

THE CONCEPTION OF EDUCATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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IN attempting to delineate the conception of education as embodied in the Old Testament, the first great literary collections of Judaism, it is well to be aware of the difficulties one is apt to meet in the course of such an attempt, and which by their very nature circumscribe and delimit if not the intensity or depth of the conception, at least its extent and scope.

The difficulties are as follows: First, that the Old Testament is primarily the instrument of expression of a religion and not of a philosophy, and as such, thoughts and views are expressed not in a systematic or coordinated way, but rather in jets of sentiment and outbursts of feeling. Secondly, that the Old Testament is not a homogenous production of one period and age, but represents a creation of the spirit of a people, spread over a period of at least seven hundred years, and reflects accordingly, different tendencies and different thought currents.

There is yet a third difficulty to be taken into account, and that is that those parts of the Old Testament wherein that conception is embodied, namely the prophetic and the poetic-didactic are entirely of an educational character, for Judaism, above all other religions of antiquity was intended to be a discipline for a distinct people, to train it for its destined role, which is not only to follow in the ways of God but also to point the way to others to follow Him. It becomes, therefore, a hard task to extract from this great mass of literature which is entirely colored with an educational tendency those very threads which really form the woof of an educational view in the strict sense. The conception must therefore be of a more general character, merely inferred as a corollary of the views of the world, of life, and of the purpose of man in the world as expressed in the Old Testament literature.

THE VIEW OF THE WORLD

The basic conception of the view of the world as reflected in the Old Testament is, of course, that of Monotheism. Whatever be the development of that idea, whether it had been revealed on Mt. Sinai, or that it had gone through a long process of development from a modified polytheism through henotheism to the final view of unity, the fact is clear that when we come to the Bible, especially to the prophetic and poetic-didactic portions, we are on the *terra firma* of the belief in one God, irregularities and ambiguous expressions notwithstanding. It is this idea which colors all the expressions of Biblical Judaism and all its manifestations. Without taking the idea of Monotheism as the underlying one, it is impossible to speak of a moral view of life, whether that of the Prophets or of Judaism. This view presupposes the idea of one God, who is the God of the world. How could the Prophets speak of a moral order in the world, and urge men in the name of God to conform to that order without assuming that the God who insists on this moral order, and who threatens chastisement for disobeying it, is also the one, who alone brought order into the world as well? If the case were not so, how could He enforce the chastisement threatened for the infraction of the moral law? Might not other powers interfere? We must conclude, therefore, that the moral order of the Prophets, which included in its scope not only Israel but all nations, had as its basis the monotheistic idea which posited God as the master of the world, and its creator, even when that is not definitely pronounced by them, that is when they do not speak of Him as creator.

The Biblical view of the world, which as stated is based on Monotheism, posits only one true existence, namely—God. The other things, such as the world of nature and man are only created things. Their existence is entirely dependent on Him. God is not only the source and ground of inanimate nature, but also the source of life as the Psalmist says, "For with Thee is the fountain of life."¹ The God of the Old Testament is not an abstract philosophic principle such as the "one" of Parmenides, or "The idea of the Good" of Plato, but a God of life (Elohim Haiim). This appellation which is so common in the Old Testament² is not a mere adjective, but expresses the deep thought that life and activity are the very essence of God, for is He not the One who is constantly active? "Who stretcheth out the Heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to

¹Ps. xxxvi. 10.

²Deut. x. 24; I Sam. xvii. 26, 36, and in many other places.

dwell in."³ Is He not the one whose activity is depicted in such a poetical way by the Prophets, poets and sages?⁴

This view freed man from the constant fear which the world had always engendered in his heart in primitive times. This world of nature, that in ancient times presented to man such an impenetrable enigma before which he stood awe stricken, and to the solution of whose mysteries the best minds of the Greeks had devoted their energies, was suddenly deprived of its mysterious power, and relegated to a secondary place in the scale of existence, namely a *created* thing subjected to the will of the one God. True, He fixed laws in nature, but the existence of the laws like that of nature itself is not absolutely permanent, but dependent on the will of the Creator. Hence, follows the importance that man assumes in the Bible. In Greek thought, man is only an insignificant link in the chain of nature, subjected to the "all" before whose mysterious laws man stands terrified. In Biblical Judaism, man breaks these chains and rises on a par with nature and even higher than it. According to the view of the Old Testament, there are only two forces in the universe, God and man.

