

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLVIII: Shoftim (Deut. 16:18–21:9)

Essay 4. Avoid soothsayers and diviners

מְדַרְשׁ ילקוט על פסוק "נאתם עדי נאם-ה' ונאניאל", כְּשֶׁאַתֶּם עֲדֵי אֲנִי אֵל, וְכִשְׂאִין אַתֶּם עֲדֵי, כְּבִיכּוֹל אֲנִי אֵל עכ"ל.

There is a Midrash Yalkut Shimoni on the verse, “So you are My witnesses, declares the L-rd, and I am G-d.”¹ The Midrash interprets: “When you are My witnesses, I am G-d, but when you are not My witnesses, it is as if I am not G-d.”²

בטעם ביאור מדרש זה נראה לומר שְׂפִשְׁיִשְׂרָאֵל זְפָאִים אֵינָם יְרָאִים לֹא מִן הַמְּנַחְשִׁים וְלֹא מִן הַקּוֹסְמִים וְלֹא מִן הַמְּכַשְׁפִּים, כְּדִכְתִּיב "כִּי לֹא-נִחַשׁ בְּעֵצָב וְלֹא-קָסַם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל". וְהָכִי אֲמַרְיֵנוּ בְּפֶרֶק קָמָא דְחֻלִּין "אֵין עוֹד מְלַבְדּוּ" אֲפִילוּ כְּשֶׁפִים, אֵינִי? וְהָא אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן לְמָה נִקְרָא שְׁמֵם כְּשֶׁפִים, שְׂמַכְחִישִׁים פְּמַלְיָא שְׁל מַעְלָה, שְׂאֲנִי ר' חֲנִינָא דְנִפְיֵשׁ זְכוּתִיה. נִמְצָא כְּשֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לְהֵם זְכוּת הַרְבֵּה, הַכְּשֶׁפִים אֵין לְהֵם כַּח, וְנִכְרַ שְׂ"אֵין עוֹד מְלַבְדּוּ", וְכִי מֵינָן כְּשֶׂאִין לְיִשְׂרָאֵל זְכוּת אֲז נִקְרָאוּ כְּשֶׁפִים שְׂמַכְחִישִׁים פְּמַלְיָא שְׁל מַעְלָה חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם, וְזֵהוּ כְּשֶׂאִתֶּם עֲדֵי אֲנִי אֵל.

For the purpose of clarifying this Midrash, it seems to say that when Israel is righteous, they fear neither diviners, nor magicians, nor sorcerers, as it is written, “Lo, there is no soothsaying in Jacob, no magic in Israel.”³ Thus it is said in the 1st chapter of tractate Chullin:

“There is none other beside Him,”⁴ even sorcery is not real. A certain woman would try to take dust from beneath the feet of Rabbi Chanina [in order to harm him through sorcery]. He said to her: Take it, but the matter will be ineffective for you, as it is written: “There is none other beside Him.” **But is that so? Doesn’t Rabbi Yochanan say: Why is [sorcery] called *keshafim* [כשפים]? [It’s an acronym for] *mach’chishin pamalya shel mala* [מכחישים פמליא של מעלה] [“they diminish the Heavenly entourage”] [which suggests that sorcery does have efficacy]. **Rabbi Chanina is different, as his merit is great** [so sorcery has no effect on him].**

- Chullin 7b

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¹ Isaiah 43:12.

² Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 271:5; Sifrei Devarim 346:2.

³ Num. 23:23.

⁴ Deut. 4:35.

It's found that when Israel has great merit, the sorcerers have no power, and it's recognized that "there is none other beside Him." But—may it not happen to us—when Israel does not have merit, then [those who would harm us] are called sorcerers, for they diminish the Heavenly entourage, G-d forbid. This is the meaning of Yalkut Shimoni saying, "When you are My witnesses, I am G-d." But when we are not His witnesses, then He does not protect us from sorcery, and it seems as though there are other gods that exist and have power over us.

והטעם על זה לפי שכל עצמם של המקטרגים והקליפות אין להם אחיזה רק באחורי הקדושה, אבל לא בפנים של הקדושה חס ושלום, וכשישראל עושים רצונו של מקום הם נשגחים מצד פנים, וכתוב "באור-פני-מלך חיים", ואינם מתיראים מן הכשפים שאין להם רשות להתקרב לצד פנים.

The reason for this is that the essence of the prosecuting angels and the *kliptot* only have a grip on the rear side of holiness, and not on the countenance of holiness, G-d forbid. When Israel does the will of the Omnipresent, they are guarded from the countenance of holiness, and it is written, "the light of the king's countenance is life,"⁵ and they do not fear from the magicians, who do not have permission to come near the countenance of holiness.

