

ST. EPHRAIM OF SYRIA, A Hymn Against Bar-Daisan

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A HYMN BY SAINT EPHRAIM OF SYRIA, translated by A. S. Duncan Jones
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Again, a hymn of Mar Ephraim against Bar-Daisan.

There is One Being, who knows Himself and sees Himself.
He dwells in Himself,
And from Himself sets forth.
Glory to His Name.
This is a Being who by His own will is in every place,
Who is invisible and visible,
Manifest and secret.
He is above and below.

Mingling and condescending by His grace among the lower;
Loftier and more exalted, as befits His glory, than the higher.
The swift cannot exceed His swiftness,
Nor the slow outlast His patience.

He is before all and after all,
And in the midst of all.
He is like the sea,
In that all creation moves in Him.
As the waters beset the fish in all their movements,
The Creator is clad with everything which is made,
Both great and small.
And as the fish are hidden in the water,
There is hidden in God height and depth,
Far and near,
And the inhabitants thereof.
And as the water meets the fishes everywhere it goes,
So God meets everyone who walks.
And as the water touches the fish at every turn it makes,
God accompanies and sees every man in all his deeds.

Men cannot move the earth which is their chariot,
Neither does anyone go far from the Just One who is his associate.
The Good One is united to the body,
And light to the eyes.
A man is not able to flee from his soul,
For it is with him.
Nor is a man hid from the Good,
For He besets him.
As the water surrounds the fish and it feels it,
So also do all natures feel God.

He is diffused through the air,
And with thy breath enters into thy midst.
He is mingled with the light,
And enters, when thou seest, into thy eyes.

He is mingled with thy spirit,
And examines thee from within, as to what thou art.
In thy soul He dwells,
And nothing which is in thy heart is hid from Him.
As the mind precedes the body in every place,
So He examines thy soul before thou dost examine it.
And as the thought greatly precedes the deed,
So His thought knows beforehand what thou wilt plan.

Compared with His impalpability,
Thy soul is body and thy spirit flesh.
Soul of thy soul,
Spirit of thy spirit,
Is He who created thee,
Far from all,
And mingled with all,
And manifest above all,
A great wonder and a hidden marvel unfathomable.
He is the Being concerning whose essence no man is able to explain.
This is the Power whose depth is inexpressible.
Among things seen and among things hidden
There is none to be compared to Him.
This is He who created and formed from nothing
Everything which is.

God said:
Let there be light! --
A created thing.
He made darkness and it became night.
Observe: a made thing.
Fire in stones,
Water in rocks:
The Being created them.
There is one Power who raised them from nothing.

Behold,
Even today, fire is not in a store-house in the earth.
For lo! it is continually created
By means of flints.
It is the Being who ordains its existence
By means of Him who holds it.
When He wishes He lights it,
When He wishes He quenches it
By way of appeal against the obstinate.

In a great grove by the rubbing of a stick fire is kindled.
The flame devours,
It grows strong,
At last sinks down.

If fire and water are Beings and not creatures,
Then before the earth was,
Where were their roots hid?

Whoso would destroy his life,
Opens his mouth to speak concerning everything.

Whoso hateth himself,
And would not circumscribe God,
Holds it great impiety that one should think himself
Over-wise.

And if he thinks he has said the last thing
He has reached heathenism,
O Bar-Daisan,
Son of the River Daisan,
Whose mind is liquid like his name!

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O Lord, remember Thy servant Duncan the translator.

THE END, AND TO GOD BE THE GLORY!