

## CHAPTER XXXVI

## GOD'S SPIRIT IN MAN

1. Man is placed in an animal world of dull feelings, of blind and crude cravings. Yet his clear understanding, his self-conscious will and his aspirations forward and upward lead him into a higher world where he obtains insight into the order and unity of all things. By the spirit of God he is able to understand material things and grasp them in their relations; thus he can apply all his knowledge and creative imagination to construct a world of ideals. But this world, in all its truth, beauty and goodness, is still limited and finite, a feeble shadow of the infinite world of God. As the Bible says: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inward parts."<sup>1</sup> "It is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty, that giveth them understanding."<sup>2</sup>

2. According to the Biblical conception, the spirit of God endows men with all their differing capacities; it gives to one man wisdom by which he penetrates into the causes of existence and orders facts into a scientific system; to another the seeing eye by which he captures the secret of beauty and creates works of art; and to a third the genius to perceive the ways of God, the laws of virtue, that he may become a teacher of ethical truth. In other words, the spirit of God is "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."<sup>3</sup> It works upon the scientific interest of the in-

<sup>1</sup> Prov. XX, 27.<sup>2</sup> Job XXXII, 8.<sup>3</sup> Isa. XI, 2.

vestigator, the imagination of the artist and poet, the ethical and social sense of the prophet, teacher, statesman, and law-giver. Thus their high and holy vision of the divine is brought home to the people and implanted within them under the inspiration of God. In commenting upon the Biblical verse, "Wisdom and might are His . . . He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding,"<sup>1</sup> the sages wisely remark, "God carefully selects those who possess wisdom for His gift of wisdom." Even as a musical instrument must be attuned for the finer notes that it may have a clear, resonant tone, so the human soul must be made especially susceptible to the gifts of the spirit in order to be capable of unfolding them. Thus the Talmud records an interesting dialogue on this very passage between a Roman matron familiar with the Scripture, and Rabbi Jose ben Halafta. She asked sarcastically, "Would it not have been more generous of your God to have given wisdom to those that are unwise than to those that already possess it?" Thereupon the Jewish master replied, "If you were to lend a precious ornament, would you not lend it to one who was able to make use of it? So God gives the treasure of wisdom to the wise, who know how to appreciate and develop it, not to the unwise, who do not know its value."<sup>2</sup>

3. Thus the diverse gifts of the divine spirit are distributed differently among the various classes and tribes of men, according to their capacity and the corresponding task which is assigned them by Providence. The divine spark is set aglow in each human soul, sometimes feebly, sometimes brightly, but it blazes high only in the privileged personality or group. The mutual relationship between God and man is recognized by the Synagogue in the Eighteen Benedictions, where the

<sup>1</sup> Dan. II, 20-21.<sup>2</sup> Tanh. Miketz 9; comp. Tanh. Yelamdenu Wayakhel, where the story is told differently.

one directly following the three praises of God is devoted to wisdom and knowledge: "Thou favorest man with knowledge, and teachest mortals understanding. So favor us with knowledge, understanding, and discernment from Thee. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, gracious Giver of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> This petition, remarks Jehuda ha Levi,<sup>2</sup> deserves its position as first among these prayers, because wisdom brings us nearer to God. It is also noteworthy that the Synagogue prescribes a special benediction at the sight of a renowned sage, even if he is not a Jew, reading, "Praised be He who has imparted of His wisdom to flesh and blood."<sup>3</sup>

4. Maimonides holds that in the same degree as a man studies the works of God in nature, he will be filled with longing for direct knowledge of God and true love of Him.<sup>4</sup> "Not only religion, but also the sciences emanate from God, both being the outcome of the wisdom which God imparts to all nations," — thus wrote a sixteenth-century rabbi, Loewe ben Bezalel of Prague, known usually as "the eminent Rabbi Loewe."<sup>5</sup> The men of the Talmud also accord the palm in certain types of knowledge to heathen sages, and did not hesitate to ascribe to some heathens the highest knowledge of God in their time.<sup>6</sup> As a mystic of the thirteenth century, Isaac ben Latif, says: "That faith is the most perfect which perceives truth most fully, since God is the source of all truth."<sup>7</sup> Of the two heads of the Babylonian academies, Rab and Samuel, one asserted that Moses through his prophetic genius reached forty-nine of the fifty degrees of the divine understanding (as the fiftieth is reserved for God alone), while the other claimed the same distinction for King Solomon as the result of his wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Singer's *Prayerbook*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Ber. 58 a; Singer's *Prayerb.*, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> *Nethivot Olam*, XIV.