וזהו שאמר הקב"ה לאברהם "התהלך לפני נהיה תמים", שמי שבוטח בה' ואינו שם לב למנחשים ולקוסמים ולמגלות נקרא תמים, כדכתיב "תמים תהיה עם ה' אלהיך", וסמיו ליה "כי הגוים האלה" וכו' "אל-מענגים ואל-קסמים ישמעו ואתה לא כן" וכו'. אם כן כשתהלך לפני, ותנקה ליהנות מאור הפנים, בנדאי תהיה תמים שלא תירא משום נחש ומשום כשף.

This is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, meant when he said to Abraham, "walk before me and be blameless,"⁶ for one who trusts in G-d and does not pay attention to soothsayers and sorcerers and fortune-tellers is called blameless. This is as it is written, "be blameless with the L-rd, your G-d,"⁷ and adjacent to it is written, "for these nations that you are to dispossess do indeed resort to soothsayers and to diviners, but you do not."⁸ If so, when you will walk before me, and you will merit to enjoy from the light of G-d's countenance, certainly you will be blameless, for you won't fear from any soothsaying or magic.

וזהו שאמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מיטהרין, שאתם זוכים לאור הפנים, דבפרק הבונה אמרינו קו"ף, קדוש. רי"ש, רשע. מאי טעמא מהדר אפיה דקו"ף מרי"ש, אמר הקב"ה אין אני יכול להסתפל ברשע.

This is what Rabbi Akiva said, "How fortunate are you, Israel; before Whom do you purify yourselves,"⁹ for you merit the light of G-d's countenance. As we find in the 12th

⁵ Prov. 16:15.

⁶ Gen. 17:1.

⁷ Deut. 18:13.

⁸ Deut. 18:14.

⁹ Mishnah Yoma 8:9; Yoma 85b.

chapter of tractate Shabbat, entitled, “**One who builds,**” it is said that children who only knew the alphabet interpreted the letters homiletically:

[The letter] *kuf* [represents the word] **holy** [*kadosh*] [קדוש] [referring to G-d]. [The letter] *reish* [represents] **a wicked person** [*rasha*] [רשע]. **What is the reason the *kuf* faces away from the *reish*? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: I am unable look at a wicked person.**¹⁰

- Shabbat 104a

והואיל דאָתא לידן נימא ביה מילתא, דתגן התם את זו דרש ר' אלעזר בן עזריה "מכל חטאתיכם" וכו' עבירות שבין אדם למקום יום הכפורים מכפר וכו', אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל וכו' ומי מטהר אתכם וכו' שנאמר "ונרקתי" וכו' ואומר: "מקוה" וכו'. יש לדקדק מה קשר יש בדברי רבי עקיבא על דברי רבי אלעזר בן עזריה, ועוד אם כבר הם מיטהרים דמשמע מעצמם, איך מצא מקום לומר "ומי מטהר אתכם", הלא כבר נטהרו מעצמם, ולמה הביא שתי ראיות.

Now that we've discussed this Mishnah of Yoma, it is appropriate to offer an explanation. It is taught there:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya taught: “[For on this day, atonement shall be made for you, to purify you] **from all your sins**; you shall be purified before the Lord.”¹¹ **For transgressions between a man and the Omnipresent, Yom Kippur atones.** However, for transgressions between one person and another, Yom Kippur does not atone until he appeases the other person.

Rabbi Akiva said: How fortunate are you, Israel; before Whom do you purify yourselves, **and Who purifies you?** Your Father in Heaven, **as it is stated:** “**And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you will be purified [from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, I will purify you].**”¹² **And it says: “The mikveh of Israel is the L-rd.”**¹³

- Mishnah Yoma 8:9; Yoma 85b

Question 1: We need to check what the connection is between the words of Rabbi Akiva and the words of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya.

Question 2: Also, if they had already purified themselves, which has the meaning that they acted upon themselves, then how do we find a place to say “Who purifies you”? Haven't they already purified themselves?

Question 3: Why did [the Mishnah] bring two proofs that G-d cleanses us, from Ezekiel and from Jeremiah?

¹⁰ Actually, the *reish* faces away from the *kuf*, so it is the wicked person who does not want to look toward G d.

¹¹ Lev. 16:30.

¹² Ezek. 36:25.

¹³ Jer. 17:13. This is sometimes translated as, “the *hope* of Israel is the L-rd,” but in this context, it is interpreted as the ritual bath that removes many spiritual impurities.

