



Parshanut and Polemics IX

Marty Lockshin, Torah in Motion 5781

Trinity: Rabbi Yosef Bekhor Shor (late 12th century) on נעשה אדם

ואם יאמר לך מין: בשביל ג' חלקים הוא אומר לשון רבים, . . .

ולפתיותם יש להשיב . . . ואף אתה הקהה את שיניו ואמור לו:

אי אתה מודה ששלתם שוה, ודעתם שוה, וכח אחד להם, אם כן, למה הוצרך לומר לחבירו: נעשה אדם, להזהירם ולהזמיןם, . . .

ולפי דבריהם היה להם לומר: ויאמרו נעשה אדם, ואז היה משמע שכולם באו באמירה אחת ובמחשבה אחת.

נמצאו דבריהם הבל וריק.

If a *min* says to you, "it is because of the three persons [of the Trinity] that the plural is used..."

One should respond to their foolishness, . . . by blunting their teeth [with the following refutation]:

"Don't you claim that the three of them are equal, and of one mind, and all share in one power, why is it necessary for one [part] to say to the other 'let us make man' as if to inform or invite [the other]? . . ."

The text, according to their understanding, should read, "And they said, 'Let us make man'," which would imply that each of them said it together with one thought.

Their words prove to be vain and empty.

Trinity: Bekhor Shor on the two angels sent to Sodom

המלאכים: שלוחים של מקום, כמו: וישלח יעקב מלאכים ומזה הפסוק תשובה למינין שאומרים: שלשה האנשים האילו ג' החלקים הם. ויש להשיבם: כשבאו לסדום היכן היה החלק השלישי, שאין שם רק שני חלקים, כדכתיב: ויבאו שני המלאכים וגו'. ועוד שאמר: וישלחנו ה' לשחתה ואיזה שלח? הלא כולם שווים.

“The angels:” – Messengers of the Omnipresent, as in, “And Jacob sent messengers” (Gen 32:4). And from this verse [there is] a response to the *minim* who say: These three men [of Genesis 18:2] are the three parts [of the Trinity]. One may respond: When they arrived in Sodom, where was the third part!? For only two of the parts were there [in Sodom], as is written, “And the two angels arrived...” Furthermore, it is written, “And the Lord sent us to destroy” (Gen 19:13). [You may respond]: Which part [of the Trinity] did the sending? Are they not all equal?

Virgin Birth: Bekhor Shor on Abraham's servant swearing placing his hand under Abraham's thigh

והמינין אומרים: מפני שמשם יצא
ישו תרפותם. ויש להשיבם: הלא
לא הורה על ידי גבר - לדבריהם;
על רחמה של אשה היה להם
לישבע.

Jerome (4th century), *Against Jovinianus*

Abraham also makes his servant swear upon his thigh, that is, on Christ, who was to spring from his seed

The *minim* say that [the oath was made in that way] in order to recall that Jesus, their false god, was born from there. One should answer them that according to them, he was not conceived through any man. So logically the servant should have sworn by putting his hand on the genitals of a woman.

Virgin Birth: Bekhor Shor Deut 18:15

נְבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ כַּמִּנִּי יִקִּים לְךָ
ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן

מקרבך מאחיד כמוני – מיוחס,
מאב ואם, ולא שאמו משתקתו
מפני שבא דרך זימה,

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed.

“From among your own people, like myself” – i.e. someone with *yichus*, with a [known] father and mother, and not someone whose mother is silent about who the father was since he was produced through illicit sexuality.

Cyprian (3rd century)

Testimonies Against the Jews 1:18

That another Prophet such as Moses was promised, to wit, one who should give a new testament, and who rather ought to be heard.

In Deuteronomy God said to Moses: "And the Lord said to me, A Prophet will I raise up to them from among their brethren, such as you, and I will give my word in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them that which I shall command Him. And whosoever shall not hear whatsoever things that Prophet shall speak in my name, I will avenge it." Concerning whom also Christ says in the Gospel according to John: "Search the Scriptures, in which you think you have eternal life. These are they which set forth testimony concerning me; and you will not come to me, that you might have life. Do not think that I accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuses you, Moses, on whom you hope. For if you had believed Moses, you would also believe me: for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe my words? "

(One version of) Toledot Yeshu

In the year 3671 (= 89 BCE) in the days of King Yannai, a great misfortune befell Israel, when there arose a certain disreputable man of the tribe of Judah, whose name was Joseph Pandera. He lived at Bethlehem, in Judah.

