

SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLE:

“DID YOU EVER SEE A LION WORKING AS A PORTER?”

by

Prof. David Flusser*

A question that continually recurs in research on early Judaism is that of the influence of Greek culture on the various trends in Judaism. Even in the Greek Diaspora, where such influence was doubtless strongest, there is no unanimous opinion, as is shown by the many studies on Philo – to give only one example. The question is even harder to answer with reference to the Rabbis, whose world of thought evolved through an internal tradition. The influence would have been continuous, and Greek culture would not have met with utter detachment on the part of the Rabbis. The continuous contact between the two cultures would rather have prepared the ground for reception of individual motives from the Greek world into the thought of Israel, as the following example may show.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:25-34, Lk. 12:22-31) Jesus condemns as lack of faith man's anxiety about his means of subsistence. He illustrates this with three conclusions from minor to major (*Kal wa-Chomer*): body and soul are more than food and clothing; man is more than the ravens, which neither sow nor reap; he is more than the lilies of the field. This view, which is by no means an Utopian one, is also to be found among the Rabbis and reflects the attitude of early Judaism. In an exegesis of Ex. 16:4 in *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ismael*¹ he who has something to eat and asks what he will eat tomorrow is condemned for his lack of faith. Jesus, who certainly knew an early form of the Midrash to Ex. 16:4 – the manna was always intended for one day's supply – goes even beyond the attitude of the Rabbis. He requires not only that we should not worry about the next day, but also that we should pray only for food for today (Mt. 6:11).

This attitude of Jesus towards worry about subsistence was also widespread among the Greek philosophers, above all among the Cynics, who required, in connection with a natural life, the abandonment of worry about livelihood. But it does not follow from this parallelism that there was any

* Hebrew title: **הראית בימך ארי סבל** in: *The Bible and Jewish History*; studies in the Bible and the Literature of the Second Temple Period, dedicated to the memory of Jacob Liver, Tel Aviv, 1972, pp. 330-340. (Hebrew title of the volume: **המקרא ותולדות (ישראל): מחקרים במקרא ובספרות ימי בית שני לזכרו של יעקב ליבר**). For the review of the whole volume see *Immanuel* 2, Spring 1973, pp. 13-17.

¹ *Beshallah dewayyassa* p. 2, Horovitz-Rabin S. 161 cf *b Sota* 48b.

influence from the Greeks on the words of Jesus and on Judaism, for the tendency to remove oneself from everyday cares and to concern oneself with higher values is to be found in several societies and religions. The question of whether the study of the Torah or the practice of it is to be valued more highly was eventually decided in Judaism in favour of the former, but study leads to practice. When the same problem of the value of study is raised by both the Rabbis and the Greeks, it would be very strange if there were no influence at all from Greek philosophy on the Jewish discussion. And indeed in *Avot* 3:5 we find reflected the Greek view that he who concerns himself with the theory is freed from the responsibilities of the political life of society.

In the exegesis of Ex. 16:4 (see above) there is also found a change which goes back to this question: while the requirement not to worry about subsistence originally applied to all Israel, since the time of Yavneh it was limited to the rabbis. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos considers that he who begins to study Torah does not know what he will have to eat or drink: "The study of the Torah is given only to the eaters of manna", while Rabbi Yehoshua considers that one should learn two *halakhot* each morning and evening, and during the day do one's work. There was an early version of this Midrash – "The Torah is given only to the eaters of manna" – as is shown by the attitude of Philo,² and Jesus³.

In connection with Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, a passage from Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar⁴ is constantly cited: "Did you ever see a lion working as a porter, a gazelle as a drier of figs, a fox as a shopkeeper, or a wolf picking dates? A conclusion from minor to major is here implied. When these, which were not created to serve their Creator, can feed themselves without suffering, would it not be right that my livelihood should be free from suffering, for I was created to serve my Creator. Who caused me to earn my livelihood with suffering? You must say then: as I corrupted my works, so I ruined my livelihood".