<sup>4</sup> *Shaare Shamayim*, IV, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Cuzari* III, 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Yesode ha Torah*, II, 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Pes.* 94 b.

<sup>8</sup> *R. h. Sh.* 21 b.

5. Thus the spirit of God creates in man both consciously and unconsciously a world of ideas, which proves him a being of a higher order in creation. This impulse may work actively, searching, investigating, and creating, or passively as an instrument of a higher power. At first it is a dim, uncertain groping of the spirit; then the mind acquires greater lucidity by which it illumines the dark world; and, as one question calls for the other and one thought suggests another, the world of ideas opens up as a well-connected whole. Thus man creates by slow steps his languages, the arts and sciences, ethics, law and all the religions with their varying practices and doctrines. At times this spirit bursts forth with greater vehemence in great men, geniuses who lift the race with one stroke to a higher level. Such men may say, in the words of David, the holy singer: "The spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was upon my tongue."<sup>1</sup> They may repeat the experience of Eliphaz the friend of Job:

"Now a word was secretly brought to me,  
And mine ear received a whisper thereof.  
In thoughts from the visions of the night,  
When deep sleep falleth on men,  
Fear came upon me, and trembling,  
And all my bones were made to shake.  
Then a spirit passed before my face,  
That made the hair of my flesh to stand up.  
It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof;  
A form was before mine eyes;  
I heard a still voice."<sup>2</sup>

In such manner men of former ages received a religious revelation, a divine message.

6. The divine spirit always selects as its instruments individuals with special endowments. Still, insight into history shows that these men must needs have grown from the

<sup>1</sup> II Sam. XXIII, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Job IV, 12-16.

very heart of their own people and their own age, in order that they might hold a lofty position among them and command attention for their message. However far the people or the age may be from the man chosen by God, the multitude must feel at least that the divine spirit speaks through him, or works within him. Or, if not his own time, then a later generation must respond to his message, lest it be lost entirely to the world.

The rabbis, who knew nothing of laws of development for the human mind, assumed that the first man, made by God Himself, must have known every branch of knowledge and skill, that the spirit of God must have been most vigorous in him.<sup>1</sup> They therefore believed in a primeval revelation, coeval with the first man. Our age, with its tremendous emphasis on the historical view, sees the divine spirit manifested most clearly in the very development and growth of all life, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual, proceeding steadily toward the highest of all goals. With this emphasis, however, on process, we must lay stress equally on the origin, on the divine impulse or initiative in this historical development, the spirit which gives direction and value to the whole.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. R. XXIV, 7; comp. Jubilees III, 12.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### FREE WILL AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. Judaism has ever emphasized the freedom of the will as one of its chief doctrines. The dignity and greatness of man depends largely upon his freedom, his power of self-determination. He differs from the lower animals in his independence of instinct as the dictator of his actions. He acts from free choice and conscious design, and is able to change his mind at any moment, at any new evidence or even through whim. He is therefore responsible for his every act or omission, even for his every intention. This alone renders him a moral being, a child of God; thus the moral sense rests upon freedom of the will.<sup>1</sup>

2. The idea of moral freedom is expressed as early as the first pages of the Bible, in the words which God spoke to Cain while he was planning the murder of his brother Abel: "Whether or not, thou offerest an acceptable gift," (New Bible translation: "If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up? and if thou doest not well,") "sin coucheth at the door; and unto thee is its desire, but thou mayest rule over it."<sup>2</sup> Here, without any reference to the sin of Adam in the first generation, the man of the second generation is told that he is free to choose between good and evil, that he alone is responsible before God for what he does or omits to do. This certainly indicates that the moral freedom of man is not impaired by hereditary sin, or by any evil power outside

<sup>1</sup> See Dillmann, l. c., 301 f., 375; J. E., art. Freedom of Will.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. IV, 7.

of man himself. This principle is established in the words of Moses spoken in the name of God: "I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed."<sup>1</sup> In like manner Jeremiah proclaims in God's name: "Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death."<sup>2</sup>

3. From these passages and many similar ones the sages derived their oft-repeated idea that man stands ever at the parting of the ways, to choose either the good or the evil path.<sup>3</sup> Thus the words spoken by God to the angels when Adam and Eve were to be expelled from Paradise: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil," are interpreted by R. Akiba: "He was given the choice to go the way of life or the way of death, but he chose the way of death by eating of the forbidden fruit."<sup>4</sup> R. Akiba emphasizes the principle of the freedom of the will again in the terse saying: "All things are foreseen (by God), but free will is granted (to man)."<sup>5</sup>

4. At the first encounter of Judaism with those philosophical schools of Hellas which denied the freedom of the human will, the Jewish teachers insisted strongly on this principle. The first reference is found in Ben Sira, who refutes the arguments of the Determinists that God could make man sin, and then goes on: "God created man at the beginning, endowing him with the power of self-determination, saying to him: If thou but willest, thou canst observe My commandments; to practice faithfulness is a matter of free will. . . . As when fire and water are put before thee, so that thou mayest reach forth thy hand to that which thou desirest, so are life and death placed before man, and whatever he chooses of

<sup>1</sup> Deut. XXX, 15-19.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. XXI, 8.

