

ARABIC PARALLELS TO RABBINIC LITERATURE

BY JULIUS J. PRICE

THE progress of mankind along the lines of ethical perfection leading towards the goal of a united humanity has been accomplished by two distinct processes; the process of conceiving high ethical ideals and the equally important but nevertheless distinct process of their application to life.

If the prophets and seers of mankind give us the ideals that guide our conduct from afar, like lighthouses on the promontories of life, the lawgivers and judges formulating their practical rules and decisions place in our hands the humble candles whereby we see how to make the very necessary daily steps of life, and the great journey toward the goal of a united humanity is made up of these humble steps. We can conceive of the world as an enormous theatre in which thousands and thousands of voices from time immemorial speak in confusion. (Comp. Delitzsch, *Jewish Artizan Life in Time of Christ*, Eng. tr. 26, London and N. Y., 1902.)

To distinguish between these difficult voices is often difficult and confusing. An attempt is made in this paper to distinguish and to explain away the similitude between two distinct trends of thought that have found voice in past ages—that is, some of the ethical and legal aspects of Judaism and Mohammedism.

A close study of the subject will show that while Mohammed took little of his religious system from Christianity he was vastly indebted to Judaism both for his historical narratives, as well as for his doctrines and precepts. For after all Islam is in reality nothing more nor less than Judaism plus the apostleship of Mohammedanism. For the teachings of Christ formed no part of his religious system.

It cannot moreover be gainsaid that many of the doctrines and social precepts of the Koran are borrowed from Judaism. The unity of God, the ministry of angels, the inspired law, the law of marriage, and divorce, domestic slavery, the day of sacrifice, prayer

and ablution the lextaliones, the degree of affinity, the stoning of the adulterer and many other injunctions are precisely those of the Mosaic code with some modifications to meet the requirements of Arabic social life.

We also find that the chief incidents of Jewish history are recorded in the Koran with a strange and curious admixture of Rabbinical fable.

In order to understand this better let us regard some of those comparisons.

Prayer which is a means of bringing men into a closer communion with the God of his conception, has gained a strong hold on the popular imagination through the fact of God's real and active rule in the universe. (Comp. S. Hirsch, *Die Religions-Philosophy der Juden*, p. 445ff.) This appears very evident in comparing Talmudic (Comp. Pesahim 50a; Hagigah 15b; Gitten 6b; Seder Flizyahn Rabba ed. Friedman 61) and Islamic theology (Comp. Musuad Ahmed, IV:66).

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Jose: What proof is there that the Holy One blessed be He, prays? It is said (1s. IVL, 7): "I will make them joyful in the house of my prayer." It is not said their prayer but my prayer. And what does He pray for? Rabbi Zutrabar Tovyah replied that Rabbi had said: May it please Me to cause My mercy to subdue My anger, to let My mercy be revealed above My other attributes, in dealing with My children according to the quality of mercy and not according to strict judicial procedure (Comp. Ber. 7a).

Mohammed in imitation of this Judaic conception, propounded a similar tradition with regard to Allah (Comp. Margoliouth, *The Early Development of Mohammedanism*, p. 165 ff.).

It is not only the belief in the truth of Biblical account of miracles that enables us to pray to our Father, but the conviction that wonders and miracles are constantly wrought by Him. According to the Talmud "Even when the edge of the sword touches already a man's neck even then he must not abandon his faith in praying to God" (Ber. 10a), or "Hope in the Lord and pray again" (Deut. Rabba ch. 11). In this connection it is interesting to note the analogous conceptions with regard to prayer in Hebraic and Islamic holy literature.

In connection with the ritual language of prayer we note that the Mohammedans (Comp. Goldziher, *Mohammed & Islam*, p. 6) like the Jews, (Comp. Sabbath 12b; Megillah 1:8), were restricted

to the use of their respective native tongues. All religious formulas then in Islam, must necessarily be repeated in Koranic language just as the Talmud demands the use of Hebrew in all Hebraic ritual. Islamic like Hebrew ritual records only one example of divergent opinion namely that of the school of Abu Haniga which was of Persian origin and allowed the use of non-Arabic tongue in ritual prayers.

Both Talmud (Comp. Ber. 3:4) and Koran (Surah 4:46, V. 9) demand ablution before prayers.

