

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

12 - SOLSTICE SURPRISES: CHRISTMAS, 9 TEVET & NITTEL NACHT OU ISRAEL/BEIT KNESSET HANASI - WINTER 2024/25

A] THE WINTER SOLSTICE - PAGAN ROOTS

- We are now in the mid-winter season, around the winter solstice. But does this still have any religious relevance to us today?

1. **מתני'.** ואלו אידיהן של עובדי כוכבים: קלנדא¹, וסטרנורא² ויום גנוסיה של מלכיהם, ויום הלילה **גמ'.** אמר רב חנן בר רבא: קלנדא - ח' ימים אחר תקופה³, סטרנורא - ח' ימים לפני תקופה, וסימנך: (תהלים קל"ה) **אָחוֹר וְקֵדָם צִרְתָּנִי** וגו'. לפי שראה אדם הראשון יום שמתמעט והולך, אמר: אוי לי! שמא בשביל שסרחתי עולם חשוך בעדי וחוזר לתוהו ובוהו, וזו היא מיתה שנקנסה עלי מן השמים. עמד וישב ח' ימים בתענית [ובתפלה]. כיון שראה תקופת טבת וראה יום שמאריך והולך, אמר: מנהגו של עולם הוא. הלך ועשה שמונה ימים טובים. **לשנה האחרת** עשן לאלו ולאלו ימים טובים, הוא קבעם לשם שמים, והם קבעום לשם עבודת כוכבים.

עבודה זרה ח.

The Mishna lists those pagan festivals before which there was a halachic prohibition to do business with idolators. The first two on the list are 'Kalanda' and 'Saturna'. The Gemara explains that Saturna is 8 days before the Winter Solstice and Kalanda is 8 days following. It traces their Midrashic routes to the reaction of Adam HaRishon to the darkening of the world as the solstice approaches and then 'rebirth' as the light began to return. This began as a way of connecting to the development of the monotheistic human relationship with God but was subsequently corrupted to paganism.⁴

2. מאי חנוכה? דתנו רבנן: בכ"ה בכסליו יומי דחנוכה תמניא אינון, דלא למספד בהון ודלא להתענות בהון. שכשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל, וכשגברה מלכות בית חשמונאי ונצחום, בדקו ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול, ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד. נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים. **לשנה אחרת** קבעום ועשאו ימים טובים בהלל והודאה.

שבת כא:

The comparisons with the way the Gemara describes the formation of Chanukah are unmistakable.

3. ויום גינוסיה של מלכיהם וכו'. מאי ויום גינוסיה של מלכיהם? אמר רב יהודה: יום שמעמידין בו עובדי כוכבים את מלכם. והתניא: יום גינוסיה ויום שמעמידין בו את מלכם! לא קשיא: הא דידיה, הא דבריה. ומי מוקמי מלכא בר מלכא? והתני רב יוסף: (עובדיה א"ב) **הִנֵּה קָטָן נִתְתִּיק בְּגוֹלָם** - שאין מושיבין מלך בן מלך, **בְּיוֹז אֶתְּהָ מְאֹד** - שאין להן לא כתב ולא לשון.

עבודה זרה י.

In defining Yom Ginusia the Gemara observes that the Romans did not have a hereditary monarchy and quotes from Ovadia - that Edom are a small and despised nation, in particular since they do not have their own script or language.

4. **כתב ולשון - של רומיים מאומה אחרת צאח להן.** אחרים תקנו להן כל ספריהם.

רש"י שם

Rashi explains that the Latin script and language are borrowed from another nation, and then adds that 'other people wrote all their books'. Why would Rashi add that and in how can it be understood?⁵

1. Kalends was the Roman name for new New Moon - hence the English word calendar. Interestingly the Roman Saturnalia and Kalends festivals were accompanied by drinking, buffoonery, sexual licence and cross-dressing, singing naked in the streets, giving gifts and the general relaxing of legal rules!

2. Some texts of the Mishna write this as סטרנורא - Saturnalia, which was the name of the Roman solstice festival which was held during the days leading up to the solstice and culminating in the 'Birthday of the Unconquerable Sun' on December 23. Tiferet Yisrael suggest that the name was changed purposely in some texts to 'Saturna' (the light is on the side) in order not to mention the name of a pagan god - Saturn.

3. The 4 Tekufot of the Jewish year mark the quarters of the solar year, each 91 days and 7.5 hours apart. They correspond with: the Winter Solstice (Tekufat Tevet), Vernal Equinox (Tekufat Nissan), Summer Solstice (Tekufat Tammuz) and Autumnal Equinox (Tekufat Tishrei).

4. See Rambam Hil. Avoda Zara 1:1 for an account of how most idolatry began in this way.

5. The Romans produced a vast literature including Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Pliny and many others!