Like Jesus, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar also uses a conclusion from minor to major. Jesus determines that the difference between man and the creatures of nature consists in the fact that the latter do not labour and nevertheless God takes care of them, whereas man errs when he takes care of his livelihood. In the opinion of R. Shimon ben Elazar, the difference between animals and man is that the animals, who are not created to serve

² Leg. Alleg. III 162 sqq.

³ In the opinion of Prof. E. E. Urbach, the attitude of Jesus as compared to the Rabbis meant a radicalisation, for R. Eliezer spoke only of him who had something to eat. Also there is in his opinion no reason not to assume that the Midrash, "The study of the Torah is given only to the eaters of manna", is original.

⁴ m *Kiddushin* 4, 14 according to Kaufmann's MS.

their Creator, support themselves without suffering, whereas man, who is created to serve his Creator, usually supports himself with suffering, and the reason for this is sin. In contrast to the more extreme attitude of Jesus, he sees in supporting oneself, and in its pre-requisite, labour, something basically positive. When man can learn from the animals, this is only possible because of sin, because of the corruption of his nature,⁵ for man is higher than the animals.

Kelsos, in the manner of the Cynics and Stoics, who use examples from the animal world to criticise society, opposes the anthropocentric conception of Jews and Christians, that the world was created for men, and argues that the world was created in an even greater measure for the animals since they, in contrast to man, feed themselves without worry and without toil.⁶ Even if this contrast drawn by Kelsos reminds us of the words of Jesus and R. Shimon ben Elazar, it does not necessarily follow that there was Greek influence in the Sermon on the Mount.

On the other hand, on the basis of another text, a connection can be shown between R. Shimon ben Elazar and Greek thought. In the seventh and ninth letters of Heraclitus, which were written in the middle of the second century, in the time of R. Shimon ben Elazar, and reflect Cynic and Stoic philosophy, it is shown, in a passage containing sharp social criticism that at some points animals are superior to men in their behaviour. Above all, a passage from the seventh letter⁷ which opposes man's worry about his livelihood, is similar in form and content to the declaration of R. Shimon ben Elazar. It is to be assumed that he was familiar with such examples as were used in the letters of Heraclitus, and began his midrash with one of them. It is possible that he learnt from Greek wisdom that man's subsistence, unlike that of the beasts, is inseparable from worry and toil, but he could also have known this from Jewish tradition.

The example of R. Shimon ben Elazar showed that an internal development in Judaism was preparing the ground for the influence of Greek wisdom. For this reason it can be understood that it is difficult to find a Greek influence which basically altered the expressions of Judaism at this time; this influence tended to take the form of enabling the Rabbis to understand their own problems more clearly with the help of the Greeks. In case of identical solutions of these problems some elements of the Greek answer penetrated into Judaism.

As far as the declaration of R. Shimon ben Elazar is concerned, on the one hand it is parallel in form and content to Greek wisdom; therefore,

⁵ cf. *Sifrei* on Deut. 32:1 Piska 206, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar is the name of R. Meir.

⁶ *Origenes contra Celsum* IV 74-99, in Marcel Borret (ed.) *Sources Chretiennes* 11 (1968) pp. 366-435.

⁷ Ps. Heracl. VII Papyrus col 13, 37-46, in *Museum Helveticum* 16 fasc. 2 (1959).

unlike in the case of the words of Jesus, Greek thought can be assumed. On the other hand, he stands in the line of Jewish tradition in stating that essentially man does not need to worry about his subsistence. Again he explains the contradiction to this in real life with a deeply Jewish attitude: "Because I corrupted my works, I ruined my livelihood".

In a postscript, Professor Flusser points to a parallelism between the Stoics and Cynics and present-day behavioural research, particularly in relation to its deductions drawn from the behaviour of animals and applied to that of men.

Summary by Gottfried Reeg

Professor David Flusser is Professor of Judaism of the Second Temple period and early Christianity at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.