

Parsha Pearls

Ki Seitzei 5767

You shall not bring the hire of a harlot nor the price of a dog to the house of Hashem your G-d for any vow, for both are an abomination to Hashem your G-d. (Devarim 23:19)

The Gemora in Avodah Zarah (16b) relates: Once Rabbi Eliezer was arrested for heresy. In that time, the Romans were persecuting the early Christians, and they accused Rabbi Eliezer of being a Christian. They brought him up to the tiered platform to be judged. The judge said, "A sage like you engages in such empty matters?" Rabbi Eliezer replied, "I trust the judge." The judge thought he was referring respectfully to him, but in reality he meant that G-d, the true judge, must have brought this accusation upon him as punishment for some past sin. The judge said, "Since you trusted me, by the idol Deimus you are exempt from punishment!"

When Rabbi Eliezer came home, he was terribly upset, for the Sages teach that a person is only suspected of a sin if he in some way committed a shadow of that sin, or at least thought about committing it, or at least was happy when he saw others committing it (Moed Katan 18b).

His students came to comfort him, but he refused to accept their comfort. Rabbi Akiva said, "My teacher, permit me to say something that you once taught me."

"Say it," said Rabbi Eliezer.

"My teacher, perhaps you heard some Christian teaching and it gave you pleasure, and that is why you were arrested?" said Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Akiva, you have reminded me! Once I was walking in the upper marketplace of Sepphoris, and I met one of the Nazarene's disciples, named Jacob of Kfar Sechania. He said to me, 'It is written in your Torah, You shall not bring the hire of a harlot to the house of Hashem. What about using it to make a toilet for the Kohein Gadol?' I did not reply. He then said, 'This is what the Nazarene taught me: The prophet Micha says (1:7), "For they gathered it from a harlot's hire, and to a harlot's hire they will return." The money came from a dirty place and it should go to a dirty place.' I had pleasure from this, and therefore I was arrested for heresy, because I transgressed what is written in the book of Mishlei (5:8), 'Keep your path far from it.'" (We have translated the Gemora according to the Netziv and the uncensored text.)

What should Rabbi Eliezer have done when he encountered the Christian disciple? The Maharsha says that he should have kept away from him and not listened to his answer at all. The Shvus Yaakov in his commentary Iyun Yaakov says that his pleasure from the heretic's explanation of the verse was considered a sin of the thoughts, and therefore he was arrested for heresy.

We see from here the obligation to stay far from heretics and not have pleasure even from an innocent remark made by them, even if the remark itself is true. All the more so that one should not deliberately put himself in a place conquered by the heretics such as the Western Wall or Hebron, where he will derive pleasure from their conquest.

In the Midrash on Koheles (1:8) we read: "Chanina the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua was going toward Capernaum, when the heretics cast a spell on him and brought him into town, riding a donkey on Shabbos. He came to Rabbi Yehoshua his uncle, who cured him by rubbing oil on him. Rabbi Yehoshua said to Chanina, 'Since that wicked man's donkey brayed at you, you can no longer stay in Eretz Yisroel.' So he went down to Babylonia and lived out his life in peace."

From here we see what great damage comes from having benefit from heretics and their activities. Because Chanina came to Eretz Yisroel on a donkey belonging to heretics and thus benefited from them, although it happened against his will, and although he came afterwards to Rabbi Yehoshua who could surely have healed him spiritually and physically, still there was no solution for him except to leave Eretz Yisroel and live in Babylonia. If one has benefit from heretics, it is impossible that none of their poison will enter him, and there is almost no cure for this. (Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, Chapter 91)