B] 9 TEVET - AN ENIGMATIC FAST⁶**B1] MEGILAT TA'ANIT BATRA⁷**

5. כתב בה"ג: אלו הימים שמתענין בהם מן התורה (צית יוסף – אף על גז דמתקנת חכמים כס קרי לכו 'מן התורה' – לומר שיש ליזכר זהם כמו צל תורה) והמתענה בהם לא יאכל בהן ולא ישתה עד הערב. באחד בניסן מתו בני אהרן. בי' בו מתה מרים ונסתלק הבאר בכ"ח בכסליו שרף יהויקים את המגילה אשר כתב ברוך מפי ירמיה. בח' בטבת היה מעשה דתלמי המלך. בט' בו לא כתבו רבותינו על מה הוא. בי' בו סמך מלך בבל על ירושלים להחריבה ולעתיד לבא הקדוש ברוך הוא עתיד להפכם לששון ולשמחה דכתיב (ירמיהו לאיב) וְהִפַּכְתִּי אֶבְלָם לְשִׁשׁוֹן וְנַחֲמָתִים וְשִׂמְחָתִים מִיּוֹנָם. וכן יה"ר במהרה בימינו אמן!

טור אורח חיים הלכות תענית סימן תקפ

The Tur (14C Spain) quotes the Behag⁸ (8C Bavel) presents a list of fasts - also called Megilat Ta'anit - which are apparently as important as 'Torah mitzvot'. They comprise dates on which important Jewish figures died or tragedies occurred. Included is 9 Tevet but enigmatically the Behag writes that the Rabbis did not write why!⁹

6. אבל לא ראיתי מעולם ולא שמעתי מי שנהג להתענות זהם. וצאמת שיש לתמוה על מי שתיקנס. היאך תיקן קצתם להתענות צראש חודשא!?

בית יוסף אורח חיים סימן תקפ

The Beit Yosef writes that he has never heard of anyone keeping some of these fasts and they also present halachic issues - some are on Rosh Chodesh or Chanukah, when the Mishna prohibits any fasting!

7. אלו הימים שאירעו בהם צרות לאבותינו וראוי להתענות בהם. ואף על פי שמקצתם בראש חדש, יש מי שאומר שיתענו בו (וטוב שלא להשלים צראש חדש). ב' בשמונה בטבת נכתבה התורה יונת בימי תלמי המלך והיה חשך בעולם שלשה ימים. ובט' בו לא נודע איזו היא הצרה שאירע בו.

שו"ע אורח חיים תקפ

Yet he includes them in the Shulchan Aruch! For 9 Tevet he writes that a tragedy happened but it is not known what.

B2] TRADITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE ORIGIN OF THE FAST OF 9 TEVET

8. ועמד על כנו ר' יהוסף הלוי הנגיד בנו ומכל מדות טובות שהיו באביו לא חסר אלא אחת - שלא היה ענותן כאביו מפני שגדל בעושר ולא נשא עול בנעוריו. וגבה לבו עד להשחית ויקנאו בו סרני פלשתים עד שנהרג ביום השבת בתשעה בטבת שנת דתתכ"ן ... ומימי רבותי ז"ל הקדמונים שכתבו מגלת תענית וגזרו תענית בט' בטבת ולא ידעו על מה הוא. ומכאן ידענו שכווננו ברוח הקדש ליום זה!

ספר הקבלה לראב"ד

Ra'avad I^o writes in Sefer Hakabbalah that 9 Tevet is the date on which R. Yosef Hanagid was assassinated in 4826 (1065). The Behag in the 8th Century did not want to reveal this in advance!

9. ותלקח אסתר אל המלך אחשורוש אל בית מלכותו בח' חדש טבת בשנת שבע למלכותו:

אסתר ב"ט

Esther was kidnapped in the month of Tevet.

10. נקט זה החודש יותר מכל חדשי השנה להיות שבעל הלכות גדולות ז"ל כתב כל יומי דראוי להתענות בו, וכתב ט' טבת ולא כתב על מה מתענין בו, כי לא כתבו רבותינו טעמו. לכן קאמר שמחת אסתר היתה בחודש העשירי בחודש טבת

פירוש מחיר יין של הרמ"א שם

In his commentary on the Megilla, the Rema writes that Esther was kidnapped on 9 Tevet.

6. Much of the material in this section is based on a shiur by R. Shnayer Leiman - *Jewish Perspectives on Early Christianity - Nittel, the Ninth of Teves and Pope Simon Peter*, available at <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/details?shiurid=715371>. See also *The Scroll of Fasts: The Ninth of Tebeth*, Sid Z Leiman, The Jewish Quarterly Review LXXIV, No. 2 (Oct 1983) pp174-195.

7. This should not be confused with the much older Aramaic Megilat Ta'anit which dates from the Second Temple period and which lists holidays on which it was forbidden to fast. The later list quoted by the Behag is often referred to as Megilat Ta'anit Batra.

8. The text here is quoted from the Behag in the 8th century, but R. Leiman claims that it is likely to reflect the custom in Eretz Yisrael as early as the 6th century, although it is not mentioned in the Talmud Bavli, Yerushalmi or Midrashim.