Man created in the image of God is superior to nature for he is intrinsically closer to Him in his character and essence. True, when we compare man in his physical smallness with nature in its majesty and beauty, he may suffer by the comparison as the Psalmist says, "When I consider Thy Heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? But, on the contrary, when contemplating his spirit, the same poet exclaims, "Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and hast crowned him with glory and honor" even above nature.⁵ The lowering of nature in the Biblical view of the world had undoubtedly been the cause for the absence of any philosophy of nature in Judaism. There was no need for one, since every thing was given and every puzzle solved. But the loss of such a pursuit is partially made up by the excessive importance which man assumed. Man and his life become henceforth the very foundation of the world, the axis around which all thoughts and sentiments turn. The question of questions, in Judaism, become the query, how and in what way shall man live?

And the man spoken of by the Bible as next to God, the most

³Isa. xl. 22.

⁴Isa. xl. 12-22; Ps. civ; Job, xxxvii, xxxviii.

⁵Ps. viii. 4, 5 6.

important subject in the world is not necessarily the entire human race, the genus homo, nor even the chosen people of Israel as a whole, but each particular and individual man. Judaism, even in its early Biblical stage, placed a great value on individuality. It is to be regretted that the current opinion of almost a majority of Christians, Old Testament scholars, and quite a number of Jewish scholars has accepted, as quite a truism, that Biblical Judaism emphasized only the nation as a whole and paid little attention to the individual as such. This opinion while it may be apparently supported by a considerable number of passages, where the destiny of the nation is spoken of, and its prosperity or downfall is the burden of the prophecies, yet, on closer examination it will be discovered that it is not as solidly founded as its sponsors claim it to be.

The theory of creation which had ultimately become not only an integral part of the Old Testament, but a most prominent part, inasmuch as it was placed at its very beginning, contains a most elevated conception of individuality. It speaks of man being created in the image of God. The image of God belongs not only to the human race in a general nor to any race in particular, but to each individual man, hence the importance of individuality. And even assuming that the pronouncement of this theory in its latest outlines is the product of the authors of P. Source who are said to have lived in exilic times, yet, it is impossible to posit that the creation story of P. Source was a mere invention by a later priest or priests. At the utmost, it is only a recasting of ancient beliefs. That the doctrine of creation inculcates implicitly the high value of individuality, was already long ago pointed out by the great teachers of the Mishnah. It is asked by them, "Why was only one man created?" The answer is given "The creation of a single man only, teaches us that one who preserves or saves even the life of one person, his act is considered as worthy as if he preserved the existence of the whole world.⁶ That this is not a mere homiletic remark, is evident from the fact that the statement is incorporated in the Mishnah, a work which deals primarily with law, and is sparing of words. The inclusion of the statement is intended to emphasize a fundamental point in the Biblical conception of man as understood by the great teachers of later Judaism.

Against this opinion, of making the nation all inclusive in Biblical Judaism militate also the words of Micah, who turns to the

⁶Tractate Sanhedrion Ch. 4, .5

individual and says, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with God."⁷ The appeal is here clearly addressed to the individual man and the program mapped out is likewise for the individual. We may, though concede to a certain extent that the Prophets dealt mainly with national-social aspects of life. This, however, is explained by the fact that they were primarily preachers, and as all preachers their center of attention is the group. Yet, as pointed out, they have not neglected the individual, and from time to time, they deal extensively with his life and morality. Thus, we see Ezekiel and Jeremiah before him emphasizing again and again individual responsibility, and inculcating repeatedly that each man will reap the fruit of his action, and no ancestral merit will save him.⁸

