

September 16, 1994

For "Face of God" Revision

Check the piyyut עשרה הרוגי מלכות on the אלה אזכרה.

What is the paytan trying to tell us? We know, of course, of the anachronisms of the piece. The framework about the tyrant and his daughter is also probably a convenient literary fiction. But what's his point?

I believe that a careful reading will yield the message: the martyrdom of these giants--and by extension any suffering--is not to be simplistically interpreted as punishment for any specific or even general sin. גזירה היא מלפני as the Divine response is sufficient evidence that the suffering is decreed by God for His own reasons though they seem quite arbitrary to humans, even such spiritual giants as R. Ishmael.

Moreover, the *only one* to mention the theme of suffering as punishment is--the tyrant, who declares his sadism as punishment for the Jews in place of their ancestors who sinned by selling Joseph into slavery! (Indeed, this may even have been a disguised polemic against Christianity which held that we are guilty of deicide, etc.)

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