9. In the time of the Rishonim this fast on 9 Tevet was observed and it was often noted that the reason was not known - see n.14 of R. Leiman's article ob cit.

10. Ravad I (R. Avraham ibn Daud, Spain c.1110 - c.1180). Not to be confused with the famous commentator on the Mishne Torah, Ravad III (Provence, 1125-1198)

- But nothing in this answer explains (a) why the date is not specifically mentioned in the verse; (b) why no fast is mentioned; or (c) why the fast was kept secret.

11. בט' בו לא נודע כו'. תימך גדולה! ה' איתא צסליחות של י' צצצצ דצצ' צו מת עזרא הסופר ול"ע רצ.

ט"ז אורח חיים סימן תקפ ס"ק (א)

The Taz expresses great surprise that the reason for 9 Tevet is not known. In our selichot for 10 Tevet we read that Ezra died on 9 Tevet.

12. בט' בו לא כתבו רבותינו על מה הוא ובו ביום מת עזרא הכהן ונחמיה בן חכליה.

מגילת תענית של בה"ג

In fact, although this wording does not appear in the Tur's list, the original Behag mentions 9 Tevet as having no known reason and then adds that 'on that day' Ezra died. It seems that the enigmatic fast of 9 Tevet is not because of Ezra!

B3] A CHRISTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE ORIGIN OF THE FAST OF 9 TEVET

13. נולד הנוצרי ... והוא נולד לדבריהם בשנת ג' אלפים תשס"א¹¹ לבריאה עולם בעשרים וחמשה ימים מחדש דייקבר [דיצמבר]. והוא יום שבת יום תשעה בטבת וראוי היה היום הזה להולד בו הרשעה, אם דבריהם אמת. אבל אין אדם מאמין לדבריהם האומרים על לידת התלוי שהם ידעו יומה שהיה ב'ה' בדייקבר כי הדבר הזה אינו כתוב להם באונגליין, ולא בכתבי תלמידי המכעים אשר הם מאמינים בהם. אבל היום הזה שהוא כ"ה מן דייקבר היה יום קלון לאומות הקדמונים עובדי האלילים והיה קדמוני כשדים קוראין לו 'מולד השנה'. ואחרים היו קוראין להם מולד החמה ... והיה היום מתחיל להאריך והלילה לקצר, וצמח האדמה והדשא והזרע מתחיל לקנות כח לצאת מתחת הארץ ולגדול לפרות. והיו משאילין אותו למולד הזמן וקוראין לו מולד וחדש לשנת ומולד החמה. וכשבאו תלמידי המכעים להתנעות את האומות האלה ולהכניסם במעות הוה אמצו אחד עתם לכבד היום הזה אשר היה מכובד בעיניהם. ואמרו לא היו עושין בו קלון גדול אלא מפני שהפסול הזה היה ראוי להולד בו. והחזירו היום אשר היה קלון לעובדי האלילים קלון לעובדי הפסילים ופסולים. וגלגלו אותו מטומאה לטומאה ומפשע לפשע.

ספר העיבור - ר' אברהם בר חייא

In the 19C Jewish academic scholars¹² found a christological explanation of the text! R. Avraham bar Chiya¹³ writes in Sefer Halbur¹⁴ that 25 December fell on 9 Tevet on the date of the birth of the Jesus¹⁵! Thus 9 Tevet was kept as a fast for this reason, although the Rabbis (for obvious reasons) refused to reveal why.

This has been accepted by many as the best explanation of the mystery of the fast of 9 Tevet, but many questions still remain:

- Did the Behag (or whoever first listed the fasts before him) know of this calculation when the list was prepared? R. Avraham bar Chiyah was a mathematician but others were not.
- Why would we accept the date of 25 December as the authentic birth of Jesus. The Sefer Halbur himself doubts that the date is correct and notes that it does not appear anywhere in the New Testament!¹⁶

14. ושמעתי בשם גדול אחד דאז נולד אותו האיש.

תוספות חדשים על מגילת תענית

This idea is also recorded in Tosefot Chadashim¹⁷ - a commentary on Megilat Ta'anit Batra, which writes that 9 Tevet is a fast day commemorating the birth of the founder of Christianity.

11. 3761, corresponding to 1 BCE. In fact the accepted position in the Catholic Church is that Jesus was born in 3 BCE and the dating to 1 BCE is based on an error which was introduced in the 6C by Dionysius Exiguus.

12. The founders of Wissenschaft des Judentums - Leopold Zunz, R. Solomon Judah Rapaport, Nechemia Bruell and others.

13. Spain, 1070-1136. A Jewish mathematician and astronomer - see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_bar_Hiyya.

14. Sefer Halbur is the oldest known book dealing specifically with the calculation of the Hebrew calendar. Although written in 1122, it was not published until 1851.

