

CREATING A NEW RELIGION

PROPHECY OF CHRISTIAN ROME

Among the religious festivals of non-Jews listed by the Mishnah (*Avodah Zarah* 8a) was *Yom Ginusya*, and the Gemara attempts to identify this festival. The Gemara (10a) considers whether it relates to the inauguration of a king or his offspring, or perhaps his birthday. The quandary arose because the word *ginusya* has all these translations, as we see that the Latin/Greek word “*genus*” can be translated as birthday or offspring, and birth could be applied to his inauguration. Rav Yosef eliminates the option that it relates to the king’s son by quoting a Baraisa expounding a pasuk: “Behold, I have made you inferior among nations; you are most despised” (*Ovadiah* 1:2), as referring to the Romans. The previous pasuk indicated that this was prophecy concerning Biblical Edom, but the Baraisa is interpreting the inferior nation as referring to their descendants, the Romans. Abarbanel explains that a Caesar did not have total authority of royalty because the Romans did not consider the position of Caesar as hereditary – a Caesar was not necessarily succeeded by his son. The Baraisa continues to expound the second half of the pasuk: “you are most despised” – for they did not have their own script or language. Rashi explains that their script and language is from another nation and others establish their books. How can we understand this when there are ample ancient Roman classics written in Latin. What does Rashi mean when he says others wrote their books?

PAGAN OR CHRISTIAN?

Superficially, one might argue that the festivals listed were pagan Roman festivals, before Rome adopted the Christian religion. Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 C.E., and it became the state religion of the Roman Empire in 380 C.E. Rav Yosef died in 324 C.E., so Christianity was hardly established in Rome in his lifetime. However, Rav Yosef was quoting a Baraisa based on Ovadiah's prophecy as referring to the future Rome. Rashi understands this prediction as referring to Christianity, but that is not readily apparent because most of Rashi's comment is missing in our *gemoros*. The *Oz VeHadar* edition in its *Hagahos Ve'tziyunim* has restored the omitted part of Rashi's comment as it appears in the first edition of Ein Yaakov, printed in Salonika 1517. We shall provide some background to Rashi's expanded comment, which is an eye-opener to understanding the Jewish relationship with early Christians. These comments are based on a lecture by Rav Shnayer Leiman and his article in The Jewish Quarterly Review, October 1983 about the fast of ninth of Teves. We shall see shortly why this date is relevant to our subject.

THE SECRET DATE

Shulchan Aruch records a list of fast days which are anniversaries of the deaths of selected personalities (*Orach Chaim* 580). The date of ninth of Teves is included, but instead of indicating its significance, *Shulchan Aruch* reports that the Rabbis did not write whom this date commemorates. This negative statement is found in the earliest sources going back to the Geonim, and *poskim* offer various interesting solutions, but none are convincing. The *Mishneh Berurah* brings the *Taz* and *Magen Avraham* suggesting that this date relates to the death of Ezra, but as noted by the *Birkei Yosef* here, Ezra's *yahrzeit* is included in the source text *Megillas Taanis* independently after the anonymous date. If it would refer to Ezra, what is the secret and why not say so?

THE *TOLDOS YESHU* NARRATIVE

A gloss by Rav Baruch Fraenkel-Teomim in his comments printed at the end of Shulchan Aruch provides a new insight. He writes that he found a manuscript identifying the ninth of Teves anniversary as that of Shimon HaKalpos, who delivered the Jewish people from great misfortune during the period of the *peritzim* (Jewish Christians). It was ordained in Yerushalayim that the day of Shimon's death be commemorated for all generations as a fast day. This manuscript reflects the account preserved in a *sefer* known as *Toldos Yeshu*, or *Teliyas Yeshu*, which dates from the time of the geonim but was suppressed because of its sensitive content. There are fragmentary pages of the *sefer* in Hebrew and Aramaic found in the Cairo Genizah collection. It was printed from an ancient manuscript in Leiden in 1705, which has since been lost, by a Christian J. J. Huldricus and called *Historia Jeschuae Nazarene*, *Sefer Toldos Yeshu HaNotzri*, and something similar is also found in *Otzar HaMidrashim*.

וְכָאֶר רֹאשׁ יְשׁוּעַ שְׁבִי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנֵם כְּהַבְּרִים
אֱלֹהִים וּקוֹרָאָם לוּ בְּשָׁם יוֹשֵׁב
בְּלֹבוֹר "מְחֻזָּה וּמְכוֹן"
שְׁמָנוּ אוֹ אֲכִיר יוֹשֵׁב אָנוּ לִי
הַלְּקָה אַלְהוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַלְּקָה
גִּילְעָם פְּנֵים בְּתוֹרוֹת שְׁלָאָה
בְּהַלְכָת וּתְלִקְמָה אַלְזָה
אֲנָשָׁם רְקִים וּפְחוֹתִים וּמָטָם
בָּאָ אֱלֹהִים הַפְּרִיצִים שְׁמַעַן
וּמְהִיא אַלְקִים וּמְרִדְנוּ
וְתוֹדוֹת וּסְבָב יְשֻׁעַ שְׁכָם
יִקְרָאָם כְּךָל שְׁמַעַן פִּיטְרוֹס
עַל שָׁם פְּנֵר בַּי דָא רָאשָׁן

Extracts from Hebrew/Latin edition of
Toldos Yeshu by Huldricus (Leiden 1705).