Near his house dwelt a widow and her lovely and chaste daughter named Miriam. Miriam was betrothed to Yohanan, of the royal house of David, a man learned in the Torah and God-fearing.

At the close of a certain Sabbath, Joseph Pandera, attractive and like a warrior in appearance, having gazed lustfully upon Miriam, knocked upon the door of her room and betrayed her by pretending that he was her betrothed husband, Yohanan. Even so, she was amazed at this improper conduct and submitted only against her will.

Thereafter, when Yohanan came to her, Miriam expressed astonishment at behavior so foreign to his character. It was thus that they both came to know the crime of Joseph Pandera and the terrible mistake on the part of Miriam. Whereupon Yohanan went to Rabban Shimeon ben Shetah and related to him the tragic seduction. Lacking witnesses required for the punishment of Joseph Pandera, and Miriam being with child, Yohanan left for Babylonia.

Icons: Bekhor Shor on making idols (Exodus 20)

לא תעשה לך פסל וכל תמונה - אם
תאמר לא אעבוד אלהים אחרים,
אבל אתה אל מסתתר ואין לראותך,
כי לא יראך האדם וחי, אעשה לי
פסילים ותמונות, שיהו מצויים לי,
ואעבוד אותם ואשתחוה להם
לכבודך, ואז אזכור אותך, כמו שאמרו
המינין. לכך נאמר: לא תעשה לך,

Do not make any sculptured image or any likeness: Should you say, “I will not worship any other god, but since you are a hidden God who cannot be seen—since no person can see you and live—I will make an image or a likeness that I will always have at hand, and I will worship them and bow down to them in Your honour, and then I will remember you,” as the *minim* say. That is why the text says, “Do not make them” [and only later says “do not worship them”].

Icons: Bekhor Shor on the golden calf

אומות העולם מלעיגים עלינו
לאמר הלא אתם עשיתם את
העגל האומות מלעיגות עלינו
על עגל אחד שעשו אבותינו, והם
עושים בכל יום תילים צלמים עד
איו קץ.

The nations of the world mock us
for making the golden calf. . . .

They mock us for one calf that our
forefathers made, when they
make never-ending piles of idols
every day.

Epistle of Barnabas (1st/2nd century) 4:7-8

They lost it in this way for ever, when Moses had just received it. . . .
They lost it by turning unto idols. For thus saith the Lord; *Moses, Moses, come down quickly; for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have done unlawfully.* And Moses understood, and threw the two tables from his hands; and their covenant was broken in pieces, that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed into our hearts.

Eucharist: Bekhor Shor on drinking the burned golden calf

לתשובת מינין שמלעיגין על אותה
שתייה, אמור להם בכאן רמז:
אלהים שאוכלים ושותים אותו,
אין בו ממש, והם אוכלים בשר
תרפותם, והם שותים דמו בכל
שנה.

To refute the *minim* who make fun of the [Israelites'] drinking [the water containing the ashes of the burnt golden calf]: tell them that here the Torah teaches us through a hint that any god that can be eaten or drunk is not a god. Yet they [the Christians] eat the flesh of their false God and drink his blood every year.

For comparison: Rashbam on the Golden Calf

וכי שוטים היו, שלא היו יודעים שעגל זה
שנוצר היום לא העלם ממצרים? אלא כל
עובדי עבודה זרה יודעים שאלהינו שבשמים
ברא את העולם, אך בזה היו טועים:
שהתרפים יש בהם רוח טומאה כמו
הנביאים שיש בהם רוח הקדש, וסבורים
שהעגל שהיה מדבר ברוח הטומאה, כאילו
היה מדבר ברוח הקדש של מעלה. ולכך
אומרים: אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר
העלוך . . . ולנסות בו את ישראל נתן בו רוח
הטומאה של מיני מכשפות,

Were they so foolish as to think that this
calf, that was just made that very day, was
the one that took them out of Egypt?!
Rather [one must understand that] *all*
idolaters know that it is our God in heaven
who created the world. But their error was
as follows: *Teraphim* have an impure spirit
in them, just as prophets have a holy spirit.
When the calf spoke to them using impure
spirits, the Israelites felt that it was
speaking through the divine holy spirit. That
is why they said, "These are your gods, O
Israel, who brought you out of the land of
Egypt." . . . God put the impure spirits of
sorcery into the calf in order to test the
Israelites.