15. The poskim discuss whether it is halachically acceptable to say 'Jesus', 'Mary' etc in regular conversation. Although there is a prohibition (Shemot 23:13) to mention the names of foreign gods, Shu't Chavot Yair 1:1:11 (R. Yair Bachrach - 17C, Moravia) rules that this is permissible as the prohibition relates to names used specifically for idolatry and not personal names also associated with idolatry. See - <http://www.torahmusings.com/2011/03/jesus/>

16. The birth of Jesus was not of theological interest to the early Christians and was only raised as an issue in the second century. Before the 4C, various dates were suggested, including March 28, Sept 11 and Nov 18. Eventually, Dec 25 and Jan 6 emerged as the most popular options, although no serious Christian theologian actually considers these to be the date of Jesus' birth. December 25th was only celebrated as Christmas after the 4th Century and many Christians note that it is unlikely, based on a simple reading of the New Testament, that the birth was indeed in December (when shepherds would NOT have been watching their flocks! In fact, this is likely a reference to Migdal Eder and the Messianic ideas connected with that - see Targum Yonatan on Bereishit 35:2 - וינטל יעקב ופרס למשכניה מן להל' למגדל'א דעדר ארת'א דמתמן עתיד דאנגלי מלכ'א משיח'א בסוף יומ'א - Many have suggested that the dating of Christmas around the solstice is simply an adaptation and adoption of the Roman pagan festival of Saturnalia, in particular the feast of the birth of Sol Invictus - the Unconquered Sun - which was introduced in 274 CE. Some Puritan groups in the 17C prohibited the celebration of Christmas on the basis that it was pagan! This theory is however not universally accepted. For a fuller treatment see - *How December 25 Became Christmas*, Andrew McGowan, Bible History Daily 12/02/2016 - <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/how-december-25-became-christmas/>

See also http://www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/Christmas_TheRealStory.htm for R. Lawrence Kellerman's analysis of the origins of Christians.

17. R. Yehuda Leib ben Menachem of Korotochin, written in 1810, before the 3 Wissenschaft scholars mentioned above and before the publication of the Sod Halbur.

B4] THE HIDDEN YAHRZEIT OF A JEWISH HERO? SIMON PETER AND TOLDOT YESHU

15. מצאתי בכתב יד שט' טבת נפטר שמעון הקלפוס שהושיע את ישראל מצרה גדולה בזמן הפריצים. נקבע יום מיתתו לתענית עולם בירושלים.

הגהות רב ברוך פרקל לשו"ע אורח תק"פ

Rav Baruch Frankel Teomim¹⁸ writes in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch that the 9 Tevet is the Yahrzeit of a great Jewish hero - Shimon HaKalpus - who saved the Jewish people.

16. ותענית ט' טבת ... ובספר זכרונות ראיתי על פטירת שמעון הקלפוני שהשלים ליהודים והעלימו מפניהם. ובמגילת תענית נקט הלשון 'לא כתבו רבותינו על מה' משמע הכי.

מאורי אור, ר' אהרון וורמס

The 19C Talmudic commentator, R. Aharon Worms¹⁹ corroborates this and writes that 9 Tevet is the Yahrzeit of Shimon HaKalponi who made a hidden pact with the Jews!

- The reference is apparently to Simon-Peter, called Simon Kepha²⁰ in most versions of the Toldot Yeshu narratives.

17. And it was after these events, and there arose a great strife between the Christians and the Jews. For when a Christian would see a Jew, he would kill him, and the distress kept increasing for thirty years. And the Christians gathered by the thousands and ten thousands, and they prevented Israel from making the pilgrimage festival, and there was great distress in Israel like the day the [golden] calf was made, and they did not know what to do. But their faith strengthened more and more.

And twelve men went out and traveled through the twelve kingdoms, and they prophesied false prophecies in the camp, and Israel strayed after them. And they were men of renown, and they strengthened the belief in Jesus, for they said they were his emissaries, and many of the children of Israel gathered after them.

And the sages saw this evil thing, and it was very grievous to them. And a man said to his fellow, "Woe to us, for we have sinned, that this evil has come about in Israel in our days, that we and our fathers never heard of." And they were very distressed, and they sat and wept, and they lifted their eyes to heaven. And they said, "Please, Hashem, God of heaven, give us advice what to do, for we do not know what to do, and our eyes are upon You. For innocent blood has been spilled among Your people Israel because of that man. How long will this be a stumbling block for us, that [the belief in] Jesus strengthens the Christians against us, and they kill us - so many, and we remain few? And because of the stumbling blocks of Your people, the House of Israel, this has come about. And for the sake of Your name, give us advice what to do, to be separated from the congregation of Christians."

And it was when they finished speaking, an elder of the elders arose, and his name was Simeon Kefa, and he communicated with a heavenly voice. And he said to them: "Hear me, my brothers and people - if it is good in your eyes, I will separate these men from the congregation of the children of Israel, and they will have no portion or inheritance among Israel. But you must take upon yourselves the sin." And they all answered and said, "We take upon ourselves the sin, but do as you have spoken."

