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Philip Carrington

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CHAPTER I
TŌRĀH IN ISRAEL

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SUMMARY OF CHAPTER I

Religious instruction among the Jews in New Testament times was oral, traditional, and semi-ritual.

Its subject-matter was *tōrāh* (instruction, discipline, law), *hokmāh* (wisdom), and *halākāh* (walking).

Its ministers (apart from the priestly *tōrāh*) were the fathers or elders; when teachers were evolved, they spoke of themselves as fathers and elders, and professed a genealogical descent (succession). They exercised divine authority.

The principal occasions of instruction were (1) Passover—e.g. Exod. xii–xxiv, *Mekilta*, the Haggadah ritual, etc., (2) Synagogue assembly—e.g. Lev. xviii ff., etc., (3) Rabbinic schools—e.g. Ecclus. i–vii, *Two Ways*, *Aboth*, etc.

These represent the old piety which had no conception of future rewards and punishments, etc. The new piety may be studied in *Testaments*, *Mandata*, etc.

The old piety presupposes a religious-social group set apart and indwelt by a divine presence.

CHAPTER I

TŌRĀH IN ISRAEL

1. The word *tōrāh* in Israel is a correlative of *hokmāh* (wisdom) and means instruction rather than law in the sense in which we understand law. It is connected, not with theological or speculative knowledge, but with behaviour or 'walking'—*halākāh*; the wise man knows how to conduct himself in relation to the Lord, and to the religious-social unit of which he is a member.

2. The body of *tōrāh* exists in a traditional form of which analogous cases may be studied in various primitive communities, such as the Maoris of New Zealand, who handed down a complicated system of myth, history, ritual, and custom, in a purely oral manner, writing being unknown to them.¹ Transcripts of these traditions were made in the nineteenth century, by means of which a reliable history of some seven centuries has been constructed, and an outline which, it is said, may go back more than two thousand years. The first six books of the Old Testament are transcripts of similar traditions, and we ought not to assume that the oral tradition ceased to function when the transcript was made, or even that the written transcript then became primary. The transcript may be regarded as a cross-section of the living tradition at a given time and place. It is necessary to remember these principles also in the study of the New Testament literature.

3. The word 'tradition' is only applicable to a permanent and accepted element within the public life of a community;² and no tradition can be understood without reference to the conditions of life in the community. In primitive conditions of life, the mode of thought in connection with the tradition of wisdom is genealogical. Though from one point of view a

¹ Cf. *The Lore of the Whare Whananga*, T. Percy Smith.

² Even an esoteric tradition can occupy an official position.

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remarkable degree of rigidity and permanence is achieved in the outward form of the tradition, it has to be remembered that it is a living biological phenomenon.

4. In Israel the simplest picture is that of the father handing on to the son the *tōrāh* which he had received from his father.¹ As this *tōrāh* is thought of as ultimately coming from God, it follows that the father has a godlike status in reference to the son, and the honour paid to parents is a form of the honour paid to God.² The fifth commandment belongs to the first table of the law;³ and in other formulae the honour of parents comes next after the fear of the Lord.⁴ This godlike status is extended to the elders of the tribe, who are, of course, the fathers of the tribe.⁵ When a professional class of teachers comes into existence we find them assuming this divine father-son relationship as the basis of their teaching;⁶ and in course of time a genealogical succession of teachers is developed.⁷ Its early stages may be studied in Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus where the pupils do not yet seem to use books; its final development may be seen in the New Testament

1 Prov. i, 1–8, iv, 1–4, etc. Tobit iv is an excellent example of paternal *tōrāh*. The death-bed blessings of Jacob and Tobit are examples of a special form of this *tōrāh*, the ‘testament’. *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* makes use of the same literary form (as it has now become) to provide a paternal *tōrāh* for Israel as a whole.

2 Mal. i, 6 argues from this likeness of status. Cf. Eccus. iii, 1–16. In the Mishnah, Kid. 30*b* says that the honour and fear given to parents is equal to that given to God. Peah 15*d* says, ‘When a man honours his father and mother, the Holy One, blessed be he, says, I ascribe it as though I dwelt with them and was honoured.’

3 The tables are so divided in *Mekilta* and elsewhere. The honour of parents is part of the fear of the Lord. Cf. Pseudo-Phocylides, i, 8: ‘First honour God, and next to that thy parents.’