But there is still another current in Biblical Judaism, the sponsors of which are no less authoritative than the Prophets—and that is the one of poetry and wisdom, which is embodied in the Psalms, Proverbs, and Job. This literary current is permeated with a strong sense of the value and worth of the individual. Whatever can be said about the age of final redaction of these books, there is no doubt that they contain largely elements of a much earlier age—especially Psalms and Proverbs, where the bulk can be said to be pre-exilic. In these two books it is the individual which holds the central place. It is in the Psalms, where we hear the palpitation of the soul of the lonely man, the lost individual who looks to God as the guide and shepherd.⁹ And they all bear an early stamp. On the contrary, all those Psalms, possessing the ear-marks of later ages, exilic and post-exilic deal with the nation as their subject. The theory often propounded that many Psalms though speaking in the name of the individual, are really of a national-collective character, can be said to represent the wish of the propounders which is the father of the thought. Proverbs and Job bear almost entirely the stamp of individualism. The first is intended to be a guide for the individual in his private life as well as in his life within the group. The second has for its subject the problem of the suffering of the individual. The attempted symbolization of Job as suffer-

⁷Micah, Ch. 6 .8.

⁸Jeremiah, xxxi. 29. Ezekiel, xviii, and xxxi, 1-20. They both denounce vehemently the proverb current in Jerusalem "The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth shall be set on edge; the purpose of which was to merge the interests of the individual with that of the group.

⁹See for instance Psalms xi, xv, xvi, xxxii, cii and many more.

ing Israel is pure imagination. The setting of Job, the prologue, his being a non-Israelite exclude such an intention. The book of Job, in its ultimate form represents the last stage of a problem which grew in Israel for ages and finally was given some kind of a solution. But the problem itself shows clearly what place of importance the individual held in Biblical Judaism.

Summing up, we can safely assert that the Biblical view of the world and man represent a view which conceived a world wherein nature held a secondary position, and in this world there were two powers, God and man. The man, who was thus elevated above nature is not the collective man, the group, the chosen nation of Israel, though the latter occupies a special position, but it was the individual who was invested with worth and dignity.

II.

VIEW OF LIFE

Out of the view of the world and man propounded by Biblical Judaism there follows its exalted view of life. The one God, the Creator of the world is simultaneously the ground and source of morality. This idea flows directly from the very conception of the Godhead as embodied in the Old Testament. The essence of God is expressed through His attributes, but the thirteen attributes enumerated in the famous passage in Exodus xxxiv. 6-7 are all ethical. The other attributes found in the Bible which are of a more corporeal nature are merely figures of speech used by the writers to convey to the people the meaning of the power of God and the extent of His providence in the ordering of life.¹⁰ And since the creator of the world and the very source of life is essentially ethical, it follows that man who is to order his life in a manner satisfactory to the Creator, the ground of his existence, cannot have any other aim in life except morality which is the very essence of God. In other words, the purpose of the life of man is to emulate God and be like Him. God becomes thus the arch-type of life.

Morality which is the supreme end of life is primarily according to the Old Testament a matter of action and not of contemplation. God Himself realizes His essence through creation, He is thus re-

¹⁰There is a unanimous consent among all ancient interpreters of the Bible that the anthropomorphic expressions in the Old Testament are merely figures and were never meant literally, and all the ancient versions from the Septuagint to Aquila took care to change these expressions in such a manner so that they conform to the more exalted conception of God. Especially zealous in this regard is the Aramaic translation modeled after that of Aquila, and known as the *Onkelos*.

