

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Naso 5768

For behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and a razor shall not go up on his head, for the child will be a nazirite of G-d from the womb, and he will begin to save Israel from the Philistines. (Shoftim 13:5)

The simple meaning of the word “yachel” is “begin,” as we have translated it above. But the Gemara (Sotah 10a) explains a different level of meaning: “yachel” can also mean “it is nullified,” namely, the oath of Avimelech was nullified. Scripture is about to relate the story of Shimshon’s life and how he terrorized the Philistines. Avraham Avinu and Avimelech, king of the Philistines, had made a sworn covenant with each other (Bereishis 21:23). But since the Philistines fought with and subjugated the Jews, thus violating the oath, the Jews were released from their obligation to keep the oath, and Shimshon was permitted to do what he did.

Some Zionists claim that there is a similar relationship between the oaths of the Jewish people and the nations (Kesubos 111a). The Jewish people was prohibited under oath from going up to Eretz Yisroel “as a wall,” rebelling against the nations, or forcing the end of exile. The nations were prohibited from subjugating the Jews too much. The claim is that since the nations violated their oath, the Jewish people is no longer bound by its oaths.

In the Parsha Pearls of Naso, 5766, we used logic to explain why this argument is flawed. In this issue we will review the historical record to show that no Jewish sage or commentator in the pre-Zionist era ever made this argument. Every source text that the Zionists can find falls into one of three categories: 1) Reference to an action by G-d, not an annulment of the Jewish oath; 2) Reference to the annulment of the oath prohibiting rebellion against the nations. 3) Reference to the annulment of the oath against excessive prayer. But no one has ever said that the oaths against going up as a wall and forcing the end of exile through action were subject to annulment when the gentiles violate their oath.

We begin with the Midrash, Shir Hashirim Rabbah 2:7: “Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina says: There are two oaths here,

one for Israel and one for the nations of the world. He made Israel swear that they would not rebel against the yoke of the kingdoms, and He made the kingdoms swear that they would not harden their yoke upon Israel, for if they would harden their yoke upon Israel, they would cause the end to come not in its proper time.”

The Midrash does not say that the oaths are a covenant between Israel and the nations, nor does it say that if the nations harden their yoke upon Israel the oath is annulled. It says only that if they harden the yoke, G-d will bring an early end to the exile.

Similarly, the Shitah Mekubetzes in Kesubos 111a says in the name of the disciples of the Rashba: “I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, what will you tell Him? That I am lovesick.” (Shir Hashirim 5:8) The Jewish people is speaking to the nations of the world, after the Holy One, blessed is He, made the nations swear not to afflict Israel too much, lest they cause Him to arouse their love before its time, because the Holy One, blessed is He, cannot bear to see Israel in great distress and not save them, as the Gemara says (Sanhedrin 97b), “When the time to redeem them arrives, the Holy One, blessed is He, will raise up a king whose decrees are like Haman’s and he will bring them to repent, and then immediately they will be redeemed.”

Here again, it is clear that G-d will be the one to bring the redemption before its time. In passing, we note that the Shitah Mekubetzes states clearly that redemption, even when early, must be preceded by repentance.

That G-d will bring the redemption and not the Jews is also clear from the Pnei Yehoshua on Kesubos 111a. The Pnei Yehoshua asks how the oath on the nations of the world fits in with the verse “do not arouse or awaken the love before it

is desired" which refers to the redemption of the Jewish people. He answers that if the nations afflict the Jews too much, "they will cause the Holy One, blessed is He, to hasten to bring the redemption before its time, as we find in the case of the Egyptian exile."

(The Pnei Yehoshua also asks how the oath against revealing the secret to the nations has to do with the redemption. He answers based on Rashi's second explanation, that "the secret" refers to the reasons behind the Torah. When the gentiles learn the reasons and secrets of the Torah, they will come to recognize the great love between G-d and the Jewish people, and they will then stop ruling over them and will arouse the redemption before its time. Thus Chazal with their holy inspiration foresaw today's situation, where 85 million Christians are strong supporters of Zionism and push the Jewish people out of exile prematurely, all due to the fact that they have read the Torah and recognize that the Jews are G-d's beloved people.)

Now we move on to the second category: those who write that the oath on rebellion against the nations becomes annulled when the nations violate their oath. As we wrote here two years ago, the oaths not to go up as a wall and not to force the end are not for the benefit of the gentiles, and thus they cannot be part of a deal between the gentiles and the Jewish people. Rather, G-d gave us these oaths for our own benefit, so that we should not try to redeem ourselves at the wrong time. But the oath prohibiting rebellion against the nations might be, logically speaking, part of such a deal with the nations. Of course, if one nation violated its oath, that would not permanently annul the oath of rebellion against the nations, nor would it give the Jews the right to rebel against a different nation; but there might be a temporary relaxation of the Jewish oath with regard to the offending nation.

This is what the Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani writes in his commentary Zera Shimshon (published in 1778) on Megillas Esther 9:1. Scripture tells us that on the 13th of Adar, the very day that the Jews' enemies had planned to destroy them, the exact opposite happened: the Jews destroyed their enemies. The Zera Shimshon comments that Scripture goes out of its way to say that "the opposite happened" because if not for this, the Jews would not have had the right to lift up their hands against the gentiles. But now, since the gentiles planned to kill the Jews, the Jews

were permitted to kill them. Because it states in the thirteenth chapter of Kesubos, "What are these three oaths? One that the Holy One, blessed is He, made Israel swear not to rebel against the nations of the world, and one that He made the nations of the world swear not to afflict Israel too much." And the Shulchan Aruch says (Yoreh Deah 236:6), "When two people swear to each other and one violates his oath, the other is also permitted and needs no annulment."

Note that of all the oaths in Kesubos, he only quotes two: the prohibition to rebel against the nations, and the nations' oath. He does not quote the oath prohibiting mass immigration to Eretz Yisroel, nor the oath prohibiting us to force the end, because those oaths have nothing to do with the nations and are not subject to any deal with them.

In passing, we note that the Zera Shimshon assumed that the oaths would have applied to the Jews in the time of Haman despite the fact that the king gave them permission to fight back, and despite the fact that their lives were in danger. Thus the very same Zera Shimshon that Zionists trumpet as one of their proofs, besides not being any proof at all, actually contradicts two of their most central claims.

Finally, we have those who say that when the nations violate their oath, the Jews are allowed to pray excessively for the redemption, something that they are ordinarily prohibited from doing under the oath "that they should not force the end". These are Rabbi Shlomo Kluger in Maaseh Yedei Yotzer on the Hagadah, and Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein in Avkas Rochel 9:1. This does not mean that the Jews are permitted to take any action towards the redemption! The difference between being permitted to pray and being permitted to take action is simple: taking action toward the redemption is tantamount to heresy, but violating the oath through excessive prayer is not, since on the contrary, prayer strengthens the Jew's belief that G-d controls all events and only He can end the exile. Therefore, as long as the gentiles treat the exiled Jews in accordance with G-d's decree and did not exceed their limit, G-d does not want us to pray for the end of exile, since the exile was His plan and is for our benefit. But when the gentiles exceed their limit, their actions emanate from their own free will and not from G-d's decree, and so we may pray to G-d to save us from them (Vayael Moshe 1:79). This was explained at length in the Parsha Pearls for Pesach, 5768.

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