

THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

Subscription 50 Cents a Year.

SEPTEMBER 1969

Vol. 54 - No. 1

The Suffering Messiah In The Yom Kippur Machzor

by JAMES MORROW

Messiah our Righteousness has turned from us.

We shudder that there is no one to justify us. Our iniquities, and the yoke of our transgressions

He carries, and he was wounded for our transgressions.

The author of this Yom Kippur prayer was Rabbi Eleazar Kalir. Today he is a figure shrouded in mystery and legend. As he walked through the streets of seventh century Tiberias or admired its lake view and gently rolling hills, he was inspired to write some of the most beautiful poetry ever to become a part of Jewish liturgy. More than 200 such poems have been attributed to him, and each of them reflects his vast knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud, and Midrashic and mystical lore. He has been credited with the invention of new literary forms in Hebrew poetry and was much imitated by later writers.

Kalir was a pupil of the Hebrew religious poet, Rabbi Yannai, a liturgist who remained even more obscure than Kalir until some fragments of his Machzor were found in an attic of the Cairo synagogue, Genizah. Yannai's poetry centered around *halacha*, i.e., legal teaching; whereas Kalir wrote about the more popular *agada*, or the story of the Talmud. Consequently, Kalir's poetry rapidly became popular with the common people, and his fame spread far and wide. People did not particularly relish listening to Yannai's poems which dealt with such matters as the laws concerning leprosy, but they loved Kalir's imaginative style and his frequent allusions to the more interesting passages of the Bible and Talmud. Yannai's poetry was didactic, explaining the ceremonial laws of the Torah; and his poems were recited sometimes as a substitute when, because of persecution, the official reading of the Torah in the synagogue was forbidden. However, permanent interest in such poetry was confined mainly to rabbis and scholars.

In time Yannai became intensely jealous of Kalir's popularity. One day he decided to play a mean trick on him. He found a scorpion and placed it in one of Kalir's

shoes, perhaps with the intention of merely injuring him. But Kalir was stung severely by the ugly creature and died soon afterward. When news of Kalir's death reached the Jewish residents of Lombardy, they were filled with grief and indignation. They vowed that never again would they recite one of Yannai's poems.

After a time, Yannai faded into almost total obscurity. Kalir remained popular with the Jewish Ashkenazic communities of Central and Eastern Europe, but for reasons that have not been explained, he was ignored by the Sephardim (the Spanish, North African and Asian Jews.)

Because Kalir lived in Israel in the seventh century, he was not subjected to the same pressures as those Jews who lived in Christian communities. It must not be forgotten that even after the Moslem conquest in 632 A.D. the population of Tiberias remained primarily Jewish, and life there did not change very much. Consequently, Kalir's liturgical poems retain some of the Messianic interpretations of Bible passages which were later reinterpreted by Jewish scholars such as Rashi and Redak who lived in so-called nominal Christian countries. An example of this can be seen in the following lines which we want to quote in their full context. They are taken from one of Kalir's poems for the Musaf service of Yom Kippur entitled, *Az Milifnei Breshit*:

We have been oppressed in our unjust gain until now.

Our Rock, you have not wept over us.

Messiah our Righteousness has turned from us.

We shudder that there is no one to justify us. Our iniquities, and the yoke of our transgressions

He carries, and he was wounded for our transgressions.

He carries our sins on his shoulders.

Forgiveness is found for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed.

O Eternal One, it is time to create him anew. Raise him up from the sphere.

Draw him up from Seir.

Gather us a second time on Mount Lebanon.

By means of Yinon.

Here Kalir has quoted from Isaiah 53:5, "He was wounded for our transgressions." The subject of this is the Messiah, here called "*Yinon*." This use of the name *Yinon* is taken from Psalm 72:17 (His name shall endure). The words "shall endure" represent the Hebrew *yinon* as interpreted by the Talmud in Sanh. 98b. It is also quoted in the Midrash on Lamentations 1:16. The name was much used by later poets who also based it on the Talmud or imitated Kalir. Thus in the well-known liturgical poem *Et Shaarei Ratson Lehipateach* by Yehudah Samuel b. Abbas (died 1163) the final line reads: "The time of salvation is coming to Zion; I am sending Yinon and Elijah." Another poem, by Jacob Naim, begins with the words, "Thou shalt send Yinon riding on a swift cloud," interpreting Isaiah 19:1 as indicating the manner in which the Messiah will appear.

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The Wilno Machzor for Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur contains the poem by Kalir quoted above, with a Hebrew commentary and a Yiddish translation. The Hebrew commentary contains the following paraphrase: "O Blessed Holy One, may it be Thy Will for the time to come when the Son of David will be healed of his sickness, and to make him a new creation in order to raise him up." It explains Mount Lebanon as the Holy Temple which whitens (Heb. *leban* means white) the iniquities of Israel.

