

"THE KISS OF PEACE AMONG THE BENE-ISRAELS OF BOMBAY AND THE HAMAZOR AMONG THE PARSEES."*

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Rev. J. Henry Lord has recently published a small interesting book, entitled "The Jews in India and the Far East," and has kindly presented a copy of it to our Society. In the first chapter of that book, the author describes "Certain religious observances in vogue amongst the Bene-Israel, not in common use amongst Jews elsewhere." The object of this paper is to compare one of these religious observances with a similar religious observance of the Parsees.

The religious observance, which I wish to compare in this paper, is that known as "The Kiss of Peace" amongst the Bene-Israel. Rev. Lord says of this custom, that it "is evidently so much one with the Kiss of Peace known amongst the early Christians, that one cannot but suppose that there is some community of origin between the two, could it be exactly traced. It is, of course, not difficult to believe in the possibility of the practice having been handed down amongst the Bene-Israel, and having been without break used by them on occasions of their meeting together at circumcisions, and for such other communal meetings as they may have kept up amongst themselves from the first. It is performed as follows:—Emanating from the chief minister, who bestows it on the elders nearest to him, it passes throughout the congregation. Each individual seeks it, as far as possible, from his senior or superior. Extending the arms with the hands flattened out, and in the position of the thumbs being uppermost, the person approached takes the hand between both of his own, similarly

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held, and the junior then probably places his remaining hand on the outside of one of those of the person already holding his other hand. The hands of each are then simultaneously released, and each one immediately passes the tips of his fingers which have touched those of his neighbour to his mouth, and kisses them. He then passes on to receive the same from, or to bestow the same on, another; and so on, till all in the Synagogue have saluted one another. Two or three minutes may be occupied in the process. A movement is going on all through the Synagogue, and a distinctly audible sound of the lips is heard through the building, till all is finished."

Then on the subject of the prevalence of this custom, Rev. Lord says:—

"This custom prevails among the Jews of Cochin as well as amongst the Bene-Israel of Bombay. As regards Christians the practice is not as yet extinct. The Syrian Christians in Malabar regularly use it, and it may be a further evidence of the intimate connection which we shall endeavour to show as likely to have existed between the Jews of India and Persia, especially those formerly of Kurdistan, that amongst the Nestorian Christians of Kurdistan, the practice is in vogue to-day also. The clergy of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission to the Assyrian Christians describe the kiss of peace as prevailing (*mutatis mutandis*) almost exactly as amongst the Bene-Israel. The Rev. T. Whitehouse, in a paper contributed to *Evening Hours* in 1873, describes the custom as practised in the White Jews' Synagogue in Cochin and amongst the Syrian Christians of St. Thomas there" (pp. 30-31).

As to the custom observed by the Assyrian Christians, Rev. Lord quotes Messrs. Maclean and Browne's book, "The Catholics of the East and His People" (p. 255) as follows: "One (deacon) goes to the Bema* and says a litany; another

* A kind of pulpit, a chancel.

gives the kiss of peace to the people, somewhat as at the daily services except that the celebrant first kisses the altar and the deacon takes his hand between his own and kisses them, and then goes to the sanctuary door and gives the peace to the person of highest rank, and then to the next, and so on". (p. 31 n).

Now I will describe here the process of the religious custom of Hamâzôr which is observed by the Parsees even now, and which, I think, is well nigh the same as the Kiss of Peace of the Bene-Israel of Bombay, the Jews of Cochin and the Syrian Christians.

It is an elder who generally begins the ceremony. Suppose there are two persons, A the senior or elder, and B the junior or younger. A holds forth both his hands flattened out, the tips of the fingers pointed to B. Then B, with whom he makes the Hamâzôr, similarly holds out his hands, placing his flattened right hand between A's flattened hands. This process places the flattened right hand of A in its turn between B's flattened hands. Thus, each holds the right hand of another in the folds of his hands. Having thus placed their hands in each other's grasp or fold, with a graceful gentle movement they withdraw their right hands, and similarly pass their left hands in the folds of the hands of each other. They then loosen the hands, and lift them to their heads so as to touch their heads with the tips of their fingers. They slightly nod their heads at the same time as a gentle salutation. This graceful movement of hands and salutation is called Hamâzôr. The whole process is spoken of as "Hamâzôr karvi" or as "Hamâzôr levi," i. e., "to do the Hamâzôr" or "to take the Hamâzôr."