And Simeon Kefa went inside the Temple, and he wrote the great name and tore his flesh and placed the writing inside it. And he left the Temple and took out the writing and studied the name. And he went to the Christian metropolis and cried out in a loud voice and said, "All who believe in Jesus, come to me, for I am his emissary." And they said to him, "Give us a sign and miracle." And he said, "What sign do you request from me?" And they said, "Perform for us the same miracles that Jesus performed in his lifetime." And Simeon Kefa said, "Bring me a leper." And they brought him one. And he placed his hands on him, and behold, he was healed. And he said to them, "Bring me a corpse." And they brought one before him. And he placed his hand on him, and he came to life and stood on his feet. And those men saw and fell on their faces to the ground, and they said to him, "Truly, you are the emissary of Jesus, for he did thus for us in his lifetime."

And Simeon Kefa said to them, "I am the emissary of Jesus, and he commanded me to go to you. Swear to me that you will do everything that I command you." And they all answered and said, "We will do everything you tell us." And Simeon Kefa said to them, "Know that Jesus hated Israel and their Torah, as Isaiah prophesied, 'Your new moons and appointed festivals my soul hates' (Isaiah 1:14). And further know that he does not desire Israel, as Hosea prophesied, 'For you are not my people' (Hosea 1:9). And even though he has the power to uproot them from the world in an instant, in any case he does not want to destroy them entirely. Rather, he wants to leave them in order that his hanging and stoning will be remembered for all generations. And most of the great affliction that he suffered, all the torments, was in order to redeem you from Gehenna.

18. R. Baruch Frankel-Teomim (1760-1828), Leipnik, Moravia. Author of the Baruch Ta'am. He was the father-in-law of the Sanzer Rebbe (Divrei Chaim) and great grandson of the great kabbalist R. Noson Nota Shapira (Megale Amukot). Many regarded him as a Gadol HaDor of his time.

19. R. Aharon Worms (1754-1836), Chief Rabbi of Metz and talmid and successor of the Sha'agat Aryeh.

20. Kephas means 'rock' in Aramaic, translated into Koine Greek as Petros.

And now he warns you and commands you not to do any more evil to any Jew. And if a Jew says to a Christian, 'Come with me a mile,' he shall go with him two miles. And if a Jew strikes him on the left cheek, he shall turn to him the right cheek as well - so that they will receive their reward in this world, while in the world to come they will be judged to Gehenna. And if you do thus, you will merit to dwell with him in his portion. And behold, he commands you not to celebrate the festival of Matzot anymore. Rather, celebrate the day of his death. And instead of Shavuot, celebrate forty days from when he was stoned and ascended to heaven. And instead of Sukkot, celebrate his birthday. And on the eighth day of his birth, celebrate the day on which he was circumcised.

And they all answered and said, "We will do everything you have spoken, if only you stay with us. And he said, "I will dwell among you, if you do for me as he commanded me - not to eat any food except dry bread and measured water. And you must build me a tower in the city, and I will dwell in it until the day of my death." And they said, "As you speak, so shall we do." And they built a tower for him, and he dwelled in the tower as his home. And they provided his daily ration, bread and water, until the day of his death. And he served the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And he composed very many liturgical poems, and he sent them throughout all the borders of Israel, so it would serve as a memorial for all generations. And all the liturgical poems he composed, he sent to his rabbis. And Simeon dwelled in the tower for six years, and then he died. And they instructed to bury him in the tower, and they did so. Afterwards they built upon it a magnificent building, and this tower still stands in Rome, and they call it Peter²¹, which is a name meaning "stone", because he dwelled there on a stone until the day of his death.

Otzar HaMidrashim (Eisenstein), p 577, the Legend of Shimon Kefha (version 1)²²

18. And the chief of the Sanhedrin was named Shim'on Kefa. And why was his name Kefa? Because he would stand on the stone on which Ezekiel prophesied in the river Chebar, and on that very stone a divine voice would answer Shim'on from heaven.

When the Nazarenes heard that Shim'on Kefa was one of the hearers of the divine voice, and that in him was great uncountable wisdom, they were jealous of Israel, that such a great man was found in Israel. And the Blessed Name set in the mind of Shim'on Kefa to go to Jerusalem and pray during the festival of Sukkot. And all the hegemon and the great elder of the Nazarenes went to Shim'on Kefa on the Mount of Olives on the day of Hoshana Rabba. When they saw his wisdom they all agreed that one like him should not count for Israel, to convert him to the religion of the Nazarenes. And they forced him, saying, "If you do not go back to our religion, we will kill you, and we will not leave in Israel anyone who enters the Holy Temple.

