

PESIQTA RABBATI 34

1st Subject

§1 *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, your king will come to you; vindicated and saving is he (tzaddiq ve-nosha^c hu'), afflicted (^coni) and he is riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass (Zech. 9:9)*

2nd Subject

This is that which was said in the holy spirit by Isaiah (*zo hi' she-ne'emera^h be-ruah ha-qodesh ^cal yedei Yesha^cyah*): *And their seed (zar^cam) shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples (Isa. 61:9).*

§2 Concerning whom (*ke-neged mi*) did Isaiah speak this verse? He spoke it only concerning the Mourners for Zion (*'Avelei Tziyyon*) to whom the Holy One, blessed be he, will give victory over their enemies, as it is said, *And their seed shall be known among the nations.* Do not read "their seed" (*zar^cam*) but "their arm" (*zero^cam*).

But who will stand by them with his arm? The Holy One, blessed be he, will stand by them with his arm. *O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for you; be our arm every morning, our deliverance also in the time of distress (Isa. 33:2)* say those who rise early every morning to beseech mercy, but these mourners yearn for deliverance, morning, evening and noon, and suffer great distress at the hands of Israel who mock and scorn them.

§3 But when Israel sees the afflictions decreed by God for that final year (emending to *ha-'aharit*) in which the Messiah is to appear among them, how they come one after another without ceasing, then at once they will understand (emending *mbzyn* to *mbynyn = mevinin*) and say: "In our lifetime there has been nothing like this. Perhaps the Messiah is about to arrive?"

And these are some of the afflictions by which they will come to understanding: In Nisan on a Sabbath eve during the seventh year, a wind will come forth from the west, and snow descend from heaven and smite all the seed. And afterwards, month after month, evil things will begin to happen, and will double (emend to *ve-kofelin*) in their degree of evil. Then they will understand and say: "Surely this betokens the king Messiah". Even so their conviction will not be settled in the seventh year until in they are so punished that they have faces as black as the bottom of a pot. And wherewith will they be punished? With famine, because the heart of Israel is not broken except by famine.

§4 Then the righteous of the generation (*tzaddiqei ha-dor*) will stand up and remove their tefillin, lay them upon the ground, and say to him: “Master of the Universe, we have not acted rightly all these years – *like sheep we have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way* (Isa. 53:6).” The Holy One, blessed be he, will say: “It is forgiven you.” Then he will kiss them and lay a crown on them. He who has the merit of Torah will find it standing by him; but he who does not have the merit of Torah, Torah (emending to *Torah Torah*) will be against him? Hence you have learned (*ha’ lamadta*) that whoever believes during the first year (emending to *ba-shanah ha-ri’shonah*: mss *ba-mishnah ha-ri’shonah*, “in the first Mishnah!) will have his reward doubled many times over.

§5 *All who see them will acknowledge them* (Isa. 61:9) – all will acknowledge the Mourners for Zion with whom the Holy One, blessed be he, will specially concern himself. For during the time immediately preceding the appearance of the Messiah, the Holy One, blessed be he, will increase the number of the angels of destruction hovering over his world, and these will take their toll of those children of Israel who scorned the possibility of redemption. At that time the Mourners for Zion will walk among and beside the angels of destruction like a man visiting with his fellow man, for the angels of destruction will do no harm to the Mourners for Zion.

And the children of Israel, dumbfounded, will say: “Without justification we made sport of the Mourners for Zion. Without justification we mocked their words.” They will go on to say, according to Rabbi Yose the son of Rabbi Hanina: “And yet the merit of these Mourners nurtured in them the power to withstand the angels of destruction. What temerity we had to belittle them in our hearts!” This confession will come at the same time that, according to Isaiah, *The nations shall see your triumph* (Isa. 62:2) – that is, all the children of Israel will be like kings, for they will be possessed of God’s wisdom. This possession will be your glory, Israel, for all the nations to see.

Close of 2nd
Subject

All the foregoing commentary is derived from meditation upon the verse *And their arm shall be known among the nations*.

Recapitulation
of 1st Subject

§6 Another comment: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion ... Behold, your king comes* etc. (Zech. 9:9). He who is called *king* is the one who is meant to rule over the generations that have been and over the generations that are to be.

