

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Purim 5768

There was a Judean man in Shushan the capital, and his name was Mordechai, son of Yair, son of Shimi, son of Kish, a Benjaminite man. (Esther 2:5)

The Gemara asks: First Scripture tells us that Mordechai was a "Yehudi" – from the tribe of Judah – and then it says he was from the tribe of Benjamin! Rabbi Yochanan resolved this question by saying that in fact, he was from Benjamin, but he was called "Yehudi" because "Yehudi" is a special term of distinction for those who deny belief in idols (Megillah 13a).

This seems to be a strange statement. Idols are patent falsehoods: statues of wood and stone that cannot even move, let alone save their worshippers. Anyone who has any intelligence denies the silly beliefs of idolatry. Why then does someone who denies idols deserve such a dignified name as "Yehudi"? The term should have been reserved for someone who possesses fear of G-d, love of G-d or another high attainment.

After Moshe Rabbeinu told Pharaoh about the plague of fiery hail that was about to befall Egypt, the Torah says, "Those among Pharaoh's servants who feared the word of Hashem gathered their slaves and cattle into the houses, but those who paid no attention to the word of Hashem left their slaves and cattle in the fields" (Shemos 9:20-21). Here we can ask a question similar to the one above: Why was this considered fear of G-d? Anyone could see that throughout the previous six plagues, whatever Moshe had predicted had come true to the last detail. Whether they feared G-d or not, they should have taken precautions. Those who did not act to protect their property should not have been called "those who paid no attention to the word of Hashem" but rather fools and madmen who did not care about their belongings.

Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the Alter of Novardok, explained that even when something is obvious and sensible, if it has some connection with belief in prophecy and the word of G-d, then a person will not be able to understand it unless he has a certain level of fear of G-d. If the Egyptians had had any reason to suspect that an enemy army was about to invade their country and steal their property, all of them would certainly have locked up their property well. But since the plague of hail was announced by Moshe Rabbeinu in the name of G-d, and belief in it was thus bound up with belief in G-d's power and attribute of reward and punishment, anyone who was lacking a certain level of fear of G-d was unable to understand and believe that it would really happen.

This is why the Gemara says that one who denies idolatry is given the title "Yehudi" – because however obvious the falsehood of idolatry is, it is impossible for a person to deny it unless he has attained some level of fear of G-d.

We are unfortunately witness to a similar phenomenon today among Jews, many of them religious and some even Torah scholars, who go and settle in the Zionist state, thinking that it is a safe and secure haven, an ideal place to build yeshivos and religious communities in which to raise their families. The terrible danger hovering over Jews in the Holy Land today is obvious and is recognized even by the non-Jewish world. Everyone knows that the State of Israel is the most dangerous place in the world for a Jew to live. Surely, then, wise Jews who have studied the Torah and Talmud should realize this.

But denial of the Zionist idol is the supreme test of our generation, and our entire redemption is hanging in the balance - the Gemara in Sanhedrin 98a states that moshiach will not come until the "low government" is gone from Israel. Admitting that the Zionist state is a place of terrible danger for Jews, and that its army provides no protection but rather puts Jews in even

greater danger, involves a certain degree of rejection of the Zionist idolatry, as well as belief in the Torah, its principles of reward and punishment, and the words of the prophets. Therefore, although the danger is an objective fact, it is very difficult for many Jews to reach this realization. May G-d help all of us to strengthen our emunah and see the truth!



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