Note: יוזש = י' מה ז' כרו ו' י' מה ש' מנו

ועוד כתוב להם ספריו
בכובים וקרואותם ע"ן כל'ין
זהם סברו שהוא אמר אב' ז'
כל'ין ז' כלומר אב' בן וגלו
רוח הקוריש ועשה להם
שמעון ספריהם מתלמודיו
ז' יש ומורה'ם ואמר שי' יש
ספר לו כל הדברים
ויבתב שמעון ברכו את
ספר ותנ'ם והם סבורם
שהוא סורתה והוא הכל
הבל ורעיון רוח כמו
שכתב בספר יה'ג'ם פרק
י' שראות יה'ג'ם דורה

He wrote their books calling them "shameful sin" but also understood as evangelium - good news from angels - the gospels

(p.557). It relates the story of Yesu from his birth and childhood and how the Jews suffered from his perversion of Judaism. It relates how at a meeting of the leading Tanaaim, Shimon Kepha, described as a foremost Tanna, was directed to infiltrate Jewish-Christian circles and to solve the problem of religious confusion and mass exodus to the new form of Judaism. It was difficult to differentiate between the traditional and new religionists as they both kept the same *mitzvos*. The idea was to infiltrate the Jewish-Christian leadership and create a Gentile Christianity which would not be able to be confused with Judaism. He was tasked to pretend that he was embracing their beliefs, and with his powerful stature, he could innovate changes that would distinguish the new sect and also to dissipate the attacks of the new religionists on the other Jews. Shimon Kepha asked that the Tanaim guarantee that he would not lose his *Olam Haba* and they provided that assurance. Shimon was welcomed as a dynamic leader into the ranks of the Christian Jews, became Bishop of Rome and taught the abrogation of Jewish law, creating a Gentile Christianity. He is identified as Simon Peter, who became the first Pope, initiating the concept of the infallibility of the Pope so that no one would argue with his suggestions. He organized the composition of the New Testament to demonstrate a break from the Torah, calling it *avon kilayon*, shameful sin, plus the double meaning of “*evangelium*” (gospel) and *av, ben, giluy ruach hakodesh* (the Trinity).



Genizah fragment of Toldos Yeshu in Aramaic

THEIR SCRIPT AND BOOKS – RASHI’S EXPLANATION

With this introduction let us return to our Rashi. In the uncensored version Rashi writes: “The script and language of the Romans were borrowed from another nation. Others wrote their books for them, namely John, Paul and Simon Peter, all of them Jews. Language refers to grammatica, i.e. the Latin spoken by priests. These Jews transformed their Roman language into an obscure one, in order to separate them from Israel. These Jews were no apostates; rather they acted from the best intentions in order to benefit the Jews. When they saw that the Jews were oppressed by the deceitful acts of the followers of Yesu, they impersonated priests and ordained all (the Christian laws, customs and books) as it is stated explicitly in *Sefer Teliyas Yesu*.” Clearly Rashi was in possession of a manuscript with a version similar to the Leiden 1705 print as illustrated. Rashi applies this narrative as the understanding of the Baraisa’s Tanaim – that their New Testament was written by others, namely the Jews.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE SCRIPT

See the extract from Toldos Yeshu illustrated which shows how their alphabet was manipulated to conceal hidden truths. The letters of the alphabet are given names, which can be read to convey a message. ABCDEF is interpreted (according to the Latin translation) – AB, Aba, referring to Esav, CDEF – CD (tzayid) EF (v’ayef) was a hunter and thief, and his descendants believe in Yesu who lived as a god, may their souls be suffocated. LMN reads *E-l eim ein*, that G-d has no mother, but Yesu does have a mother. The letters OPQRSTU are read APIQUORUS TAU, an apikorus who seduces. XYZ is read EKS MY’ZED – one who is me’akesh and mei’zed, a fraudster and fervent like Esav who ate cooked food. Rav Yehudah Barzilai in his commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* (p.146) relates to this Baraisa regarding the Roman script and notes that LMN are the three middle letters of the alphabet, representing the central essence, which symbolizes truth.



Shimon taught the Latin alphabet – the letters L M N pronounced E-l em en, meaning G-d has no mother, but Yesu does have a mother.

THE ANONYMOUS TZADDIK

Shimon Kepha (Peter, meaning rock) or HaKalpos, built a tower in Rome where he studied and had bread and water passed up to him each day for six years until he died. Sefer Chassidim (191) describes him as a *tzaddik*. He is accredited as writing the Yom Kippur *Eten Tehillah* service and some say he is the author of *Nishmas* (*Siddur Avodas Yisrael*, p.206). We now understand why his death anniversary of the ninth of Teves had to remain anonymous.