<sup>3</sup> See Sifre Deut. 53-54; J. E., art. Didache.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. III, 22; Mek. Beshallah 6; Gen. R. XXI, 5; Mid. Teh. Ps. XXXVI, 3; LVIII, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Aboth III, 15, but see Schechter: *Aspects*, 285, note 4.

his own desire will be given to him."<sup>1</sup> The Book of Enoch voices this truth also in the forceful sentences: "Sin has not been sent upon the earth (from above), but men have produced it out of themselves; therefore they who commit sin are condemned."<sup>2</sup> We read similar sentiments in the Psalms of Solomon, a Pharisean work of the first pre-Christian century:<sup>3</sup> "Our actions are the outcome of the free choice and power of our own soul; to practice justice or injustice lies in the work of our own hands."

The Apocalypse of Ezra is especially instructive in the great stress which it lays on freedom, in connection with its chief theme, the sinfulness of the children of Adam. "This is the condition of the contest which man who is born on earth must wage, that, if he be conquered by the evil inclination, he must suffer that of which thou hast spoken (the tortures of hell), but if he be victorious, he shall receive (the reward) which I (the angel) have mentioned. For this is the way whereof Moses spoke when he lived, saying unto the people, 'Choose life, that thou mayest live!' . . . For all who knew Me not in life when they received My benefits, who despised My law when they yet had freedom, and did not heed the door of repentance while it was still open before them, but disregarded it, after death they shall come to know it!"<sup>4</sup>

5. Hellenistic Judaism also, particularly Philo,<sup>5</sup> considered the truly divine in man to be his free will, which distinguishes him from the beast. Yet Hellenistic naturalism could not grasp the fact that man's power to do evil in opposition to God, the Source of the good, is the greatest reminder of his moral responsibility. Josephus likewise mentions frequently as a characteristic teaching of the Pharisees that man's free will

<sup>1</sup> Ben Sira XV, 11-20.

<sup>2</sup> Enoch XCVIII, 4.

<sup>3</sup> IX, 7.

<sup>4</sup> IV Ezra VII, 127-129; IX, 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Quod deus immutabilis, 10, I, 279; Di confusione linguarum, 35, I, 432; Quod deterius potiori insid, 32, I, 214.

determines his acts without any compulsion of destiny.<sup>1</sup> Only we must not accept too easily the words of this Jewish historian, who wrote for his Roman masters and, therefore, represented the Jewish parties as so many philosophical schools after the Greek pattern. The Pharisean doctrine is presented most tersely in the Talmudic maxim: "Everything is in the hands of God except the fear of God."<sup>2</sup> Like the quotation from R. Akiba above, this contains the great truth that man's destiny is determined by Providence, but his character depends upon his own free decision. This idea recurs frequently in such Talmudic sayings as these: "The wicked are in the power of their desires; the righteous have their desires in their own power;"<sup>3</sup> "The eye, the ear, and the nostrils are not in man's power, but the mouth, the hand, and the feet are."<sup>4</sup> That is, the impressions we receive from the world without us come involuntarily, but our acts, our steps, and our words arise from our own volition.

6. A deeper insight into the problem of free will is offered in two other Talmudic sayings; the one is: "Whosoever desires to pollute himself with sin will find all the gates open before him, and whosoever desires to attain the highest purity will find all the forces of goodness ready to help him."<sup>5</sup> The other reads: "It can be proved by the Torah, the Prophets, and the other sacred writings that man is led along the road which he wishes to follow."<sup>6</sup>

As a matter of fact, no person is absolutely free, for innumerable influences affect his decisions, consciously and unconsciously. For this reason many thinkers, both ancient and modern, consider freedom a delusion and hold to deter-

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, J. W., II, 8, 14; Ant. XVIII, 1, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ber. 33 b.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. R. LXVII, 7. Comp. P. R. El. XV.

<sup>4</sup> Tanh. Toledoth, ed. Buber, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Shab. 104 a; Yoma 38 b-39 a; Yer. Kid. I, 67 d.

