

Toldos Yaakov Yosef

Parshas Pinchas 1

The Secret of the Rosh Chodesh Offering

There was once a kingdom who were entrenched deeply in the idolatrous worship of Edom (Christianity). The king made a great feast and invited several great dignitaries and statesmen from the neighboring lands to join him. When he had drunk wine and his heart was glad, the king rose and asked each representative to describe their state religion and their own idols and foreign gods. Each one, in turn, described their idolatrous religion and practices, however they all agreed that his god was also a power to be reckoned with especially since he was a prophet. Each group sang the praises of [Edom] except when it came time for the Jews. When it was their turn, not only did the Jews not praise him, they said quite the opposite; they claimed that he (Jesus) had been a wicked Jew. The king was greatly shamed. However the Jews explained their position based on a parable:

There was once an expert gemologist who knew the value of all manner of precious stones. However he owned one gemstone that had a flaw that only experts recognized which rendered it worthless. What did he do? He changed his clothing and mannerisms and in the guise of a simple farmer who tilled the soil he went about selling this gem. The merchants mistook him for an ignoramus due to his disguise and when they saw the gemstone and realized that this “fool” had no inkling of its “true” value they purchased it from him for a few gulden. Having fooled the first merchant with his worthless wares the gemologist retired. But the stone continued to make its rounds passing from one hand to another till the stone found itself in the royal palace. The worthless gem had made its way to the king himself. The king who imagined he had a real find, called all the jewelers and appraisers in the kingdom to value his gem. Each in turn marveled at the stone, declaring the valueless flawed gem to be worth more and more. None dared tell the truth. Each sought the king's favor, and so each one proclaimed to the king what a find he had and sang the stone's praises. Finally the stone arrived at the expert hands and eyes of the gemologist who had originally sold it in the first place. Once and for all he lifted the ruse and proclaimed that the gemstone was indeed flawed and valueless! The king was mortified and very upset. How could this be true? However the gemologist revealed that it had been he in the first place who disguised himself and sold the worthless flawed stone to an unsuspecting merchant.

So is this form of idolatry, explained the Jews to the king, this man was himself a Jew. Who better than to judge him than the Jews themselves?

The verses in Tehillim 69:27 say “For You [Hashem]-he whom You struck they pursued and persecuted, and about the pain of those whom You wounded they tell a tale. 28 [They] Add iniquity to their iniquity, and let them not come into Your charity or clemency.”

(See Rav S. R. Hirsch's comments to this psalm, he explains it in the same vein as is being explained here by the Toldos in the name of the Baal Shem Tov. Based on both the Baal Shem and Rav Hirsch's understanding this psalm can clearly be read as speaking of the attitude of the Church towards Bnei

Yisroel during the exile and how they justified their merciless persecutions, inquisitions and pogroms. However the Jews being the expert appraisers they are unmask the church and its idol revealing them for what they and their false doctrines are, not gems, but flawed and valueless.)

My master (the Holy Baal Shem Tov) asked the following question about these verses. From the simple reading of verse 27, it sounds like the subject of that verse was fulfilling Hashem's will, yet puzzlingly in the next verse, 28, they are punished. It almost sounds like they were acting as His Divine emissaries and carrying out His will by pursuing and persecuting whoever it is that Hashem struck. If so why are they said to be doing an iniquity and why should they be denied Hashem's clemency and charity as a result for their actions?

He, (the holy Baal Shem Tov) answered based on the parable above. The Holy One, does not punish a righteous tzadik except using a wicked person as His agent and not through another righteous person.

(And so are Bnei Yisroel oppressed and persecuted in exile by the nations for their sins. Bnei Yisroel must suffer for their sin in order to repent, however the nations, although they are carrying out the Divine decree are really wicked and will be punished for oppressing and persecuting Bnei Yisroel.)

For example [regarding the bondage of Bnei Yisroel in Egypt] Hashem told Avraham (Bereishis Chap 15) that He judged the nation which would oppress them in the future. The word Dan is the past tense of judged, wouldn't it have made more sense to use the future tense of the verb and say that Hashem will judge the Egyptians later on for their oppression of the Jews? However the Egyptians had already been judged as wicked and therefore for that reason Hashem saw it fit to use them as a tool to oppress Bnei Yisroel, because the wicked must be punished for their wickedness anyway, why not use them as tools and then their very act shall be their downfall [as the Egyptians were later drowned in the sea]. This is as is found in Koheles 8:9 "a time that a man ruled over [another] man for (this act caused) his [own] harm."

Through the suffering and oppression which the tzadik endures at the hands of the wicked, he refines the holy sparks of the shattered vessels. The tzadik rises and is uplifted thereby, whereas the wicked descend into their downfall. This is the secret behind the he goat which is a sin offering on Rosh Chodesh.

This is the meaning of the verse in Tehillim quoted above, you persecuted he whom Hashem struck, you the wicked ones know the truth, that the ones you are oppressing are actually righteous. Therefore you are truly wicked, the proof to this is that they were the ones who did the persecuting and pursuing, therefore they must be the wicked [whom Hashem uses as His tools and agents to carry out Divine punishment]. This is why they are then punished for their misdeeds and this is why they have added iniquity to their previous iniquity in order that they should now rightfully be blotted out from the book of life.

This then explains the verse "On your Rosh Chodesh, new months' festivals, you shall offer a burn offering, one he goat as a sin offering."

By Bnei Yisroel's sins we sent away our mother [the Shechinah] and only through repentance and Teshuva can we Tashuv Hay = return the letter Hay (which represents the Shechinah) and return it back up to its proper lofty place (in the Divine name, see Pasach Eliyahu from Tikkunei Zohar). And now when we renew our strength like an eagle through our repentance (Zohar Raayah Mehimna 248b) We find in Sefer Chanoch that on Rosh Chodesh, the moon shall be cleansed and purified and draw close to

her husband.

This is achieved by our bringing ourselves metaphorically speaking as an Olah, a burnt offering to Hashem. That is through our pain and suffering in exile for our sins, where we are oppressed by the nations of the world then just as nationally we suffer oppression as a form of penitence this corresponds on the national level to the single tzadik oppressed at the hands of the wicked. Then he is renewed and he betters himself, rectifying his previous misdeeds. Then the Shechina rises Olah, to Hashem through the he goat offered as a sin offering. Because we need to give the other side its portion, as in the secret of why we offer the scapegoat to Azazel on Yom Kippur (see Ramban's commentary there), similarly the tzadik is uplifted and rises (Olah) while the wicked descend. Then once and for all all sin shall cease and then my soul shall praise and bless Hashem and His great name shall be exalted and sanctified and the supernal attributes shall all be united speedily in our days Amen.