When Israel saw this, they pleaded with him, "Accept their words and act by your wisdom, and the sin and transgression will not be upon you." At that, after he saw that the ruling was bad for Israel, he went back with the Nazarenes. And he said to them, "On one condition will I go back in your practice – that you never kill a Jew, nor strike him, but let him exit and enter the Holy Temple." And the elder and the Nazarenes accepted his words on them, all these conditions. And a condition he made for them that they would build him a tall tower and he would go in it and eat no meat nor you-know-what, just bread and water; to drop down to them a box on a string, and they would put bread and water alone in it, and to be in that tower until the day of his death. All this he did so as not to defile his soul nor be made unclean among them, nor be intermingled with them, in the name of heaven.

And upon the Nazarenes²³ he would say "According to your reasoning," as if he was mourning for Yeshu; and he would not eat meat nor you-know-what, just bread and water alone. And they built him a tower and he dwelt in it, and he was not defiled in eating, nor did he bow down to the image.

After some days he wrote poetry inside the tower – *qerovot*, *yotsrot*, and *zultot*²⁴ – by his name, as did 'Eliezer ben Qallir. And he sent and gathered the elders of Israel, and gave them everything that came from his reasoning, and commanded them that they should teach it to cantors, and they should pray with them so as to remember him for good. And also to Babylon they sent them, to Rabbi Natan the exilarch, and they showed them to the heads of the yeshivas, to the Sanhedrin, and said, "This is good," and they taught it to the cantors of all Israel. And everyone who would want to remember his name would pray it. Rabbi Shim'on in his song – remember his memory for life in the world to come! And may the Blessed Name in His mercy bring him a good advocate – *amen, selah!*

A parallel account is recorded in Sefer Toldot Yeshu²⁴.

21. In some versions of Sefer Toldot Yeshu the identity of this under-cover Jewish agent was switched to Paul - the founder of Christianity and apparent apostate from Judaism. In fact, Sefer Toldot Yeshu alleges that he was a 'double agent', appearing to found Christianity, but ultimately saving Judaism.

22. https://www.sefaria.org.il/Otzar_Midrashim%2C_Aggada_of_Shimon_Kippa%2C_Introduction.1?lang=bi. Three versions of the aggada are recorded there.

23. See Appendix 2 below.

24. Toldot Yeshu was written some time between the 4C and 8C and has been quoted and vilified by the Church for the last 1000 years. A number of printed versions are extant, one of which is available on-line. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toledot_Yeshu, <https://archive.org/stream/sefertoledotyes00unkngoog/page/n0/mode/2up> and <https://opensiddur.org/readings-and-source-texts/festival-and-fast-day-readings/readings-for-days-on-christian-calendars/nittel-nacht-readings/toldot-yeshu-according-to-the->

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In this version, Shimon was a Jewish insider who infiltrated the Christian establishment, becoming Bishop of Jerusalem²⁵. All of this was intended to separate the early Christians from the Jews and thereby enable to the Jews to identify which people were part of this heretical sect.

19. וימות שמעון [הקלפוני] ויתאבלו בני ישראל את שמעון. וקבעו יום מיתתו להתענות בכל שנה ושנה והוא ט' ימים בירח טבת

תולדות ישו (Huldreich version, 1705 - p.126)

The 1705 version of Toldot Yeshu refers to Shimon Kalponi and also refers to his Yahrzeit as 9 Tevet!

- It is not however clear whether the Huldreich version of Toldot Yeshu pre- or post-dates Megilat Ta'anit. Which was based on which?
- It is also unclear who wrote Toldot Yeshu and how reliable it is.

20.

Simon resided in the tower of Rome, where he ordained and codified the [Christian] laws and customs, as he was commanded to do by the King [of Judea] and the Sages. He transformed the alphabet, giving the letters new names, thereby intimating [to those in on the secret] that what he ordained

was false. This was the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F, . . . He also composed for them books of lies which he called *Avonkilayon*, but they thought he said *Evangelium* . . . Simon also authored books in the name of Jesus' disciples, including John, claiming that Jesus had provided him with all the material.

תולדות ישו (Huldreich version, 1705 - p.107-115)²⁶

21. יהודי שהמיר מכנין לו שם שנאמר (תהלים קל"ה) כְּמוֹהֶם יִהְיֶה עֲשֵׂיהֶם - כמוהם יש לכנות לו. כגון אם שמו אברהם יקרא אפרם וכן כיוצא בזה. ואפילו לצדיק והם תועים אחריו כגון שמעון כיפה שאומרים 'פטר חמור'.

ספר חסידים (מרגליות) סימן קצא

Sefer Chasidim also records a tradition that 'Peter' was a tzaddik but others after him became heretics. On that basis, Peter himself is often given the derogatory nickname - 'Peter chamor'²⁷

22. רש"י ד"ה כתב ולשון: אחרים תקנו להם כל ספרי טעותם - יוחנן, פאולוס, פיטרוס והם יהודים היו. 'לשון' הוא גרמטיקה - הוא הלשון שמדברים בו הגלחים. הם שנו ונמקו הלשון ועשו להם הכל לחשזם בפני עמם ולסלקם מעל ישראל. ולא שכפרו, כי לטובותן של ישראל נתכונו. אלא מפני שראו ישראל צלער וזדוחק מתרמייתו ישו, עשו עמם כאלו הם עמו צקדישות ולאו עליהם הכל. כמפורש בספור תליית ישו. ע"כ פירש"י

רש"י - דקדוקי סופרים עבודה זרה י.