vealed to us; hence the Bible comes to attach such importance, value, and even sanctity to an active life in particular, and life in general. In no other literature, whether religious or secular do we find such enthusiasm for life as in the Bible. Life, according to it, is the greatest boon for man. The Psalmist has no other request from God but life, as it is said, "He asked life of Thee and Thou gavest it him, even length of days forever and ever. . . ." ¹¹He likewise pleads with God, "I shall not die but live and declare the words of the Lord." ¹²It is not that the poet is afraid of death or that he does not believe in immortality. The terror that death holds for him is in the fact that it brings with it a cessation of activity, an eternal life without action is of no importance. This idea is clearly expressed in the words, "The dead do not praise God nor all those that go down into silence." ¹³They may enjoy there a life of bliss, but as long as it is an inactive one, it is of no value for the Psalmist. The great striving then is for a life of action, a life which brings an ethical goal. This great enthusiasm for life expressed itself in the numerous epithets joined to the word life, such as "Source of life" ¹⁴, Book of Life ¹⁵, Tree of Life, ¹⁶ all such expressions which connote activity and its continuation. ¹⁷

A life of constant activity leading to an exalted aim is certainly of a serious nature. Biblical Judaism never views life with disparagement or depression, nor do we find there any traces of weariness with life or a sense of its heaviness. The feeling of the "burden of life" which is such an essential trait in the religion and philosophy of some Aryan peoples such as Hindoos, and even played an important part in some currents of Greek life ¹⁸ is totally strange to Judaism. The pessimistic expressions found in Ecclesiastes are not only few in number, but are not really as pessimistic as some suppose them to be, for they do not negate life proper, but only belittle the striving after imaginary material happiness. But while that Judaism passed over any negative attitude to life in silence, it expressed itself very vehemently against the attitude of light-mindedness toward life, and considered it a great sin. The scorner, or more

¹¹Ps. xxi. 4.

¹²*Ibid.* 118. 17.

¹³*Ibid.*, 115. 16.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 52. 7.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 69. 29.

¹⁶Proverbs, iii. 18.

¹⁷Even the expression Book of Life does not mean a book in the modern sense, but a roll which is constantly being inscribed and unrolled.

¹⁸See Friedrich Nietzsche Die Geburt der Tragédie.

correctly the mocker, (Letz in Hebrew)¹⁹ is pictured in the wisdom books as the symbol of all evil. He is considered beyond redemption and several warnings are given to the preacher not to admonish him.²⁰ Even the fool is preferable to the mocker for he will ultimately learn by chastisement but not the latter. To view life with lightness, to mock at it, this Judaism could not forgive.

Added to the value and earnestness of life, there is also its sanctification. The dictum which is always added to the most important precepts "Ye shall be holy, for I, your God am holy,"²¹ shows distinctly the sense of reverence towards life. Holiness implies not only the raising of the value of life, but also a sense of distinction and separation, which flows out of a clear concept of the worth of personality. A thing which is insignificant has no defined personality, it is only the noble and the exalted which becomes distinct and separated from the environment which surrounds it. The concept of holiness in turn further elevated the value of personality to a still higher degree. Every individual is a personality which occupies a distinct place and it is not to be infringed upon. And hence, we note that the repeated injunctions concerning family morality are prefaced with an admonition regarding holiness, for every infringement upon these laws which leads to promiscuity, violates also the sense of distinction implied in personality. And above the sanctity of the personality of the individual, there stands the sanctity of the life of the group or the nation of Israel. "Ye are a kingdom of priests and a holy people,"²² the Jews were told frequently. These epithets raise not only the nation but the individual Jew. If the individual is a member of a sanctified group his responsibility is only the greater, for by deviating from the mapped road of life, he not only brings injury to himself, but to the group as a whole.

III.

THE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION.

These two outlined views of Biblical Judaism, that of the world and man, and that of life, supply the necessary foundation for the con-

¹⁹The word scorners used by the A. V. and other translators for Letz seems to me incorrect. The root Litz is taken by all grammarians to mean mock, and Gesenius in his dictionary gives for Letz accordingly the German equivalent Spötter.

²⁰See Prov. xix. 25. Where it is said: "Smite the scorner and the simple will beware." The scorner will not heed it for he is beyond redemption, the smiting will only serve as a deterrent for the fool.

²¹Leviticus xvix. 2.

²²Ex. xvix. 6.

struction of a conception of education.

