

THE CAUSES AND CURES OF A RECURRING CURSE

1. Sidra ends with the story as significant as it is strange, and as genuinely meaningful as it is, apparently, irrelevant: the story of the blasphemy...

2. Rabbis speculate who he was. More important: why, what were his motivations? They offer a number of opinions, of which we shall dwell on two.

3. *אולי זה היה בן זר -- אולי? אולי זה היה מן העובדים.*
 Came from "his own world," an alien milieu, a non-Israelite context ~~in~~ society, and therefore could not appreciate the Jewish sensitivity to reverence for God.

The second opinion is that he wanted to settle in *בן דן*, because that is where his mother came from, but the tribe refused because his father was not a member of that tribe (his father was a non-Jew). The suit was brought before the court of Moses, which found in favor of the Tribe of Dan. *אולי זה היה מן העובדים...*
אולי זה היה מן העובדים... He felt unwanted, dispossessed, no place in the camp of Israel.

4. At first blush, the explanations are as fanciful as the story is strange. Yet -- neither fanciful nor strange. For, the tale of blasphemy is a recurrent curse, one that plagues us this very day. Of course, in modern world blasphemy is rare. I have not been called to any emergency meetings about the plague of blasphemy, nor woken up at night with such Halakhic questions. Contemporary rebel not express hostility and discontent by cursing

God by Name. Instead -- denies existence of God, and turns his back on the People of Israel. Present form of *פגמי חינוך* is: apathy, alienation, assimilation.

5. I, therefore, take the Biblical story and the Talmudic analysis as a parable or paradigm for all times, including our own.

6. First is: *כלי נדון*. Modern Jew lives in the wider world, which is a world drastically different from that positive^א by Torah: hedonistic, materialistic, a world where power is abused, a world without God or the image of God. When a person comes out of this world to the world of Jews, he expects to find an alternative -- something different, something nobler -- and usually what he finds is: the same old thing! We have so acculturated, adopted values of larger society, abandoned our own "world." Instead of *עולם קדוש* '3-4 *מדינה*, we have jettisoned the Kingdom of God in favor of "the world." So too often most of the Jewish community is as hedonistic, as materialistic, as unspiritual, as corrupt, as soulless, as ^{as another "world"} insensitive. No alternative!

7. No wonder that in 1970's some of our best young people opted out of the Jewish community and establishment. Till the 50's and 60's, we built large and empty temples, and Hillel groups with dances. So when the generation of the 70's arose rebelling against the Western World, and looking for something more serious, more real, they couldn't find it with us.

8. In a word, by *נדון*, the Rabbis mean not so much a world as a world-^{vi}few, not so much the *עולם* as the *עולם הקדוש*, not only

a welt, but a weltanschauung.

9. Another reason for contemporary *פיר* is because
אז ער וויל נישט אונזער פיל. I interpret: we have been
too ready to condemn the alienated Jew, or too unwilling to
open ourselves and our *וועלט* to him. Not only socially -- but
culturally and intellectually. The stranger or searcher has
not always felt comfortable with us. Even if he has found,
in some segments of the Jewish community, an alternative to
the world view which he is rejecting, he has often found them
barred to him, because they do not share the same language --
culturally, intellectually, professionally, educationally.
10. Hence, in order to avoid this recurring curse of alienation,
we must offer genuine alternatives in the sense of values, but
we must be able to speak the same language of culture.
11. This effort must be done, primarily, in the form of education.
12. What I have done is to describe an educational institution
which already exists -- Yeshiva University... (describe)
13. So, then, can we blame the blasphemer? Yes, we can, be-
cause he did not look hard enough. Had he done so, he would
have found in the YU and in its community, the alternative
which he seeks and the language which he seeks. Nevertheless,
it is our fault too. Because we have not supported YU
sufficiently, because we ought to have not 3000 students but
15,000, and because Yeshiva ought to be firmly established
financially, not causing heartache and agony to its supporters
and leaders.

14. Component parts of YU.

15. I have been associated with the University most of my life, as student and now as teacher, and so are many people in this audience. I cannot imagine what Jewish life in the United States would look like without it. Tragic.

16. Few people realize: no charge a single penny for *לפי '311' ד* -- all of it must come from our contributions. The theory behind it is: *מה אני מחינם לך אתם בדינים*.

17. Now inflation -- yet, never close doors on students of poor families. In the last three weeks, I have gotten two students into the Yeshiva -- without questions, without red tape, without making parents go through all humiliation. Story of youngster from Broome Street, only white family, mother dying father paralyzed, boy underfed, but brilliant. Multiply that by hundreds and hundreds.

18. Jewish Center -- Annual appeal for YU. A foremost institution of Jewish education cannot get adequate support from Orthodox Jews -- our kind of Orthodox Jews -- where then can it go?

19. Jewish life has more than its share of curses and blasphemies. Up to us to help YU develop its curses and its blessings. Trust will respond when appeal is made and may our help to YU in this blessing invoke on us *לפי 32 מנצח*.