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**POPULAR JUDAISM AT THE TIME OF THE SECOND TEMPLE
IN THE LIGHT OF SAMARITAN TRADITIONS**

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I wrote to attack a problem which my knowledge has hitherto not received that full attention which its importance deserves, viz.- which were the popular beliefs and popular practices among the Jews, especially in the provinces and in the Diaspora, during the centuries before and after the destruction of the Second Temple?

There are no contemporary sources which could throw light on the religious beliefs and practices of the Jews during that period. The literary tradition of a purely Jewish character starts later, and is embodied in the Aggadic and Halachic works emanating from certain schools. These represent partly the practical and partly the theoretical developments of tradition, and allow only by inference conclusions of the real life led by the people in Jerusalem. Little, if any, of the popular practices outside Jerusalem can be found in these writings. The same holds good for the Apocryphal literature which has been the object of scientific investigation. These writings emanate also mostly from Scribes; their authors are learned men; they live mostly, if not exclusively, in Jerusalem. Their thoughts, conceptions, and ideas centre round the Temple and its worship, and no notion is taken except in a few stray allusions of the practices followed by the people at large, and by those who lived far away from Jerusalem. Each one tries to confound his neighbour and to uphold strenuously one special view. He may be the exponent of a school of thought or of a political religious faction. But these were not the views of the general public, of the mass of the nation, who took very little interest in the party fights going on between the various sects inside Jerusalem. This explains why there seems to be such a profound gap between the beliefs and notions contained in the Apocryphal writings and the Bible, Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Many beliefs and practices in the latter appear, therefore, somewhat strange, and attempts have been made for a long time to find their origin and explanations in extraneous sources and extraneous influences. One source of information has hitherto, however, been somewhat neglected. I am alluding to the Samaritans.

Without expecting too much- for we are standing practically at the beginning of such investigations- I may say that some valuable information could be gleaned from the traditions and religious beliefs and practices of the Samaritans. First, of course, it will have to be determined whether these traditions and ideas which are found in their writings and prayers and in their daily religious practices are of a purely Jewish and pre-Christian origin, or whether the Samaritans have adopted, in addition to the Jewish tenets, also Christian and Mohammedan practices. Most of the scholars who have studied the Samaritan literature have limited their investigations almost exclusively to their Liturgy, and have accepted almost as a dogma the view that the Samaritans owe many of their ideas and beliefs to every possible source: they are said to be indebted not only to Rabbinical late Judaism, to Karaites and the heathen inhabitants of the Hauran, but also to Christianity, and most extensively to Arabic teachings and examples. They are not credited with having retained or possessed anything of their own. But I have failed hitherto to find the slightest proof for these assertions. It is much more natural to assume that they have shown the same tenacity in retaining these ancient practices and beliefs which they held long before the rise of Christianity, instead of believing that they have been constantly changing at every turn in their history. If it can be shown that Islam had no effect upon their religion, and a very slight one, if any, upon their religious rites, we would feel perfectly justified in believing that they have kept themselves also independent of other influences. For the last twelve hundred years they have stood under the exclusive influence and dominion of the Mohammedan rulers, and have lived under comparative tolerance; and yet, although they had adopted the Arabic language and had almost forgotten their own Samaritan and Hebrew language, still not a trace of Mohammedan influences can be shown in their Liturgy, in its system, order, and recital. I must guard against a commonly fallacy which considers everything written in the Arabic language or

found in Mohammedan writings as if it were of Mohammedan origin. The Arabs borrowed at the beginning wholesale from Jew and Christian alike, and much that is treated now as Mohammedan may, and often is, of a different origin altogether. It is time that a 'Caveat' be uttered. The relation between Samaritan and Christians was, on the contrary, of a short duration and marked by terrible persecutions on the part of the Christians, by a far bitter feud between them than between the Samaritans and Jews. Under such circumstances, it is not likely that the Samaritans should have adopted anything from the Christians. Their literature is anything but comprehensive. They have the Law, and not even the Prophets, but some Apocrypha. They have a primitive set of prayers- enlarged later on by a few hymns- and ample Lessons from the Law. They have one attempt at codification of the Law, made in the tenth or eleventh century, a few polemical writings and a chronicle copied out by every subsequent writer, and going, therefore, under different names, and finally a mystical cabbalistic magical literature, of which nothing had been known hitherto. I have been fortunate enough to secure, through the munificence of my friend Mr. S.I Cohen, of Manchester, the chief monument of that literature, the famous Samaritan mystical 'Shem-hamitfaresh,' corresponding to the Jewish 'Shem-ha-meforash,' the Ineffable Name of God, the value and importance of which for the history of Cabbalah cannot be overrated. I am exhibiting it here, and I may say that, as far I am aware, it is the first time for centuries that it has been shown in public or seen outside Nablus. Another abbreviated copy bears the date 1342. Markah, of the fourth century, knows already an elaborate system of mystical cabbalistic teaching among the Samaritans, and uses it, and Simon Magus carries us back to the first century.

