies. What are we, what is our life, what is our piety?"' 'Make me know the path of life . . . cleanse the impurity of my deeds . . . we are like clay in thy hands.' 'The soul is thine and the body is thy work: have pity on thy labour.' The 'frontlets' (Deut. vi, 8) are laid daily on the forehead 'in order that the soul which is in the mind should be subjected to God's service'; while the morning prayers open with the declaration:

'O my God, the soul which thou gavest me is pure. Thou didst create it, thou didst fashion it, thou didst breathe it into me. Thou preservest it within me; and thou wilt take it from me, but wilt restore it unto me hereafter.

'So long as my soul is within me, I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, Sovereign of all works, Lord of all souls!'

The teaching is definite. There is in each man a soul which is God-given and in God's hands, to give and to take away. And just as at night with the fading of consciousness in sleep one prays:

'May it be thy will to suffer me to lie down in peace and to let me rise up again in peace. Let not my thoughts trouble me, nor evil dreams, nor evil fancies, but let my rest be perfect before thee. O lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, for it is thou which givest light to the apple of the eye.

'Blessed art thou, O Lord, who givest light to the whole world in thy glory';

in the same way, with the return of consciousness, thanks are given to the 'living and everlasting King who returned my soul in pity—great is thy faithfulness'.