For comparison: Nitzahon Yashan (13th/14th century, Germany) on the Golden Calf

השיב ר' נתן האופסייל לכוזרים ששאלו
אותו למה עשיתם את העגל . . .

אמר להן: ארורים עורים אשר עינים לכם
ולא תראו כמה אתם נדונים ונתפסים
בגיהנם. והלא דברים קל וחומר: הם שטעו
בדבר נקי כמו הזהב נכתם עונם לפני
המקום . . .

אתם שאתם טועים ואומרים שנכנס דבר
קדושה באשה באותו מקום הסרוח . . .
קולטת זרע האיש על אחת כמה וכמה
שתאכלכם אש . . . וירדתם שאול.

Rabbi Nathan Official [13th century France] answered the priests who asked him, “Why did you make the golden calf?”

. . . . He replied, “Accursed are you blind men who have eyes and do not see how you will be judged and entrapped in hell. Why an a fortiori argument applies here: They erred in worshiping a clean thing like gold . . . [and they were punished].

Certainly then you who err in saying that something holy entered into that stinking place in a woman . . . that serves as receptacle for a man’s semen, you will certainly be consumed by fire and descend to deepest hell.

Nizzahon Yashan (Sec. 42): on priestly celibacy

This is how I confute the heretics and priests who assert that they refrain from being fruitful and multiplying. They say, “thus says the Lord to the eunuchs (*sarisim*) . . . I will give in my house and within my walls a place and a name better than sons and daughters”

Tell them: “Foolish and weak-minded men, what do eunuchs have to do with priests? The latter have testicles, and even if they do not engage in reproduction legally and publicly, they wallow in licentiousness in secret.”

“They even burn their sons and daughters in fire to their gods” (Deut 12:31): Burning refers to the priests and nuns who burn up in their lustful desire but are unable to consummate it; this is the sort of burning which is an abhorrent act that the Lord detests. . . .

Moreover, it is written in their own book of errors that Paul said, “It is better to marry than to burn” (I Cor. 7:9)

Nizzahon Yashan on priestly celibacy (cont.)

[Sec. 236]: It was because of the fact that they wallow in fornication and yet their Torah forbade them from marrying that they agreed to require men to come and tell their sin and publicize their adultery so that they might know which women were having extra-marital affairs. They then tell those women that they would like to do the same, and the women cannot deny anything since the adulterer has already identified them. This is certainly the explanation, because otherwise, why doesn't the pope, who is regarded as the vicar of their god and has the power to forbid and permit, give nuns the authority to hear the confession of women? It would clearly be more proper and acceptable for women to confess to women and men to men so that they should not be seduced into fornication and adultery.

Nizzahon Yashan (sec. 155) on the Proper Style of Arguing with Christians

הוי שקוד ללמוד תורה מה שתשיב
לאפיקורוס ולשאל להם. ובדברך
עמהם אל תניחהו ליכנס מדבר
לדבר, כי כן דרך הגוי העז והנמהר
לדלג מדבר לדבר

כי כשמרגיש שלא יכול לאמת
דבריו אז יתחיל לדברים אחרים.

Be diligent in the study of Torah in order to be able to answer a heretic and question them. When you speak to them, do not allow your antagonist to change the subject, for it is the usual method of the assertive and impatient Gentile to skip from one subject to another. . . . When he realizes his inability to verify his statements, he begins to discuss other matters.

Nizzahon Yashan on the Proper Style of Arguing with Christians (cont.)

והחולק עמהם יהיה לבן חיל לשאול
או להשיב על דבר אחד ולא יניחנו
לפטר מאותו דבר עד שיסיימו.

ואז תמצא את הגוי בוש וחפר
ימצא בעיקר כופר
וכל ישראל יתנו אמרי שפר.

One who argues with them should be strong-willed by asking questions or giving responses that deal with the specific issue at hand and not permitting his antagonist to extricate himself from the issue until it has been completed. Then you will find the Gentile thoroughly embarrassed; indeed, he will be found to have denied their central dogmas, while all Israel “will speak lovely words.”