וְנִשְׁלַח לְדַבְרֵי רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה מִשְׁמַע שְׂאֵף בְּלֹא תְשׁוּבָה יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר, דְּמִדְתְּנָא עֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְמָקוֹם יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר סֵתָם, וְגַבִּי עֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְחִבְרֹו אֵין יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר עַד שְׂיִרְצָה אֶת חִבְרֹו, מִשְׁמַע דְּעֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְמָקוֹם אֵין צוֹרֵךְ שְׂיִרְצָה הַמָּקוֹם. וְזֶה לְכַאוּרָה אֶתְנָא דְלֹא פְהִלְכְתָא דְרַבִּי סְבִירָא לִיהַ דְּיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר אֶף בְּלֹא תְשׁוּבָה, וְחֻכְמִים פְּלִיגִי עֲלֵיהּ שְׂאֵינוּ מְכַפֵּר אֶלָּא עִם הַתְּשׁוּבָה, וְיָדוּעַ דְּהִלְכָה כְּרַבְנֵנוּ.

It can be said that the words of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria mean that even without repentance, Yom Kippur effects atonement, from which we derive that for sins between man and the Omnipresent, Yom Kippur atones alone. But concerning sins between one person and another, Yom Kippur does not atone until he appeases the other person. This means that for sins between man and the Omnipresent, there is no need to appease the Omnipresent. This is apparently not according to the halacha, for Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi is of the opinion that Yom Kippur atones even without repentance, and the rabbis disagree with him, that it only atones with repentance, and it is known that the halacha accords with the rabbis.¹⁴

מִשׁוּם הַכִּי בָּא רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא לְהוֹסִיף אֲשֶׁרִיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנָי מִי אֲתֶם מִיִּשְׁתַּהֲרִין, כְּדֵי לְבָאֵר דְּבִרְיֹו דְּכַדְרַבְנֵנוּ נָמִי אֲתוּ, לְפִי שְׂהַחִילוּק שְׂיִישׁ בְּעֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְמָקוֹם, לְעֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְחִבְרֹו, הֵינְנוּ שְׁעִם הַמָּקוֹם דִּי שְׂיִהְרָהוּ בְּלָבוּ לְעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה, וְעַם חִבְרֹו צְרִיךְ שְׂיִרְצָה מִמֶּשׁ, וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה אֲשִׁמוּעֵינוּ שְׂעֲבִירוֹת שְׁבִין אָדָם לְמָקוֹם יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר בְּהִרְהוּר תְּשׁוּבָה בְּעֵלְמָא, אֲבָל שְׁבִין אָדָם לְחִבְרֹו צְרִיךְ שְׂיִרְצָה מִמֶּשׁ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה אוּ בְּדִבּוּר, וְלֹא דִי בְּהִרְהוּר.

Because of this, Rabbi Akiva came to add, “Fortunate are you, Israel, before Whom do you purify yourselves,” in order to clarify his words, which at first glance are like those that the rabbis also brought. This is because of the distinction that exists in sins between a person and the Omnipresent, and sins between one man and another person. The difference is that with the Omnipresent, it is enough that he should desire in his heart to repent, but with sins affecting another person, it is necessary that he appease him.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah informs us that for sins between man and the Omnipresent, Yom Kippur atones through feelings of repentance alone, but for sins between one person and another, he needs to appease him with actions or with speech, and it’s not enough through feelings of repentance.

This is the answer to question 1, the connection between the words of Rabbi Akiva and the words of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya.

¹⁴ Shevuot 13a; Yoma 85b.

ומעתה אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין, כלומר בהרהור הלב בעלמא, שאינו מכיר בו אלא המקום, תכף נקרא צדיק ואינו נקרא עוד רשע, אמנם לפי שהרהור אין לו פס להתקיים, ועוד שצריך לעשות מעשים טובים וסיגופים כדי לבטל המקטרגים שמקטרגים עליו ומכשילים אותו, משום הכי חזר לומר ומי מטהר אתכם דהינו לגמרי. אם לא יהיה לכם אלא הרהור תשובה, או אף תקנים זה הרהור. ומירץ אביכם שבשמים, כדכתיב "ונרקתי עליכם מים" וכו' כלומר מיד שתהרהרו בתשובה אני אזורק עליכם מרחוק, לפי שעדיין אתם טמאים במעשה, שהרי עדיין לא עשיתם מעשים טובים ולא נטהרו איבריכם וגופכם שנטמאו בעבירות, ומי"ם טהורי"ם גימטריא שוכבי"ם, והינו שישלח עזרם מקדש, שזה הרהור יתחזק בנדם ויעשו תשובה גמורה, וזהו "וטהרתם" כלומר שיעשו תשובה גמורה.