The following are the ceremonies and the prayers, at the end of which the Hamâzôr is always performed by the officiating priest:—

1. The Yaçna or the Yazashna.
2. The Vendidad.

3. The Visparad.
4. The Âfringân.
5. The recital of the Nyâishes jointly by a number of persons forming a congregation.

During the first three ceremonies, it is the two officiating priests who perform the Hamâzôr. In the case of the Vendidâd when it is recited for the Nirangdin ceremony, the second priest, *i.e.*, the Râspi or the Âtravakhshi, at the conclusion of the ceremony, performs the Hamâzôr with other priests and laymen assembled to witness the ceremony.

In the case of the Âfringân ceremony, the two officiating priests, the Zoti and the Âtravakhshi, perform the Hamâzôr at the end of each *kardê*, or section of the Âfringân. If a congregation has assembled, at the end of the whole ceremony, the Âtravakhshi goes round amongst the assembly and performs the Hamâzôr, as described above, with all. This custom of performing the Hamâzôr with all members of the congregation is getting a little out of practice from the Parsees of Bombay, but it is generally observed at Naosari and at some other Parsee towns of Gujarat. Even up to two or three years ago, in the principal Fire-temples, like the Wadia Fire-temple, all the laymen used to sit down on the same carpet on which the priests performed the Jashan ceremony, but now they are made to occupy chairs. Such changes have led and lead to a general non-observance of the Hamâzôr custom by the whole congregation as a body.

Now, it is at the recital of the Nyâishes in a congregation that one sees the Hamâzôr with many points of similarity with the Kiss of Peace of the Jews. For example, the Oothumnâ ceremony on the third day after one's death presents such an occasion. In such religious or ceremonial gatherings, people generally take their seats or stand according to their seniority of age or position. The senior or head-priest takes his stand in the middle and in the front line. At the end of the recital of the Nyâishes, and of the Doâ nâm Setâyashna, which

always follows it, the senior priest begins the Hamâzôr, commencing with the next senior priest standing by his side. He continues that with several more next to him. Those next to him continue in their turns with those next to them, and so on; thus the whole assembly performs the Hamâzôr, each member observing it with the few next to him. From this description, we see that the Hamâzôr of the Parsees resembles the Kiss of Peace of the Bene-Israel of Bombay and the Jews of Cochin.

The principal points of similarity are the following:—

- (a) The movements or the passing of hands is similar in both.
- (b) In both they emanate from, or begin with, the chief minister.
- (c) In both, each person makes it with, or bestows it upon, the elders nearest to him.
- (d) In both, it passes throughout the whole congregation.

The only point of difference is this, that while, among the Bene-Israel, the process ends with a kissing of the tips of fingers of the hands, among the Parsees, it ends with the lifting of the tips of the fingers of the hands to the forehead and with a gentle bow.

Now, what is this Hamâzôr. What is the meaning of the word? What does the custom signify or symbolize?

The word Hamâ, in the Hamâzôr is Avesta *hama*, Sanskrit *sam*, Lat. *similis*, English *same*. The word zôr is Avesta *Zaothra* and comes from the root 'zur' to perform a ceremony. So, the word Hamâzôr means "to be the same or to be one in ceremony." One of the principal celebrants or participants in the ceremony, by passing his hands in the hands of others, makes them symbolically participate in the ceremony⁹ he had performed. The members of the congregation, by performing the Hamâzôr with one of the principal celebrants, make themselves participants in the ceremony.

