

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Beshalach 5769

“And Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to illuminate for them, to travel by day and by night.” (13:21)

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 11a) tells the story of Onkelos, nephew of the Roman emperor, who converted to Judaism and went to study in a yeshiva. His uncle sent soldiers to capture him and bring him back, but Onkelos convinced them to convert to Judaism as well.

He sent a second group of soldiers and this time warned them not to enter into any discussion with Onkelos. As they were leading him away, he said to them, “If a simple soldier and a captain are walking together at night, the simple soldier holds the lantern. If a captain and a general are walking together, the captain holds the lantern. If a general and a governor are walking together, the general holds the lantern. If a governor and the king are walking together, the governor holds the lantern. But does the king ever hold a lantern for anyone?” “No,” replied the soldiers. “But,” said Onkelos, “when the Jews traveled from Egypt, G-d illuminated the way for them with a pillar of fire.” When they heard this they all converted to Judaism.

The emperor sent a third group of soldiers, warning them not to speak with Onkelos at all, even about worldly matters. As they were leading him away, he put his hand on the mezuzah and smiled. They could not contain their curiosity and asked him why he was smiling. He said, “A human king sits inside and his servants guard the doors, but G-d stands guard at our doors while we, his servants, sit inside, as it says (Tehillim 121:8): ‘Hashem will guard your going and coming forever.’” All the soldiers converted to Judaism, and the emperor gave up trying to capture Onkelos.

Why did Onkelos choose these concepts to attract the soldiers? Why did they work so effectively? The answer lies in a fundamental difference between idolatry and Judaism. The idolaters see their gods as powerful but limited beings who need their services. By bringing offerings and performing the service of the idol, they are like servants providing the needs of a king. The idol and its priests remain focused on the spiritual while the rest of the people focus on the physical – satisfying their own desires. Their only duty to the idol and its priests is to provide their physical needs. By doing so they buy the right to live however they want. The Talmudic Sages connect idolatry and permissive lifestyles when they say (Sanhedrin 63b) that the Jewish people worshipped idols only in order to permit themselves to do immoral acts in public.

In Judaism, on the other hand, G-d is the ultimate in perfection and does not lack or need anything. He did not create us because He needed us to serve him. Rather, He created us in order to bestow kindness upon us: reward in the World to Come, which we earn through performance of the commandments in this world. Our spiritual obligations are for our own good, in order to better our souls. The Jew’s job is to focus on his spiritual well-being as much as possible, and trust in G-d to take care of his physical needs. G-d lights the way for us, guards our houses and provides us with everything we have so that we can continue to live and better our souls. When Onkelos explained this to the soldiers, they realized that the G-d of the Jews is the only true G-d, who is perfect and needs nothing from man.

The redemption for which Jews are waiting will follow the pattern of Judaism: We will complete the spiritual process of teshuva, and then G-d will take care of the physical so that we can devote ourselves to higher spiritual goals. G-d will bring us back to the Holy Land, build it for us, give us the Temple and a kingdom ruled by moshiach. He will give us plenty of food and money so that we can devote ourselves to Torah and Avodas Hashem.

This comparison between the carrying of the torch at the Exodus from Egypt and our future redemption is made by the Midrash Rabbah (Shemos 15:17): “When the Holy One, blessed is He, took Israel out of Egypt, He held the torch and walked before them, as it says, ‘And Hashem went before them...’ And so He will one day do when He takes them out of Edom, as Yishaya says (52:12), ‘For Hashem goes before you, your gatherer, the G-d of Israel.’”

The Zionists, however, have patterned their “redemption” after the system of idolatry. The more religious among them will claim that they are still waiting for G-d to send moshiach, but what exactly is our role and what is G-d’s role? In their view, our role is to take care of the physical aspects of the redemption: bringing the Jewish people back to the Holy Land, conquering it, building it up, establishing a government and making food and money. G-d’s role will be to bring about the spiritual aspects of redemption. Thus, the Zionist redemption is the exact inverse of Judaism. We pray that the Jewish people recognize this and reject Zionism as the heresy that it is!

Those who do not have e-mail can now receive this sheet free every week by regular mail. To order write to the address below.



True Torah Jews
183 Wilson St. PMB 162
Brooklyn, NY 11211

For additional copies of this publication,
or to sponsor an issue,
PLEASE CALL 718-841-7053.