If life is a very serious business, and the more, it is sanctified and exalted, and especially since life according to the Old Testament view is always understood in terms of action, it follows then, that for a life of this kind, man must needs have a strenuous preparation, namely, a long and rigorous education. Education, consequently, occupies a very prominent place in the Old Testament. The difficulty is only that the limits of such education are not defined, and that it embraces all life, both the entire life of the individual as well as that of the nation. The life of man stretches from the day of birth to the day of death, and daily, according to the Old Testament he is to search his way in life. This kind of search is almost the constant occupation of the prophets, poets, and sages of Biblical Judaism. The Prophets, who come always in the name of God, and who are saturated with the spirit find the task easier. They, at times, see the way, and even point it out, in a fiery manner, to others. Yet, at times, even the greatest of them is perplexed. Did not Moses beg of God, "Show me now Thy way."²³ But more difficult was the task for the poets and sages, they are perplexed and plead often, "Mayest Thou show me the path of life," or "Give me understanding that I may live."²⁴ And thus they search all their lives, search and by this trained and educated.

However, we must not construe this search of the way of life as a mere aimless search. On the contrary, the way is more or less clear to the searchers. It is the way of ethics, piety and morality, the general outline of which is repeated many times through the Old Testament. The searchers only ask for help from God, for the way is very difficult. The man who is to follow such a way of life, needs first of all a strong unbending will, which shall help him to overcome all obstacles. Without a strong will, it is impossible to lead a life of strenuous action. The way of life, as defined requires then a strong discipline moulded by fixed law and a definite plan, or as the book of Proverbs expresses it, "The reproofs of instruction is the way of life."²⁵ The word instruction, which in the original is *musar*, and connotes besides instruction also the meaning of morality and discipline in general, is to be understood not in a theoretical sense, namely abstract ethics or instruction in abstract principles, but in a limited sense as practical instruction in life conduct, and at

²³Exod. xxxiii. 13.

²⁴Ps. xvi. 11, 119, 144.

²⁵Prov. vi. 23.

times even reproach and rebuke. The word *Musar*, which is found in the Book of Proverbs alone more than thirty times, implies in its oft-repeated usage an exalted educational thought, namely, that man requires instruction not only in his childhood, but throughout his life, for all life is one constant discipline.

The Old Testament certainly took cognizance of the great struggle in the human soul. Man is not good by nature. On the contrary, "The thought in man's heart is evil from his youth,"²⁶ and it is also said that, "Man is born like a wild ass' colt,"²⁷ yet he has to become good, for that is his aim in life. It is this inner struggle to overcome his natural propensities which raises man to his high plane. Hence, we obtain the educational ideal of the Old Testament which is, the education of the will. To the inculcation of this ideal, the entire Book of Proverbs, large portion of Psalms, and Prophetic writings are devoted. The heart which occupies such a prominent place in the Old Testament is considered not only to be the seat of thought and feeling, but primarily, the seat of the will. Hence, the oft-repeated injunction for the education of the heart. The sage who begins by the call to his disciples, "Hear ye, children, the instruction of a father"²⁸ ends by the emphatic admonition, "Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life."²⁹ namely, the very life of man is dependent on his good will.

But, in addition to the education of the will, there is inculcated in the Old Testament another educational ideal, and that is wisdom, or still better, the acquisition of wisdom. A good will alone is not sufficient, it must needs have knowledge, and without it education is not complete. But what is this wisdom without which man cannot find life? "For whoso findeth me findeth life,"³⁰ declares wisdom herself. This wisdom is of a double nature. First of all, it is the means by which man can know the will of the Creator. And this, according to the conception of the Old Testament is of paramount importance. Since there are only two powers in this world, one independent and one dependent, namely the one God and man, it follows that without the knowledge of God and His will, man cannot realize the purpose of his life. Therefore, the sage repeatedly admonishes his pupil to acquire wisdom and understanding, for

²⁶Gen. viii. 21.