While performing the Hamâzôr, they recite the words "Hamâzôr, Hamâ ashô bed," *i.e.*, "May you be one with us in the ceremony, may you be *ashô* or righteous." The recital of the words signify and emphasize the object and aim of the performance of the Hamâzôr ceremony. The ultimate aim of all ceremonies, rites and sacrifices, is to elevate the mind and thoughts of the performers of the ceremony or of the worshippers. A sacrifice does not fulfil its object, unless it makes the participant "sacred," unless it elevates his thoughts, unless it makes him a better man. So the celebrants or the participants in the ceremony, by performing the Hamâzôr and uttering the above benediction, wish each other to be *ashô* or righteous.

From the fact that the Hamâzôr was performed in the Liturgical services, with a view to signify participation and unity, and with a wish that the person with whom it was performed may be righteous, the Hamâzôr has come to signify a religious or solemn way of communicating one another's good wishes on the Naoroz or the New Year's Day. It is in connection with the New Year's Day that the Hamâzôr is best known to the laymen. Early in the morning of that day, after washing themselves and putting on new suits of clothes, members of the family exchange this form of salutation and expression of good wishes. Friends do the same when they meet one another. Members of a family, or friends, if at variance, are expected to forget, on the New Year's Day, their differences, and to unite and be friendly by performing the Hamâzôr with one another.

A generation or two ago, it was a custom for the head of a main family, *i.e.*, the senior or older member representing the chief block from which several families had descended, to call a *mijlas* or a gathering at his place in the morning of the New Year's Day for the purpose of the Hamâzôr. All the members of the family met there and exchanged this form of salutation.

We see, from what is said above, that behind the exoteric or outward passing of hands in the Hamâzôr, signifying unity

and harmony, there lies the esoteric idea which demands that the participant must unite in the work of righteousness. Thus, behind what we may call "physical Hamâzôr," there is, what we may term, the "spiritual Hamâzôr." The participants in the ceremony are asked to be one with the chief celebrants in some religious acts which may lead to an increase of righteousness in the world.

From that view of the question, we find that, there is not only the idea of the Hamâzôr—the physical Hamâzôr—between Man and Man, but there is also a kind of Hamâzôr—a spiritual Hamâzôr—between Man and Nature, between Man and Nature's God. The Pâzend Âfrins recited in the Âfringân ceremonies, at the end of which the Hamâzôr is performed, are replete with expressions about this kind of Hamâzôr with Nature and Nature's God. For example, in the Âfrin of Ardâfrosh, there is a long list of such spiritual Hamâzôrs—Hamâzôr with Ahura Mazda and Hamâzôr with many abstract ideas—all leading to the conception of a righteous, moral life. The lesson, which this part of the Âfrins inculcates, is this: one must try to be one with the Harmony, Order, System, established by God in Nature. The divisions of time and space in the grand Infinity of Time and Space—divisions brought about by the movements of heavenly bodies—are all intended with a view to Harmony, Order, System. So let Man try to be one with that Harmony, that Order, that System in Nature.

Rev. Lord considers the custom of the Kiss of Peace among the Bene-Israel, to be one, not in common use amongst Jews elsewhere. The custom prevails among the Jews of Cochin, and also among the Syrian Christians in Malabar. The question then is: "If it is not an old Hebrew custom, whence did it come to them?"

Rev. Lord, while speaking of some of the legends of the Bene-Israel, gives their tradition, which says, that some 1,600 years ago, they came to India from some northern parts. Most

of them were ship-wrecked. Mr. Haim Samuel Kehimkar compares, as pointed out by Rev. Lord, this tradition of their ship-wreck, etc., with a similar tradition about the Chitpavan Brahmans and "raises the enquiry whether the Chitpavan Brahmans, to whom such curious legends attach, and whose countenances differentiate them from Indians generally, may not have been of one common stock with the Bene-Israel." Rev. Lord himself suggests the theory that the Bene-Israel may have come to India from Egypt or the Persian Gulf with which India had a good deal of commerce. He points to Chaul or Revdândâ as the place where they may have landed at first. Chaul is situated at about 10 miles from "the village of Nawgaon, which the Bene-Israel claim as the spot of their first landing and abode in India" (p. 13).