4 Eph. vi, 2 calls it the ‘first commandment with promise’ (i.e. of long life and of children). In many codes it is the first commandment, following the inculcation of the fear of the Lord or other prefatory matter; note its early position in Ps.-Phoc., Lev. xix, 3, Prov. i, 7, Mal. i, 6, Eccus. iii, 1–16, Tob. iv, 3, etc. In Rom. xiii, 1 ff., I Pet. ii, 17, etc., the words ‘fear’ and ‘honour’ are to be explained from this mode of thought.

5 Lev. xix, 32, etc. See p. 67, n. 3.

6 E.g. ‘Who teaches *tōrāh* to the son of his fellowman, has it ascribed to him as though he had begotten him’ (Sanh. 19*b*).

7 In Prov. iv, 1 ff. and Eccus. iii, 1 this seems to be already the case.

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period (cf. *Pirke Aboth*),¹ where reference is made to the written law which is now studied by the pupils. Ecclesiasticus is a transcript of a fully oral system; *Pirke Aboth* is a transcript of an oral scholasticism, based on scripture, and embodied in a didactic succession.

5. Many phenomena of the New Testament period are best explained by the assumption that elementary education of converts in religious duties was not given from books, but from oral catechisms like those of which we possess transcripts in the *Gnomai*² of Phocylides, the *Two Ways*³ (or *Way of Life*) embodied in *Barnabas* and *Didache*, the *Mandata* of Hermas,⁴ and similar literature. The real repositories of knowledge and wisdom are the 'wise' ('elders' and 'teachers'); where books exist, they are still mere transcripts. It is at once obvious that this conception may be fruitfully applied to the Gospels and Epistles. The Sermon on the Mount is such a transcript of the *tōrāh* of the Lord as it was taught by the elders of the Christian community; it is itself a new form of the oral *tōrāh* of Israel to which, in the Matthaean version, constant reference is made.⁵

1 *Pirke Aboth* contains sayings of Rabbis many of whom are contemporary with the New Testament writers. It is easily accessible in the Hebrew Prayer-Book or Danby's *Mishnah*.

2 It seems impossible to date the *Gnomai*, which is a collection of counsels in morals and religion, written in Greek hexameters, but drawn mostly from Jewish sources. Text in Bergk, *Anthologia Lyrica*.

3 The *Two Ways* was a catechism of the Greek synagogue based on Hebrew sources, and incorporated into two Christian documents called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*. My quotations are from the former (cited as *Didache* or *Did.*) and have the support of the latter unless otherwise stated. It is my opinion that the second 'way' (of death or darkness) is a later addition, and that the catechism was originally merely the *Way of Life*. A shorter form may have been known to the author of the *Apology of Aristides*.

4 The writings of the Roman prophet Hermas were probably composed at intervals between about A.D. 95 and the accession of his brother Pius as bishop of Rome (about 140?). The *Muratorian Fragment* tells us that a compilation of them (*conscriptis*) was made during his episcopate to be read in church. The second part of these writings (*Mandata*, i.e. Commandments) is mainly composed of Jewish catechetical material closely allied to passages in James, Ephesians, and the *Two Ways*.

5 Matt. v, 17 ff., vii, 12.

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6. There were, of course, special circumstances under which *tōrāh* was given; for instruction in the 'fear of the Lord' was a feature of the life of the holy community.

1. *Passover*

7. The paschal meal is the holiest point in family life in Israel, and the occasion on which the father instructs the son in the great *haggādāh* (instruction-narrative) of the Exodus, so that the festival itself may be alluded to as the Haggadah. A study of *Mekilta*¹ suggests that the original narrative of Exod. xii–xxiv had itself an instructional and initiatory character; it was certainly so regarded in the New Testament period. Beginning with the passover ritual² and the blood of the covenant, *Mekilta* develops the thought of Israel turning from idolatry, and, by the Red Sea baptism, becoming the son of God; it stresses the faith of Israel, and the gift of the Holy Spirit through which Israel was enabled to sing the song of triumph;³ it goes on to the appointment of elders, the ten Commandments, and the covenant sacrifice. St Paul, in I and II Corinthians, is clearly working from a midrash of this character.⁴ This *haggādāh*, relating to the initiation of Israel as God's son, is used for instructional purposes at the paschal festival which is also the occasion of the instruction (and initiation?) of the son within the family,⁵ and perhaps

1 *Mekilta* is a 'midrash' to this part of Exodus. It is said to have received its earliest (literary?) form under R. Akiba in the first quarter of the second century A.D. German translation by Windisch and Wunsch.