There is a censored Rashi which quotes Sefer Toldot Yeshu and also attributes positive intentions to the New Testament writings of John, Peter and Paul.

[strasbourg-variant-cantillated-and-vocalized-by-isaac-gantwerk-mayer/](https://ia800708.us.archive.org/10/items/ToledotYeshuTheLifeStoryOfJesus_201812/Toledot%20Yeshu%20The%20Life%20Story%20of%20Jesus.pdf). A 2014 critical edition was produced by Peter Schaefer - *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus: Two Volumes and Database. Vol. I: Introduction and Translation. Vol. II: Critical Edition (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism) Bilingual Edition* and is available on Amazon (for a significant price!) although the first volume is available for download at:

https://ia800708.us.archive.org/10/items/ToledotYeshuTheLifeStoryOfJesus_201812/Toledot%20Yeshu%20The%20Life%20Story%20of%20Jesus.pdf

25. The classical records of Eusebius show that Simeon son of Clopas was a Jewish Christian leader and was Bishop of Jerusalem 70-107.

26. Translation by R. Leiman in his article ob cit.

27. Based on the mitzva of redeeming the firstborn donkey - Shemot 13:13 and 34:20.

APPENDIX 1 - LEARNING ON NITTEL NACHT

- The custom not to learn on Nittel Nacht²⁸ dates back to the Rishonim.
- The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained the custom so as not to give zechut to Jesus on that night. As such he said that Nittel Nacht had to be kept on 6 Jan where that was the night of Christmas.
- Ta'amei HaMinhagim (p 500) explains that it was dangerous for the Jews to leave their homes due to pogroms or have candles lit inside their homes. They would need to post guards to protect the community.
- Chatam Sofer brings a reason in the name of his Rav, R. Nathan Adler, that it is a sign of mourning.
- Chatam Sofer himself rejects that reason and suggests that we do not want the Jews to be sleeping when the non-Jews are zealously attending midnight mass! So the minhag was for the Jews to sleep in the first part of the night so that they could get up at midnight to learn Torah.
- The custom was not accepted by the Vilna Gaon and was not practiced in Lithuania.²⁹ It was also irrelevant to most of the Sefardi communities.³⁰ As such it was not accepted in Eretz Yisrael. The Chazon Ish learnt on Nittel Nacht. The Steipler learnt by heart and asked not to be told when Nittel Nacht was so that there would be no reason to interrupt his learning.
- The custom in Chabad is to play chess³¹.



The Lubavitcher Rebbe on Nittel Nacht playing chess with the Friediker Rebbe

28. The etymology of the word 'Nittel' is unclear. The most likely explanation is that it relates to 'natus' - birth in Latin. Some suggest that it is from the Hebrew לתלות - to hang, on the basis that Jesus is referred to as the נתלה. See also Rashi in source 20 who refers to the 'Toldot Yeshu' collections as 'Teliat Yeshu'.

29. See R. Moshe Sternbuch in Shu't Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 1:551.

30. See R. Ovadia Yosef in Shu't Yabia Omer 7 (YD) 20.

31. On Chabad customs and approaches to Nittelnacht see:

<https://chabadinfo.com/magazine/more-than-chess-the-history-and-meaning-of-nittel-nacht/> and <https://anash.org/nittel-nacht-what-to-do-and-what-not-to-do/>

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APPENDIX 2 - THE ORIGINS OF THE PRAYER NISHMAT

- Nishmat is an ancient prayer - R. Yochanan bar Nafach (180-279) is quoted in the Gemara³² as suggesting that it should be recited at the Pesach Seder after Hallel.
- Rav Amram Gaon (810-875) and R. Saadia Gaon (882-942) refer to it as being part of the Shabbat morning tefilla.
- As to its authorship, many identify a reverse 'Shimon' acrostic in the prayer and attribute it to a Shimon.³³

נְשִׁמַת כָּל חַי וְאֵלֹהֵינוּ מִלֵּא שִׁיכָה לַעֲדֵהנָה עֲזֹרֵנוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ מִי יִדְמָה לָךְ שׁוֹכֵן עַד מְרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ.

23. **ברכת השיר - וחזרתם בנשמת כל חי.** דנשמת כל חי היא ברכת השיר ששינו בערבי פסחים. ויש שאומרים על **אותו נבל שמעון פטר חמור** שהיא טעות של רומה יסדו אותה תפילה ושאר תפילות כשהיה על הסלע. וחס ושלוש שלא תהיה זאת בישראל. וכל האומר דבר זה כשיבנה בית המקדש יביא חטאת שמנה!