The Samaritans thus represent at least one phase of the popular beliefs and traditions current among the Jews of that period. They claimed, in fact, to be the true Jews, and did not differ from the rest by any of their religious practices.

The only point of contention was that they claimed for Sichem and Mount Garizim to be the chosen spot for the worship of God, preordained since Creation, and explicitly stated in the Pentateuch, and not Jerusalem or Mount Zion. But otherwise they must have shared with the rest of the Jews in what was known at the time as Judaism. They followed the popular Judaism of the provinces and of the lower classes, of the tillers of the ground from Galilee, and of the fishermen on the Lake of Tiberias down to the gates of Jerusalem. Of course, great caution is required in sifting Samaritan traditions, but whatever recurs as a permanent factor in their religious belief and practices and shows strong similarity to Jewish notions and to primitive Christianity could be safely considered as a true element in helping to elucidate some of the problems of the religious life of that time.

Let me limit to two or three points. What was the position of the Cohen outside the Temple? We he, then, a layman pure and simple, or was he entrusted with some duties of a religious character outside those distantly laid down in the Pentateuch? It seems that with the destruction of the Temple every privilege attached to the 'Cohen' had disappeared, and the fight between the two sections, the Pharisees and Sadducees, seems to have resulted in the elimination of the Cohen from practical life. Did he, then, exercise any spiritual function? Was he a 'minister' in the way in which the priest has been considered in the Temple. What part did he take in the religious life of the people in the provinces? The origin of the Presbyter (or Diaconus) and the part he took in the services seems to be still somewhat obscure. But if we find that the Cohen has exercised exactly the same 'priestly' functions, and does still exercise them among the Samaritans, it might be inferred that he was the 'priest' to the Jews in the provinces and in the Diaspora. The Presbyter or priest has taken the place of the 'Cohen' and then of the 'Zaken,' Elder, in the new order of things. What is considered Sacrament in the Church, such as birth, initiation, marriage, last blessing of the dying, etc., we find to be still the exclusive function of the Cohen among the Samaritans.

Take another point. What was the old form of worship outside Jerusalem? The Papyri of Elephantine throw some light on the subject. The Jews used to have an 'altar,' not for sacrifices, but for burning incense and reciting prayers. Did this custom prevail in the provinces and in the Diaspora? We know of the Synagogue that it was the place of assembly, where the Law was read. Jesus and the Apostles were called upon to read their portion and to expound it. But what else was done, and what was the conception of the Synagogue in relation to the temple? We find, then, among the Samaritans again the 'altar' as an essential feature of the worship, the prayer as 'the sacrifice,' a certain primitive form of creed, the recital of verses from the first chapter of Genesis, then culled from the rest of the Law and whole sections of the Bible, the priest as the appointed reader, the people merely joining in the responses, the whole service reminding one very strongly of the ancient description of the Liturgy of the Church.

Turing to another set of ideas- the all-absorbing topic of the Messiah, St. John calling people to 'return' and baptismal purification as the preliminary condition for the 'kingdom of heaven,' the preordination of the Messiah, his existence before the world, the evolution of events so arranged as to prepare for his advent, the transfiguration on the mount between Elijah and Moses- for all of these topics we find very close parallels in the Samaritans teaching of Fanuta and the Taieb, the Restorer through repentance, the history of Moses, his pre-ordination, and the evolution of things so arranged as to coincide with his appearance as the Saviour of the world. Everything depended on that final event, on his transfiguration, and now on his expected return.

Some of the points raised, notably those bearing on the elevation of Moses to the position of Saviour and Mediator, have already been noticed and discussed by Samaritan scholars. But they have drawn their information indiscriminately and exclusively from some liturgical pieces belonging to widely different periods-fourth, eleventh, and fifteenth centuries- and then these parallels were looked upon as proofs of Christian influences. My desire is to invite rather the study of the whole range of Samaritan literature, of their legal and ritual practices and religious beliefs as found in their books of laws and rubrics of their prayer-books; a more comprehensive and independent study of the oldest fragments of their literature and a recognition of the fact therein may be found a new source of information about that popular Judaism which was the religion of the masses in the outlying districts of Palestine, traces of which have hitherto been found only in some of the Apocrypha of the Old and New Testament, in Rabbinical literature and in the New Testament.