²⁷Job ii. 12

²⁸Prov. iv. 1.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰*Ibid.*, viii. 35.

then he will be able to acquire the fear of the Lord.³¹ This fear of the Lord is not merely the plain truism that there is a God in the world who is all potent and that He is to be feared, for the words contained in the passage cited (Prov. ii. 1-9) "And you will find the knowledge of God" (V. 5) and the very closing words, "Then thou shalt understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path," show that the fear of the Lord implies a much wider meaning, practically a whole ethical program of life.

The second aspect of wisdom is of a much higher nature. It is in a way synonymous with the total intelligence reflected in the great creations of God, namely, the world and life. It sums up all forms of order and harmony seen in nature and life, nay, even more, it is their very source. Does not Wisdom declare "When He prepared the Heavens, I was there, when He set a compass upon the face of the earth—When He gave to the sea His decree that the waters shall not pass His commandment—Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth and my delights were with the sons of men."³² Here is a clear attempt to personify the divine intelligence manifested in the world and life, and name it wisdom. This attempt gave later a great impetus to Philo and his followers to formulate and perfect the Logos theory.

But this higher kind of wisdom is hardly for man to conceive it fully, for as it is said, "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?"³³ It has no special place, for it permeates the world and the inner essence of life. "Only God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof."³⁴ What is left for man is only the wisdom conceivable by him, as it is said, "Behold the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and turning from evil is understanding,"³⁵ namely, practical wisdom leading to the way of life. Hence, the practical character of wisdom which is the great factor in education. This is that wisdom which teaches through pointed sayings, directions in all ways of life, both that of the individual and the nation.

There are many bible scholars who are wont to characterize the Hebrew wisdom as extremely practical and prosaic. In reality, however, there is no intrinsic difference between the practical aspect of wisdom and that kind, of which ethics and the fear of the Lord are its

³¹See Prov. ii. 1-9.

³²Prov. viii. 27-29-31.

³³Joh. xxviii. 12.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

³⁵*Ibid.*, xxviii.

essence. These are two phases of one thing. Both have one purpose, to teach the way and ordering of life in conformity with the higher wisdom which is the universal intelligence. The order of life is after all a reflection of the order and harmony in the world. True wisdom, therefore, will bring to man not only spiritual happiness but material as well, as it includes also the very minutiae of daily life.

This conception of wisdom gives rise to the formation of an ideal type in education, and that is the wise man, or rather to call him by the Biblical name, the *wise son*. It is this son about whom the sage said, "A wise son maketh a glad father. . . ."³⁶ This wise son is not identical with the *homo sapiens*, the ideal type of the Stoics. The wise man of the Stoics has only reason for his guide, and keeps himself aloof from the life which surrounds him even looking down upon it, his morality, which though stern, is not of a social nature but a personal one. The Hebrew wise son is a son of his people, his way of life is the way of social ethics. But above all, his wisdom is not derived from abstract reason, but from the fear of the Lord, which rightly interpreted means a recognition that the world is ordered by a unique being possessing will and purpose.

The wise son, though at times given in the Book of Proverbs the appellation righteous (Heb. Tzadik) is also practical in a considerable measure. He is the same wise son "That gathereth in the summer,"³⁷ and the very same one who remembers that "The hand of the diligent maketh rich."³⁸ But this practicality is not mere petty shrewdness, only one which is a result of an all embracing observation in the ways of life and the world, which recognizes a purpose in life in all its aspects, in its material form as well as in the spiritual and ethical ones. This wise son at times can rise to the height of the righteous (Heb. Tzadik) and the pious, who moves solely in a world of justice, righteousness and the fear of the Lord.

In a way this ideal type symbolizes the character of the Jewish people as a whole which has produced, on the one hand, prophets, saints and martyrs, and on the other hand, keen business men and sharp traders. It reflects the spirit of a people which managed to survive by means of flexibility, at times compromising with life, and at times braving the adverse current and suffering intensely for the sake of its ideals.

³⁶Prov. x. 1.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 4.