I beg to submit that, if Chaul be the place of the first landing and abode of the Bene-Israel, as suggested by their tradition, and if, as pointed out by Rev. Lord, the Persian Gulf was the place whence they came here, we can say in reply to the above question, that the custom of the Kiss of Peace, which is not observed amongst the Jews elsewhere, came amongst the Bene-Israel of Bombay from ancient Persia, where it had its parallel in the Hamâzôr of the Zoroastrians.

Again, it must be borne in mind, that one of the Arab writers, who write about Chaul, and say that it was at one time inhabited, among others, by the Jews, says, that it had amongst its inhabitants, the fire-worshippers, *i.e.*, the Parsees also. According to Zakariya-al-Kazwini, Chaul was inhabited by the Parsees in the 13th century. So, it is possible, that the Jews or Bene-Israel of Chaul and the adjoining districts had taken the custom of the Kiss of Peace, if not direct from their Zoroastrian countrymen of Persia, from their Zoroastrian co-citizens of Chaul. Zakariya says that the Parsees had even their Fire-temples there. I had the pleasure of visiting the town of Chaul (Revdândâ) in November 1904,

to find, if there was any vestige of the Parsee population there, but I found none.

Again, Rev. Lord says, that the custom, though not a general Jewish custom, prevails amongst the Jews of Cochin and also among the Syrian Christians of Malabar. He thinks that it came to them from Persia, with which that part of India had commercial relations. The custom is still prevalent among the Christians of Kurdistan. So, probably, it came to the Jews and the Christians of Malabar from the Jews and Christians of Persia, who must have taken it from the custom of the Hamâzôr among the Zoroastrians of Persia.

We have further evidence of the commercial relations formerly subsisting between India and Persia in the fact, that some Pahlavi inscriptions have been found in Southern India. These inscriptions which are now in Christian churches have been connected with Persian Christians.

In the church, known as Mount Church or St. Thomas's Mount, near Madras, there is a Pahlavi inscription on a stone slab having the Christian Cross over it. The inscription is in the form of an arch round about the Cross. There are two similar stones with Pahlavi inscriptions in the Valiyapalli Church at Kottayam in the district of Travancore.

It is said, that in 1547, while the Portuguese were digging the foundation for a church in a place on St. Thomas's Mount, in the midst of some old ruins of the Christians, they came across the above stone. When they finished the church, they built up, in its altar, the stone with the Cross and the Pahlavi inscription. It is about 4 feet in height and 3 feet in width. A translation of the inscription was attempted at first by Drs. Haugh and West, when Dr. Burnell first brought the inscription into public notice, but it was in 1896, that the late Dr. West gave a better translation of it.

The text and translation, as given by Dr. West, run thus :¹

Text.

1. Mân ham-ich Meshikha-i avakhshây-i madam-afrâs-ich khâr bâkhto
2. Sûr zây mân bun dardo denâ

Translation.

“(He) whom the suffering of the selfsame Messiah, the forgiving and upraising (has) saved, (is) offering the plea whose origin (was) the agony of this.”

The inscription bears no date, but by comparing the character of its writings with that of the Pahlavi inscription of the 11th century in the Kennery Caves in our neighbourhood, and with that of some copperplates, Dr. West thought that the Mount Church inscriptions were of the 11th century.

Now, how did the inscriptions in the Pahlavi language of the Parsis come to the South of India, and that, with the Christian Cross over them and in Christian quarters? Dr. Burnell thus explains the matter: Christianity had made great strides in Persia in the time of Shapur I, so much so, that some writers suspected, that the king personally was inclined towards Christianity,—a suspicion not well founded, because the Dinkard speaks of Shapur, as one who took an active part in the Renaissance of Iranian literature and religion. It was in his reign, that Mani, the founder of Manichæism, flourished in Persia. He had founded a hybrid religion, the elements of which he had taken both from Zoroastrianism and Christianity. His religion was neither Zoroastrian nor Christian. So, he and his followers were hated both by Christians and Zoroastrians. Though he flourished in the reign of Shapur, he could not spread his doctrines in Persia itself in the time of Shapur. His influence increased a little in the reign of Hormaz, but Behram, the successor of Hormaz, put him to death in 277 A.D. He put to death also his so-called 12 apostles and bishops. Hundreds and thousands of his followers, among whom there was a large number of Christians, were compelled to leave Persia. Many of these fugitives, it is believed, came