<sup>6</sup> Mak. 10 b; ref. to Ex. XXI, 12; Num. XXII, 12; Isa. XLVIII, 17; Prov. III, 34.

minism, the doctrine that man acts always under the compulsion of external and internal forces. In opposition to this theory is one incontestable fact, our own inner sense of freedom which tells us at every step that *we* have acted, and at every decision that *we* have decided. Man can maintain his own power of self-determination against all influences from without and within; his will is the final arbiter over every impulse and every pressure. Moreover, as we penetrate more deeply into the working of the mind, we see that a long series of our own voluntary acts has occasioned much that we consider external, that the very pressure of the past on our thoughts, feelings and habits, which leaves so little weight for the decision of the moment, is really only our past will influencing our present will. That is, the will may determine itself, but it does not do so arbitrarily; its action is along the lines of its own character. We have the power to receive the influence of either the noble or the ignoble series of impressions, and thus to yield either to the lofty or the low impulses of the soul.

In this way the rabbis interpret various expressions of Scripture which would seem to limit man's freedom, as where God induces man to good or evil acts, or hardens the heart of Pharaoh so that he will not let the Israelites go, until the plagues had been fulfilled upon him and his people.<sup>1</sup> They understand in such an instance that a man's heart has a prevailing inclination toward right or wrong, the expression of his character, and that God encouraged this inclination along the evil course; thus the freedom of the human will was kept intact.

7. The doctrine of man's free will presents another difficulty from the side of divine omniscience. For if God knows in

<sup>1</sup> Ex. IV, 21; VII, 3, and elsewhere; see the Jewish commentaries to these passages. Comp. Pes. 165 a; Num. R. XV, 16. See Schechter, *Aspects*, 289-292.

advance what is to happen, then man's acts are determined by this very foreknowledge; he is no longer free, and his moral responsibility becomes an idle dream. In order to escape this dilemma, the Mohammedan theologians were compelled to limit either the divine omniscience or human freedom, and most of them resorted to the latter method. It is characteristic of Judaism that its great thinkers, from Saadia to Maimonides and Gersonides,<sup>1</sup> dared not alter the doctrine of man's free will and moral responsibility, but even preferred to limit the divine omniscience. Hisdai Crescas is the only one to restrict human freedom in favor of the foreknowledge of God.<sup>2</sup>

8. The insistence of Judaism on unrestricted freedom of will for each individual entirely excludes hereditary sin. This is shown in the traditional explanation of the verse of the Decalogue: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me."<sup>3</sup> According to the rabbis the words "of them that hate Me" do not refer to the fathers, according to the plain meaning of the passage, but to the children and children's children. These are to be punished only when they hate God and follow the evil example of their fathers.<sup>4</sup> Despite example and hereditary disposition, the descendants of evil-doers can lead a virtuous life, and their punishment comes only when they fail to resist the evil influences of their parental household. To illustrate the Biblical words, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"<sup>5</sup> the rabbis single out Abraham, the son of Terah, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, and Josiah, the son of Manasseh.<sup>6</sup> Man, being made in

<sup>1</sup> Saadia: *Emunoth*, III, 154; IV, 7 f.; Bahya: *Hoboth haleboboth*, III, 8; *Cuzari*, V, 20; *Moreh* I, 23; III, 16; *H. Teshuba*, V; Gersonides: *Milhamoth*, III, 106; Albo: *Ikkarim*, IV, 5-10; see Cassel notes, *Cuzari*, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> *Or Adonai* II, 4; comp. Bloch: *Willensfreiheit des Hisdai Crescas*; Neumark: *Crescas and Spinoza*, Y. B. C. C. A. R. 1908.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. XX, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Job XIV, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Sanh. 27 b.

<sup>6</sup> Pesik. 29 b.

God's image, determines his own character by his own free choice; by his will he can raise or lower himself in the scale of being.

9. The fundamental character of the doctrine of free will for Judaism is shown by Maimonides, who devotes a special chapter of his Code to it,<sup>1</sup> and calls it the pillar of Israel's faith and morality, since through it alone man manifests his god-like sovereignty. For should his freedom be limited by any kind of predestination, he would be deprived of his moral responsibility, which constitutes his real greatness. In endeavoring to reconcile God's omnipotence and omniscience with man's freedom, Maimonides says that God wants man to erect a kingdom of morality without interference from above; moreover, God's knowledge is different in kind from that of man, and thus is not an infringement upon man's freedom, as the human type of knowledge would be. However, Abraham ben David of Posquieres blames Maimonides for proposing questions which he could not answer satisfactorily in the Code, which is intended for non-philosophical readers. The fact is that this is only another of the problems insoluble to human reasoning; the freedom of the will must remain for all time a postulate of moral responsibility, and therefore of religion.

<sup>1</sup> *H. Teshubah*, V.