It was a beautiful saying of Rabbi Jochanan (Jer. Ber. V. 1) that he who prays in his house surrounds and fortifies it, so to speak with a wall of iron. Nevertheless it seems immediately contradicted by what follows: For it is explained that this holds good when a man is alone but that when there is a community prayer must be offered up in the synagogue. We can readily understand how, after the destruction of the temple and the cessation of its symbolical worship, the excessive value attached to man attendance at the synagogue would rapidly grow in public estimation till it exceeded all bounds of moderation or reason. As a result of which the Rabbis say "that prayer which a man addresses to God has only its proper affect if offered in the synagogue" (Ber. 6a). Rabbi Josi is recorded to have laid down the rule (that unless unavoidably prevented from attending) a man's prayer is not heard outside of the synagogue (Ber. 6a; comp. also Maimonides, *Hilhoth Tephilah*, Sec. 8. Hal. 1). And the Talmud goes a step further in the assertion that "God is to be found only in the synagogue (Peah, 1:1; Aboth 3-3-7; A. Z. 3a; Sabbath 30a). The Talmud derives it from Ps. LXXXII:1. where in it is stated that God stands in the congregation of the might.

In a somewhat lengthy passage in Berachoth a similar trend of thought is developed; namely, (a) God is in the synagogue: (b) when God does not find ten males in the synagogue, He is angry: (c) God prays and the synagogue is His house of prayer which is derived from Ps. LVI:7, "Even then will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer"; (d) as a corollary of the preceding the prayer of man is only heard when prayed in the synagogue (Ber. 62 ff., and 7a ff.). The Rabbis magnify this thought in the following passage: "For though the distance between Heaven and Earth is infinitely great yet when a man comes to the synagogue and prays, God listens to him, for the petitioner is like a man who talks in the ear of his friend." (Jer. Ber. 13a; comp. also *Pesikta d'Rab Kahana* ed., Duber Lyck, 1868.)

A passage in Numbers Rabba (XI:2), represents God as skipping from synagogue to synagogue in order to bless Israel when it prays in the synagogue (so also is Canticles Rabba 2 on verse "Skipping upon the Mountains.")

So great are the prayers in the synagogue magnified that according to Exodus Rabba (XXI:4), the angels take the prayers of the Israelites in the synagogue and weave them into a crown for the head of God.

On the other hand, if we turn to Islamic theology we find that Mohammed as the Hebrews or in imitation of them taught similar conceptions, for it is recorded by tradition that to Abu Darr for example is given the following instructions, "that a prayer in a mosque is of more value than a thousand prayers recited elsewhere."

Amongst the Hebrews special merit was assigned to an early appearance in the synagogue, so also amongst the Mohammedans.

There are several other specific injunctions with regard to the conduct of prayers that are analogous to Hebrew and Islam's ritual. The Talmud prohibits loud and noisy prayers (Meg. 18a; Ber. 61a; cf. Slav. Enoch XXIV, 13) and Mohammed repeats the same in a more concise phraseology, "Cry not in your prayers" (Sura XVII: 11).

Intoxicated persons are prohibited to engage in acts of worship (Ber. 61a) also amongst the Mohammedans (Sura IV:46).

Prayers may be performed standing, walking, or even riding both according to the Jewish (Berachoth) as well as Mohammedan theology (Sura 2:23; 3:188; 10:13).

Devotion in both religions is permitted to be shortened in urgent cases without committing sin (Mish. Ber. IV:4, and Surah IV:1-2; Ber. 29b).

It is likewise a simple matter to trace the conception of Mohammedan food blessing to Talmudic sources. The Rabbis tell us (Vayikra Rabba, Chap. IX), "Though all prayers were to be discontinued, prayers of thanksgiving will never be discontinued." For we give expression to our feelings of gratitude towards our benefactors by acknowledging the fact that whatever we enjoy we are enabled to enjoy through His kindness.

The various blessings formulated by the Mohammedan and Rabbinic sages serve a double purpose, first they facilitate the expression of our feelings; and secondly, they remind us of the presence of the Almighty and his goodness in providing us and all his creatures. We therefore find in accordance with the teachings as found

in Berachoth a Koranic injunction (Sura 6:21), "Do not eat of that on which God's name has not been invoked for that is sin." This proves that a believing Mohammedan as a strick Jew will not eat meat which has not been ritualistically blessed at its slaughter (Comp. Bockenhoff, *Speisegesetze Mossaicher Art in Mittelalterlichen Kirchenrechts quellen*. Munster, 1907, p. 49).

The Geonic theory with regard to the creation of man in the image of God has been the foundation of all human endeavors to approximate and imitate the Supreme Being. The Rabbinic interpretation of the phrase "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord am holy" (Lev. 19:2) is that it is incumbent upon all to imitate the King (God)" (Bacher Ag. Tan. 2:367). Philo expatiating upon this theory says that "Every man in regard to his intellect is connected with Divine Reason being an impression or a fragment or a ray of that Blessed Nature." (This is undoubtedly an un mistakeable instance of Stoicism. Comp. Philo's remark on creation of the world, Vol. 1:11.)