¹ *Epigraphica Indica*, June 1869, pp. 175 76.

to India. So, the Pahlavi inscriptions with Christian devices, found in the South of India, belonged to the Persian Christians. The first Christians, who came to India from the West, are believed to be the believers of Manichæism. Some say, that Mani himself, when expelled for some time from Persia by Shapur, had come to India. He was an excellent painter, and he said to the ignorant and to the superstitious, that it were the angels who helped him in drawing his beautiful pictures.

Among the books attributed to him, one was called "A Greater Epistle to the Indians."¹ It is on the authority of Mahomedan writers like Abû'lfaraj and Al-Nadîm, that it is said that his disciples had come to India. Again, Syrian traditions say that one Marsapahole had come to them from Babylon. This person is believed to be a follower of Mani.

That the Christians of the Mani sect had come to the South of India appears from the fact, as pointed out by Dr. Burnell, that there is a place Manigramana in the South of India, so-called from his name.

It is believed, that the Christians of the Mani sect ceased to come to South India after the 11th century. The Syrian Christians then began to take their place. In the Church at Kotayam, the stone, bearing a Pahlavi inscription, has also an inscription in the Syrian language.

Rev. Lord says of the Bene-Israel custom of the Kiss of Peace that it is "evidently so much one with the kiss of peace known among the early Christians that we cannot but suppose that there is some community of origin between the two." Now the "kiss of peace" among the early Christians was really a kiss as we now understand the word. It was a kiss on cheeks. In the first epistle of Paul the Apostle, to the Thessalonians, they are asked to "greet all the brethren with an holy kiss." (I., Thessalonians, V. 26.) In the latter portion of the same epistle to the Romans they are asked to "salute one another with an holy kiss" (Romans, XVI, 16). From these

¹ Indian Antiquary, Vol. III, p. 309.

passages it appears that there was the regular kissing on the cheeks of one another, and not only the kissing of the tips of the fingers of one's own hands after passing them into the hands of another person. Of the later modification of the original Christian custom, Dr. E. B. Tylor says: "This (custom) may even now be seen among Anabaptists, who make an effort to retain primitive Christian habit. It early passed into more ceremonial form in the kiss of peace given to the newly baptized and in the celebration of the Eucharist; this is retained by the Oriental Church. After a time, however, its indiscriminate use between the sexes gave rise to scandals, and it was restricted by ecclesiastical regulations—men being only allowed to kiss men, and women, women,—and eventually in the Roman Church the ceremonial kiss at the communion being only exchanged by the ministers, but a relic or cross called an *osculatorium* or *pax* being carried to the people to be kissed."¹

So, it appears that the kiss of peace of the early Christians was different from the kiss of peace of the Bene-Israel of Bombay and of the Jews of Cochin. If it was the kiss of peace of the early Christians that gave to the Bene-Israel of Bombay and to the Jews of Cochin their modern custom of the kiss of peace, the custom would have been common to all the Jews. But, as it is a custom special to the Bene-Israel of Bombay and to the Jews of Cochin, and, as it differs from the early Christian kiss of peace, it seems probable that they have taken it from the Zoroastrian Persians with whom they came into contact at Chaul and at the adjoining centres and in Southern India.

We find from Herodotus (Bh I, 134) that among the ancient Persians one of the forms of salutation was kissing. When equals met together, they kissed each other on the mouth. When one was inferior the kissing was on the cheeks.

¹ Encyclopædia Britannica, Vol. XXI, p. 236.