3rd Subject

1st development

And the Holy One, blessed be he, will have it proclaimed and said to all the righteous men of generation after generation: “O righteous men of the world, even though your obedience to words of Torah is pleasing to me, yet you wait only upon my Torah – you do not wait upon my

kingship. Hence I have declared on oath that for him who waits for my kingship I myself shall bear witness on his behalf, as it is said: *Therefore wait for me, says the Lord, until the day that I shall rise up to witness* (Zeph. 3:8).

Those who have waited for me are the Mourners for Zion who grieved with me because of my House which is destroyed and because of my Temple which is desolate. Now I bear witness for them, each of whom Scripture describes in the verse, *With one that is of a contrite and humble spirit* (Isa. 57:15). Do not read *with one that is of a contrite ... spirit*: read rather *he that is of a contrite ... spirit grieves with me*. Such are the Mourners for Zion who humbled their spirits, listened meekly to abuse of their persons, keeping silent the while, and yet did not consider themselves particularly virtuous therefore."

2nd development

§7 Another comment: *Until the day that I rise up to witness*. That is, on the day that I myself will rise up to witness for the Messiah, whose merit is equal to the entire household of heaven, [and say]: "Since you know all the attributes with which I have endowed the Messiah, could you not have waited for me to send him to you?"

The children of Israel will reply: "Master of the Universe, you gave us a heart of stone and it led us astray. If ^cAzza and ^cAzza'el, whose bodies were fire, sinned when they came down to earth, would not we of flesh and blood sin all the more?"

God will answer: "The Mourners merit the Messiah because they avowed their need of him as coming before gratifying any other desires they had."

Then, at this answer, all the righteous men of the world will weep, saying to him: "Yes, the Mourners for Zion came to this avowal, but we failed to."

Whereupon the Holy One, blessed be he, will say: "Do not weep, my holy ones, my glorious ones. I have already heard your prayer. Do you think you will be denied the reward for your obedience to Torah? It goes without saying that your reward will be ample, as it is said: *And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted that he may have compassion on you; for the Lord is a God of justice, happy are all who wait for him. For, O people who dwell in Zion at Jerusalem, you shall weep no more; the Gracious One will be gracious to you at the voice of your cry, when he will hear, he will answer you* (Isa. 30:18-19) *The Gracious One*, the One who gives reward for obedience to Torah, will be gracious to you, and you will enjoy the days of the Messiah; when he will hear, he will answer you in the world to come, [which lies beyond the days of the

Messiah]. And all the good things that I intend to bestow on you are on account of the Messiah who has been kept in confinement all these years.”

Close of 3rd
Subject

Rabbi Yannai said in the name of Rav: He who looks forward to deliverance as from a watchtower, him the Holy One, blessed be he, will cause to lie down in the Garden of Eden, as it is said: *In a good pasture ... I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down* (Ezek. 34:15).

Recapitulation
of 1st Subject

Vindicated and saving is he (tzaddiq ve-nosha' hu') (Zech. 9:9): this is the Messiah who vindicated God's judgement upon Israel, when they laughed at him while he sat in prison: hence he is called *vindicated*.

Development

Why is he called *saving*, if not because having vindicated the judgement on their behalf, he said to them: “Though all of you are sons of destruction, nevertheless you will be saved, every one of you, by the mercy of the Holy One, blessed be he.”

Afflicted, and he is riding upon an ass (ibid.): this is the Messiah.

And why is he called *afflicted*? Because he was afflicted during all those years in prison while transgressors in Israel laughed at him.

Why does Scripture say *he is riding upon an ass*? Because the wicked have no merit of their own, but he who goes goes and recalls (the merit of) the Fathers. (But) through the merit of the Messiah, the Holy One, blessed be he, shields them <and guides them> in a straight way, and redeems them, as it is said: *They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them; I will guide them to rivers of waters, in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born* (Jer. 31:9).

What is the meaning of *he* in *he is riding (ve-hu' rokheb)*? He – in the days of the Messiah, He – in the world to come, and there will be no other.

Coda

And his enemies will I clothe with shame (Ps. 132:18): these are those who dispute with him. *And upon himself shall his crown shine (ibid.)* – upon him and those who are like him.