In the light of the stress laid upon this Hebraic conception it is not strange when we remember that Mohammed took a number of his theological teachings from Judaism inasmuch as we find analogous expression in Islamic sacred literature.

Under Sufism it became an ethical ideal that one should strive to realize the qualities of God. The great theologian of Cordova Abu Muhammed Ali ibn Hazan (d. 1069) advanced the theory in his treatise ("Habit and Elevatim") *Kitab-al-aklak walsivar fi mudawat al-nujus*, which deserves a great deal of attention because the writer included in it in his "Confessions." A very characteristic and striking passage reads: Whoever strives for the blessedness of the other world and the wisdom of this, for justice in behavior and for the union of all good qualities, as well as for the merit of all virtues, he can follow the example of God and his prophet Mohammed and as far as he is able imitate their qualities and their manners. "May God help us with His grace, that we may be able to resemble the paragon" (Cairo, 1908, ed. Madmasant, p. 21). It might be well to here compare the Sifra which gives somewhat the same phraseology but perhaps more pregnant with meaning (Sifra Lev. XIX:17 and 18). On the other hand, if we turn to Ghazali we find in his introduction to the "Fattihat al ulum (Cairo, 1322) that he gives as a Hadith the almost Rabbinic phrase of the Talmudic saying: "takhallaku bi-akhalak-ill ahi," which in modern English means "to try to acquire the qualities of Allah." A similar

Jewish conception is found in the Talmud from which Mohammed directly or indirectly must have used as a source. (Comp. Sotah 14a and in Sifra Deut. 49, ed. Friedman, p. 85a, 16).

It was Rabbi Chamo ben Chaninah who said, "Walk in the attributes of God, i. e., make God's attributes rules for man's conduct. As he clothes the naked (Gen. 3:12) so do thou clothe the naked, as he nurses the sick (Gen. 18:1) so do thou nurse the sick; as he comforts the mourners (Gen. 25:2) so do thou comfort the mourners; as he buries the dead (Deut. 34:5) so do thou bury the dead. (Sotah 14a; comp. also Rabbi Eliezer of Metz Sefer Yarahim; also Maimonedes Sefer ha-Mitzroth, especially passage dealing with positive precepts, par. 8.)

As the way of heaven is that he is ever merciful against the wicked and accepts their repentance so be ye merciful against each other. As he bestows gifts on those who know him and those who know him not and deserve not his gifts so bestow ye gifts on each other (Tanad'ba Eliyahu ed. Friedman Vienna, 1902, p. 135), or better still, "If you have a chance to do an enemy a good turn and do not do it, you are guilty of revenge or hardship (Comp. Sifra Lev. XIX:17 and 18). An Islamic parallel almost word for word is found in the teachings of Ibu Arabi the Sirfi. For imitation of God demands the virtue of showing Kindness to one's enemy (Jour. Roy. As. Soc., 1906, p. 8, 9 and 10). But in spite of these five Mohammedan parallels which somehow or other must originally have come from Hebrew sources we have an example in Hebrew literature which is the boldest and most pictorial and one which I have been unable in spite of my many inquiries to find a parallel to. The boldest and most pictorial representation of these same imminent ideas of Divine activity is that of Yalkut on Exodus XXXI where the Almighty is represented as declaring "From the day of the world's creation even unto this hour I sit upon the Throne of my Glory spending one-third of the day in study of Torah, and another third in executing justice, and the last third in practicing benevolence and giving sustenance to all mundane creatures." If this passage means anything at all it alludes to the Divine implanting of these virtues in the heart of mankind. God's day is eternity. His throne is the universe. The study of the Torah is the emblem of righteousness and truth. The Divine tendencies making for righteousness, truth and benevolence are ingrained in the world; they are the traces of God, which are part and parcel of the texture of the human soul. (See Numb. R. 94.)

The Torah was to the Jew the very expression of the mind and thought of God; and that is the evident explanation of the assertions that God looked upon the Torah when He created the world (Tanh 2b) or that he Himself studies the Torah every day. In this way God's self communing was made known to man, as a result of which "the Torah was to be made not merely in theory but also in practice a complete guide to life." (Hersford, Pharisaism, p. 95.)

The Torah arrived to control the minority by the majority or in direct quotation "not to impose upon the public what the majority could not abide by." What was always understood by the "hedge about the Torah" was the means taken to keep the divine revelation from harm so that the sacred enclosure so to speak might always be free and open for the human to contemplate and commune with the Divine. And so far as the Torah consisted of precepts, positive and negative, the "hedge" was of the nature of warning whereby a man might be saved from transgressing before it was too late (Comp. Hersford, Pharisaism, p. 27).