The image depicted for us then, is that of a suffering Messiah ("wounded" is a better translation than "made sick" since the word used is *mechullal*, not *muchleh*). He has been wounded because of Israel's sins and he has temporarily turned away from his people. Kalir then beseeches God to allow Israel to hear him "a second time" from the temple mount.

Perhaps Rabbi Kalir did not know the true identity of the suffering Messiah whom he described. He probably took little notice of the fact that the very town in which he

lived and wrote his poetry was the one in which the Messiah lived and taught about 700 years earlier. Rabbi Eleazer Kalir definitely knew that Isaiah 53 referred to the Messiah, although he may never have suspected that the topic of that chapter was Jesus of Nazareth.

Respected reader, we trust that you realize that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilled all this chapter and many more prophecies of the Hebrew Bible to the letter. In the Yiddish portion of the Wilno Machzor, following the explanation that "Yinon" is the name of the Messiah, we find the words, "O God, may it be Thy Will to save us through the Messiah." This is the prayer which every person must pray in order to receive forgiveness of sin and full salvation, but the prayer must be said with complete trust and assurance that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and Savior of whom the Jewish Scriptures speak.

Your comments and response are most welcome. Please write us today.

I AM A JEW WHO BELIEVES IN JESUS

by MARGERY J. ANSELMA

I came from a happy home whose religious affiliation moved between Reform and Conservative Judaism. We usually attended the Conservative Synagogue, but the religious traditions of Judaism were only minimally observed in the home. I had strong personal feelings, however, about observing such ceremonies as the lighting of the Chanukah candles and keeping the fast on Yom Kippur. My high school friends knew that I would not sing Christmas carols which mentioned the name of Jesus Christ. When I was sixteen years old, I made a trip to Israel with an Orthodox Jewish group. This experience made a deep impression upon me. It helped me realize that I desired more of a spiritual dimension in my life. *But I didn't know how to go about achieving this.*

When I was a freshman in college, I was invited by some girls on my dormitory floor to attend a Bible study. I discovered that they were studying the New Testament, so I refused, saying that the New Testament and Jesus had nothing to do with me as a Jewish person. My roommate and some others I knew attended this study. As the months passed, I reconsidered. I decided to go out of curiosity. Before going, however, I extracted a promise from the leader to study the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

Week after week, I felt myself drawn back to this Bible study. There I met a group of girls for whom the Bible was a meaningful book. I discovered that through its message they had found a personal relationship

with God. I was amazed to find out that the New Testament is a book written by Jews, about Jews and also for Jews. The Apostle Paul, who was a deeply committed Jewish leader, had written: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (cultured Gentiles)." These words "to the Jew first" appear again and again throughout the New Testament. They moved me deeply.

When I examined my edition of the Jewish Scriptures, I discovered that they spoke of the Messiah, and the portrayal their words gave fitted Jesus! In the prophecies, especially in those of Isaiah, I found passages telling where he was to be born, what he would do, and how he would be rejected by men. If you have never made such an investigation for yourself, I would challenge you to do so.

I knew that I also wanted to have a personal relationship with God. But how could I embrace Jesus? I had rejected him for so long. How could I now take such a step and put my faith in him? A battle raged within me for quite awhile. But, through the witness of the Scripture and the lives of my friends, and through the yearnings of my heart to know God personally, the Lord drew me. I was finally willing to put my trust in the One through whom He had revealed Himself to me: Yeshua Ha'Meshiach, Jesus the Messiah.

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AMERICAN BOARD OF MISSIONS TO THE JEWS, Inc.

Established by Leopold Cohn in 1894



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Published monthly to make
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Subscription 50 Cents a Year.

SEPTEMBER 1969

Vol. 54 - No. 1

משיחם ליידין אינעם מחזור

פון יעקב מאַרדאָוו

מאכמעדאנער האָבן איבערגענומען ארץ ישראל איז נאָך אלץ טבריה פארבליבן א יידישע שטאָט און דאָס לעבן דאָרט האָט זיך ניט פיל געענ- דערט. דעריבער געפינען מיר אין רבי קאלירס פייטים פיל משיחישע פירושים אויף דער תורה, וואָס רש"י שפעטער און רד"ק האָבן זיי אנדערש פארטייטשט. אזוי ווי מיר קענען עס טאקע זען פון דעם אויבן ציטירן פונט וואָס הייבט זיך אָן מיט די ווערטער „אז מלפני בראשית“, אין מוסף פון יום כיפור:

באָדריקט ביז איצט זיינען מיר מיט אונדזער געווינס

א. ישראל פעלו, דו האָסט ניט געוויינט איבער אונדז

אָוועק פון אונדז איז משיח צידקינו מיר ציטערן, קיינער גערעכטפארטיקט אונדז, אָ אַדונינו