2 The passover meal re-enacts the Exodus story, which was the moment when Israel turned from idolatry to God, and became his 'son'. The 'blood of the covenant' in which this was done has three major associations which are linked together in *Mekilta*, (a) the escape from Egypt, (b) circumcision, (c) the covenant sacrifice at Sinai; from this usage it passes into the similar Christian tradition, I Cor. xi, 25, etc.

3 Compare with this sequence from *Mekilta* the Christian sequence of faith, baptism, the reception of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of tongues which includes song (I Cor. xiv, 15). *Mekilta*, like St Paul, insists on the faith of Abraham, and, like St James, refers to the offering of Isaac.

4 I Cor. x, etc. Cf. 'Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and were written for our admonition' (x, 11).

5 Exod. xii, 26, xiii, 14.

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also the admission of the *gēr* or stranger into the congregation of Israel.¹ It should be remembered that initiation, instruction, and education are aspects of one process in the primitive culture.

8. We have in the passover a living tradition of great antiquity of which very different cross-sections are preserved in Exod. xii–xxiv, *Mekilta*, *Tractate Pesachim*, and even perhaps in I and II Corinthians which seem to be in parts at least derived from a passover paraenesis.²

2. *The Synagogue*

9. As S. Krauss³ points out, the word '*ēdāh*' means nothing at all but the Israelite community duly gathered under its proper officials, the elders; he follows A. Rosenmann in deriving the historical institution known as a synagogue in New Testament times from the *ma'amad*, or standing congregation of lay Israelites who met in the Hall Gazzit of the temple at Jerusalem in order to take part at the door of the sanctuary in the daily sacrifices.⁴ It is difficult to see how this institution in Jerusalem could have given rise to other synagogues throughout Israel; but if we admit (which he is unwilling to do) that other sanctuaries persisted into a late period, the local synagogues would (on his own hypothesis) be the gathering of the local community at the door of the local sanctuary.⁵ Even when sacrifice was abolished at the local sanctuaries, there would still be many purposes which such sanctuaries would serve;⁶ and if the local community had been in the habit of meeting there, there is no reason to

¹ *Pesachim*, viii, 8 gives an example of this.

² E.g. I Cor. v, 7 f., and xv, 20. The ceremony of the 'firstfruits' occurs in passover week. Parts of I Peter also suggest passover; see p. 28, n. 1.

³ *Synagogale Altertümer*.

⁴ As demanded in Lev. iv, 15.

⁵ I am pleased to see, since writing this, that S. A. Cook in his recent book, *The Old Testament*, p. 148, also suggests that the synagogues represent the old sanctuaries.

⁶ There are traces of their continued use in the Mishnah; e.g. Meg. i, 11 contemplates offering certain types of sacrifice at a high place; Megillah also deals with synagogues.

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suppose they would cease to do so. Such a state of affairs might explain the well-known allusion in Ps. lxxiv, 8. It seems, too, the best way of explaining the actual arrangements of the synagogues, the ritual door, the elders 'with their backs to the sanctuary', and the presence of priests.¹ The synagogue is often called a secondary sanctuary, or simply a sanctuary.

10. Neh. viii and I Esdras ix, 37ff.² give us a picture of a synagogue type of service at the door of the Jerusalem temple; but in earlier times sacred instruction seems to be a function of the priesthood.³ This seems to be the situation presupposed in the Holiness Code (H) of Leviticus,⁴ a code which is compatible with the existence of local sanctuaries. Certain parts of H are addressed to the people as well as to the priesthood, in particular Lev. xix, which is composed in stanzas with the refrain 'I am Yahweh your 'El'. This chapter, which covers most of the duties of religion in gnomic form, is the principal base of many subsequent catechisms,⁵ in particular, of the *Zadokite Fragment*,⁶ of

1 See Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues*.

2 Two versions of the same narrative. Both, no doubt, were intended to supply a pattern for the synagogue service; but in I Esdras the pattern is more completely worked out, and forms the climax of the book.

3 See Mal. ii, 5-7. Malachi has frequent allusions to a code of *tōrah* of a priestly type.

4 The Holiness Code is based on the conception of a holy community (Lev. xix, 2) indwelt by a holy God (xxvi, 11, 12) and characterised by mutual love (xix, 18) and submission to authority (xix, 32).