The Halakah further emphasizes the fact that the laws of the Torah were all given in order that man might live by them and not die because of them. In the words of the Sifra the Jew is commanded that "he may live by means of the Halakah and not die because of them." The chief and central purpose of the Torah being to guide man in his labors for humanity. It would defeat its own purpose if it deprived itself of the laborers by insisting upon a too strict observance of its precepts (Comp. Sifra Ahare XIII. Weiss, p. 86b).

The same religious conception as expressed above is found in the Koran and in a somewhat more laconic form "Allah hath not laid on you any hardships in Religion" (Comp. Sura 22 V:77), or "Allah wisheth you ease and wisheth you not discomfort" (Sura 2 V:18), or better still the phrase, "We have come to make it easier and not more difficult" (Comp. Bukh. Isbn. Korans, 181). He cites it as a Koranic verse.

In view of the fact that we have here an almost verbatim translation of the Hebrew command in Arabic and as is well known today to the average student of Arabic literature that "Many Jews well versed in the scriptures were won over by the inducements of Islam, and as a result had placed themselves at the service of Mohammed and his followers." We may well claim that Jewish tradition had long been well known in Medina (Muir, *Life of Mohammed*, 8, LXII) and that Mohammed had imitated the sayings of the Rabbis

as well as the rest of the Jewish lore which was brought to his notice rather than evolved the famous sayings and the high concepts of theology himself. Well does Ibn Khaldun write, "The Arabs were a people without literature or science, rude and unlearned, when the longing after knowledge which is natural to humanity arose in their hearts. They betook themselves to the people of the previous Book and sought information from them. Then were the adherents of the Tourat (O. T.) consisting of the Jews—their teachers" (Comp. Sprenger, *The Life and Doctrine of Mohamet from sources hitherto for most part unused*, Vol. P. CIX).

The Arabic authority Mim also remarks that "most of the Arabic patriarchial geneologies are an undisguised plagiarism from the Old Testament and the legends of Rabbinical writings. Everything is derived from the Rabbins of Yemen and Syria (Comp. Muir's *Mohamet*, Vol. L, pp. lxx, cvii and cxcii).

HELL

The conception of hell as a place where certain types of the unrighteous shall go regardless of other merits, is common to both Mohammedan and Hebrew writers. Both agree that the pious follower shall not be forever condemned. The Mohammedan being taught that no believing Muslem shall remain eternally in hell (Alfred M. Kramer, *Geschichte der Herrschenden Ideen des Islam*, p. 25, Leipsig, 1868). And the Talmud is of the same opinion (Comp. B. M., 58b; Matt. V:22).

And it is written in Proverbs XI, 4, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but alms (righteousness) delivereth from death." Treasures of wickedness profit nothing but alms delivereth from death" (Proverbs X:2). One deliverance is from an unnatural death and the other is from the condemnation of Hell (B. B. 1-a). According to the Talmud all those that descend to Hell rise again after the year of Judgment except those who commit adultery, who cause their fellows to blush in public and those who slander (Compare R. H. 16b; Tosefta; Sanhedrin XIII 3-5; Matt. V:22). Rabbi Chanena said, "All who descend into Hell rise again except those who commit adultery, who cause their fellows to blush in public and who call their neighbors by nicknames. Likewise Abu Hureira, the

Mohammedan, reports: "Some one was telling the phophets about a woman who was famous for her praying, fasting, and almsgiving, but nevertheless slandered her neighbors greatly with her tongue." "She belongs in Hell," declared the prophet (See Goldizer *Islam*, p. 20).

And yet giving charity and relieving the poor was positive step to advance one to a place in heaven. Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiba, "If your God is a friend of the poor why does he not feed them?" He replied that we by maintaining them may escape the condemnation of Hell. Of like import is the opinion of Abu Talib who says that when a poor man takes charity from the wealthy he is thereby building him a house in Paradise (Kut al-Kulub 2:201). Another story is told (K. K. 1:95) of a man who had provided 2,000 chickens for a journey to Mecca. A saint told him that one acquired more merit by disbursing them in charity than by using them for a pilgrimage.

In the Talmud the Prince of Hell demands a supply for his domain and a similar request is made in the Koran (Othroth by Rabbi Akiba VIII:1 (Comp. also, Surah, 1:29). And in another instance the mention of seven hills as the appointed abode of the damned, and each hell with seven gates is found in representative documents (Erubin, XIX :1; Midrash on Ps. XI and Surah XV :44).