אָבער עבירות און דעם יאָר פון אונדזער זינד,

ער טראַגט און איז צעביילט פאַר אונדזער זינד

מיט דער צייט האָט רבי ינאי מקנא געווען אין רבי קאלירס פאָפולאריטעט. א געוויסן טאָג האָט ער אים געוואָלט אָפטאָן א שפיצל. ער האָט געפונען א סקאַרפּיאָן (עקרב) און ער האָט עס אַרײַנגעלייגט אין רבי קאלירס שײך אַרײַן, ער האָט מסתמא געמיינט אז עס וועט אים נאָר א שטאָך טאָן. אָבער רבי קאליר האָט זייער געליטן פון דעם בים און איז באַלד נאָכדעם נופטר גע- וואָרן. ווען די יידן אין לאַמבאַרדן זיינען געוואָרן געוואָרן וועגן דער פטירה פון רבי קאליר זיינען זיי זייער טרויעריק און אין כעס געוואָרן און געשוואָרן אז זיי וועלן מער ניט זאָגן די פּיוטים פון רבי ינאי.

און אזוי אַרום האָט מען כמעט פאַרגעסן רבי ינאים פּיוטים. אָבער רבי קאלירס פאָפולאריטעט איז געוואָקסן צווישן די אשכנזים אין צענטראַל און מזרח אייראָפּע, דאָך האָט מען זיינע פּיוטים ניט אויפגענומען צווישן די ספרדים. היות רבי קאליר האָט געלעבט אינעם זיבעטן יאָרהונדערט אין ארץ ישראל, האָט ער ניט געליטן פון די צרות וואָס יידן זיינען אַדורכגע- גאַנגען אין אייראָפּע. אפילו נאָכדעם ווי די

פנה מני משיח צידקינו, פולצנו ואין מי לצידקנו עונותינו ועול פשעיננו, עומס, והוא מחולל מפשעינו.

דער מחבר פון דעם דאָזיקן פּיוט איז געווען רבי אליעזר הקאַליר. ווען ער פלעגט גיין שפּאַצירן אויף די גאַסן פון טבריה אין זיבעטן יאָרהונדערט אָדער ווען ער פלעגט זיך צוקוקן צום ים כינרת האָט עס אים מסתמא אינספּירירט אַנצושרייבן זיינע וואונדער-שיינע פּיוטים לויטן אַלף בית, וואָס מען האָט זיי אַרײַנגעשטעלט אינעם יום כ״ד פּור מחזור. עס איז פעסטגעשטעלט געוואָרן אז ער האָט געשריבן 200 פּיוטים און אין איטלעכן ווייזט ער זיין בקיאות אינעם תנ"ך, אין תלמוד, מדרש און אין די ספרי קבלה. ער איז געווען דער שעפּער פון נייע שיטות אין פּיוט און שפעטערע פּאָעטן האָבן אים נאָכגעאַנט.

רבי אליעזר קאליר איז געווען א תלמיד פונעם גרויסן בעל פּיוט, רב ינאי, וועמענס פּויר טים זיינען ווייניקער באַקאַנט, און נאָר אַ חלק פון זיינע פּיוטים האָט מען געפונען אין דער גניזה אין א שול אין קאַראַאָ, מצרים. רב ינאים פּיוטים באַציען זיך מער צו דער הלכה, און רבי קא- לירס באַציען זיך מער צו דער אַגדה פונעם תלמוד. אַלס רעזולטאַט דערפון איז רבי קאלירס פּיוט געוואָרן באַקאַנט צווישן עמך, פשוטע יידן. אין אַלגעמיין זיינען מענטשן דעמאָלט ניט גע- ווען אינטערעסירט אויסצוהערן רבי ינאים פּיוטים וואָס האָבן באַהאַנדלט דינים וועגן קרעציקע (מצורעים) ל"ע, אָבער האָבן בעסער הנאָה געהאַט פון רבי קאלירס פּיוטים וואָס האָבן זיך באַזירט אויף די שיינע שטעלן פונעם תנ"ך און תלמוד. רב ינאים פּיוטים זיינען געווען פּול מיט דינים און מען פלעגט זיי שטודירן ווען מען האָט ניט געטאַרט לערנען גמרא און תורה. דאָך עס האָבן זיך נאָר פאַרנומען מיט זיינע פּיוטים רבנים און בעלי תורה.

א הערלעכע מתנה!

א זייער שיינער לוח מיט יידיש אַרטיסטישע בילדער פאַר דעם יאָר ה' תש"ל (5730) מיט פּסוקים פונעם תנ"ך פאַר יעדן טאָג באַזונדערס.

נאַטירלעך וועט איר דאָרט געפינען אַלץ וואָס מען דאַרף וויסן וועגן די יום טובים.

שרייבט אונדז און מיר וועלן אייך שיקן אינגאַנצן אומזיסט דעם דאָזיקן שיינעם לוח.

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