5 Hertz (*Pentateuch and Haftorahs*) says that it is stated in *Sifra* that Leviticus is the central book of the *tōrah*, and that chapter xix is the central chapter of that book, and therefore of the whole *tōrah*. Of this central chapter, verse 18 (love of one's neighbour) is called by R. Akiba, as well as by St Paul, the completion or summary of the law. According to Lev. R. vii, 3, children began their education with the study of Leviticus. We need not doubt that Leviticus, and especially Chapter xix, was fundamental in Jewish catechesis.

6 The *Zadokite Fragment* is the *tōrah* of a peculiar sect, probably Samaritan, and, according to Charles, of the second century B.C. The Hebrew text is published by Schechter, and affords us a stage in *tōrah* intermediate between the Old and New Testaments. English translation with commentary by R. H. Charles in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*. I fear, however, that Dr Charles' elucidation needs much revision; in

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the *Gnomai*¹ of Phocylides, and even to some extent of the Sermon on the Mount.

3. *The Rabbinic School*

11. The *Wisdom of Ben Sirah* (Ecclesiasticus) provides us with a cross-section of the secular instruction given in the lay schools. It does not touch the specifically priestly *tōrāh* of sacrifice, clean and unclean, etc., though it shows devotion to the levitical system. Its subject is 'fear of the Lord', which signifies, as Hertz points out,² natural piety. The material of Chapters i–vii is used again and again in later writers, especially in the *Two Ways*, the *Mandata* of Hermas, and the Epistle of St James.

12. Each of these three types of tradition demands a peculiar social group within which it functions. The paschal tradition belongs to the family; the levitical tradition belongs to the tribe or holy congregation gathered in the presence of the Lord; the rabbinic tradition belongs to the school. But we must be careful to avoid the conception of a dry or humanistic didacticism; the learner coming to school is 'approaching' the fear of the Lord,³ the teacher is endowed with godlike honour,⁴ and 'wisdom' is itself a grace from God; there is, in

particular the location of the sect in Damascus is an error; the *Fragment* is referring to the captivity of northern Israel 'beyond Damascus' (Amos v, 27: quoted in the *Fragment*), not to anything in its own time.

1 M. Dibelius, in his commentary on James in the Meyer series, has pointed out that Phocylides is a Greek form of Lev. xix. There is, of course, much other material.

2 *Pentateuch and Haftorahs* to Lev. xix, 2; but supernatural piety might be nearer the mark. The old piety of pre-Christian Judaism is love and fear of a *numen praesens*, not dictated ethics.

3 Ecclus. i, 28, ii, 1. In the levitical type of priestly *tōrāh*, the enquirer 'drew near to God' by approaching a sanctuary. The synagogue also was a sanctuary. The rabbinic teachers appear to have attempted to retain this sense of approaching a divine presence. Much apparently 'ethical' *tōrāh* is originally sanctuary *tōrāh*, like Ps. xv.

4 In *Mekilta* to Exod. xvii, 9, Aboth iv, 15, etc., it is said that the 'fear' of the teacher is as the 'fear' of God. The *Two Ways* (Did. iv, 1, but altered in Barn.) says, 'Him who speaketh unto thee the word of God, thou shalt honour as the Lord; for where the lordship is spoken of, there is the Lord.'

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short, an element of real presence.¹ (On this point see W. Lockton, *Divers Orders of Ministers*.)

The New Piety

13. All three types are alike in looking only to this life for rewards and punishments; even the Sermon on the Mount is true to the old piety in this respect. But a new piety had actually arisen, though it had not as yet got possession of the schools, which spoke of destinies beyond the grave, of the Gan Eden and the Ge Hinnom. Whereas the old piety dealt with definite duties towards God and one's neighbour, with some stress on inward disposition (the 'heart'), the new piety dealt with abstract vices and virtues and with self-perfection. The old piety had indeed looked on wisdom as a 'spirit' or *dunamis* from the Lord, but the new refers much more frequently to other spiritual forces within or without the soul, and in particular to a contention between the forces of light and the forces of darkness which, while it occupies the whole universe, yet has its focal point in the soul.

14. The new ideas seem to have some affinity with Persian thought; we may be right in connecting them with Pharisaism; we note that they influence Christian literature in varying degrees, most strongly perhaps in St Paul and Hermas, much less in I Peter and the *Two Ways*. But the best monument of the new piety is the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

¹ Aboth iii, 7, 'When ten people sit together, and occupy themselves with *tōrah*, the *Shekinah* abides among them, etc.'