The second question dealt with Rabbi Akiva first saying that we purify ourselves, but then rhetorically asking Who purifies us.

And now Rabbi Akiva said: "Fortunate are you, Israel, before Whom do you purify yourselves," as if to say, by feelings alone, which only the Omnipresent recognizes, you are immediately called "righteous" and no longer called "wicked." However, these feelings don't have the power to endure. Because one needs to perform good deeds and undergo afflictions to annul the accusing angels, who accuse and lead one astray, he thus continued to say, "And Who purifies you," which means a complete purification. If you will only have feelings of repentance, can you be completely purified without good deeds or undergoing afflictions? Or how will this feeling endure, so you won't continue with the same sins?

The solution to the question, "Who purifies you," is "Your Father in Heaven." This is as it is written, "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you will be purified," as if to say, "As soon as you have feelings of repentance, I will sprinkle pure water upon you from a distance. [From a distance,] because you are still impure in action, as you have not yet performed good deeds, and your limbs and bodies which were impure from sins haven't become purified."

The words **"pure water"** [*mayim tehorim*] [מים טהורים] **have the same Gematria, 360, as "rebellious"** [*shovavim*] [שוכבים]. **This [means] that He will send [those who have only begun the process of repentance] help from the seat of holiness, from Heaven. Thus, the feeling of repentance will be strengthened in their hands and will be led to accomplish complete repentance. This is the meaning of the word "and you will be purified" [*u'thartem*] [וטהרתם], as if to say that they should perform a complete repentance.**

ולאחר שעשו כל מה שבנדם לעשות, אם עדיין לא תהיה מספקת לבטל המקטרגים לגמרי ולתקן כל המעוות, הקב"ה טוב וסלח" ויחשוב כאילו עשיתם תשובה מספקת, וזהו "מכל [טמאותיך] ומכל-גלולתכם אטהר אתכם".¹⁵

After they have done everything within their power to do, if it is still not sufficient to completely annul the prosecuting angels and to correct every twisted thing, the Holy One, Blessed be He, is "good and forgiving."¹⁶ He will consider it as if you have performed a

¹⁵ The first edition had the erroneous text "מכל חטאתיכם" ["from all your sins"], from Lev. 16:30.

¹⁶ Ps. 86:5.

sufficient repentance. This is the meaning of “from all your uncleanness and from all your idols, I will purify you.”

ואם תאמר איך קאמר קרא ברישא "וטהרתם", אם עדיין יש להם כל הטומאות והגילולים, משום הכי הוסיף ואמר "מקנה ישראל", שיהי קנימא לו סייב אדם לטהר עצמו ברגל. ואף על פי שבזמן הזה כלנו טמאי מתיים, עם כל זה המדקדקים גזקרים בטבילה זו, לפי שרומזת הטהרה על טהרת הנפש. על ידי טהרת הגוף מתעורר ומנדבף טהרת הנפש, וכמו שכתבו המקובלים. ואף פאן ואומר "מקנה ישראל ה'" מה מקנה מטהר את הטמאים, כלומר שיהם עדיין טמאים שאינם יכולים לטהר לגמרי ואף על פי כן המקנה מוסיף עליהם קדושה ומעורר טהרת הנפש, כך הקב"ה מטהר את ישראל מעט מעט אף קודם שיהיו טהורים לגמרי, כדי שאותה מקצת הטהרה יוסיף להם אומץ וכח להתחזק בטהרה. ועיין עוד לעיל בפרשת אהרי מות, ולקמן בפרשת וילך.

The third question asked why the Mishnah of Yoma brought two proofs that G-d cleanses.

If you will say, why is it first written, quoting Ezekiel, “and you will be purified,” if they still have impurities and idols, because of this possible objection, he also says, quoting Jeremiah, “the *mikveh* of Israel is the L-rd.” We hold that a man is obligated to purify himself by going to a *mikveh* on a Festival.¹⁷ Even though at this time we are all impure from contact with the dead, nevertheless those who are meticulous are careful with this immersion, because the purification hints at the purification of the soul. Through the purification of the body, the purification of the soul is aroused and refined, as the Kabbalists have written.

Even here, when it says, “the *mikveh* of Israel is the L-rd,” just as a *mikveh* purifies the impure, it is as if to say that they are still impure, as they are not able to be completely purified. Therefore, the *mikveh* adds holiness to them and arouses the purification of the soul.

Similarly, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel little-by-little, even before they are completely pure, so that this partial purification will give them the strength and courage to strengthen their purity.

See further above in parashat Acharei Mot (essay 3), and below in parashat Vayeilech (essay 4, the text “and according to this explanation”).

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¹⁷ Rosh Hashanah 16b.