מחזור ויטרי - הלכות פסח ס"ו

Machzor Vitri quotes a tradition³⁵, which he vehemently rejects, that Simon-Peter composed the prayer Nishmat³⁶.

24. **ורבינו יעקב בר' מאיר פוסק** דבכל י"ח ברכות יכול אדם לחדש, בין דברים שהן הודאה ותפילה, בין דברים שהן צרכיו, הואיל ומעין ברכה הוא מחדש ולא הוי הפסק ברכה כלל. ומותר להאריך בהן כעין קרובות תפילות וסליחות שמסרו לנו רבותי אנשי השם **מימות שמעון כיפה שיסד סדר של יום הכיפורים - אתן תהלה.** ור' אלעזר בירבי קליר שהיה תנא ויסד קרובות למועדי השנה.

מחזור ויטרי - הלכות רא' השנה שכה

Yet Machzor Vitri also quotes a view that some of the Yom Kippur piyutim are connected to Simon-Peter.

25. והנה אני השתוממתי ונבהלתי זה כ"ד שנים כשראיתי במחזור ויטרי כ"י תשובת רבינו תם כתוב בה כי שמעון כיפה יסד סדר של יוה"כ אתן תהלה. וסרה תמיהתי אחרי עשרים שנה כשראיתי בפירוש המחזור כ"י שבידי אתן תהלה. שמעון כיפה שקורין ק' פיירו מרומי (מלות 'שקורין' וכו' כתובות על המחק ולא אדע מה היה כתוב בתחלה) עשה השבח הזה לאחר שתקן להם אמונת הנוצרים, ושם עצמו במגדל רומי כל ימיו בלחם צר ומים לחץ. ושלא להם זה השבח להודיע להם כי כלל לא היה מאמין בישו, אבל להשקיט הפריצים שהיו פורצים בישראל נתכוון עכ"ל. אז הבנתי כי דברי רבנו תם מיוסדים על שמועת שוא שנתפשטה בישראל בימי קדם בזמן הצרות והשמדות, בכוונה טובה לחזק אמונת ההמון כשישמעו כי ראש האפוסטולי כתב פיוטים בשבח האמונה הישראלית. ושכוונתו כשיסד האמונה החדשה לא היתה אלא לשם שמים ולטובתם של ישראל.

שד"ל במבוא למחזור מנהג בני רומא צד ז' (ליוורנו תרט"ז)

R. Shimon David Luzzato (Shadal) refers to this tradition, which he also understands to be false³⁷.

26.

גְּדִיכָה בְּעֵין זֵרֶכְךָ. וּפְלִאֲתֵי כְפִירוֹס יֵאֵן סָנִיג לַסְדוֹר כִּי"י טַאֲחַת קַסְיָו וְהוּא כְּפִסָּס סְרִי"ס וו"ל אֶטְעֵתִי סִר' יִסְדֵּה נֶר יִטְזָן זֵר' שְׁמַעוֹן בֵּן כִּיפָא יִסְד נִשְׁמַת עִר סִי יִדְמָה לָךְ טַב"ל וּנְפִירִיס אַחֵר סִלְחֵתִי נִזְל' שְׁמַעוֹן בֵּן כִּפָּה וו"ל שְׁמַעוֹן בֵּן שִׁמְשָׁח יִסְד אֶחָ נִשְׁמַת יִרְמֵי זָסוּ נִזְ לַסְפִּיעַ דְּכִינֵי ז' אֶזְכֵּן עַד ס' סִי יִדְמָה ע' עַד כִּנֵּס טַזִּינוּ ו' וְזִילֵי סִינוּ נ' נִשְׁמַת טַב"ל. נִשְׁמַת כָּל דְּזִי טַב"ל כָּל כְּנַעֲסֵס חִסְלָל יִס. וְרַחֵם

סידור עבודת ישראל (רעדעלהיים) עמ' 206

Some siddurim (here the famous Rodelheim siddur still used in Yekke communities) refer to the tradition of Peter writing Nishmat as well as the attribution to Shimon ben Shetach.

32. Pesachim 118a.

33. Some commentators attribute it to Shimon ben Shetach in the 2nd Temple period.

34. Nusach Ashkenaz does not include the vav at the start of this word but it is included in Nusach Sefard and Edot Hamizrachi. It is also in the siddur of Rav Amram Gaon.

35. This is often attributed to Rabbeinu Tam.

36. See <https://www.kotzblog.com/2016/11/102-did-st-peter-compose-nishmat-prayer.html?m=1>. This references an old Yemenite prayer book that similarly purports that Peter was the author of Nishmat. This source, dated at around the 1500's, is a handwritten note in Yehiya Bashiri's Baladi-Rite Siddur. See also Rav Ari Shevat on this issue <https://www.yeshiva.co/ask/57950>

37. He also writes in that Introduction: "Since the names of the first paytanim have been lost to memory, it has happened that the liturgical poems have been attributed to people who never thought to write them".