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WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRIESTS OF RHUTA TO PRIESTS OF FANUTA

The A.B. newspaper, since its establishment 42 years ago, has insisted upon encouraging the safe creativity of many writers among the Samaritan community, by collecting different compositions that were never published before and sometimes by bringing new compositions published in new prayer books, mostly composed by the scribe himself who published a book, or when he includes in his new book compositions of new writers. All of these were made in order to encourage the publisher to keep scribing and publishing and also the new writer to continue composing.

Part of the publicity in A.B. is by bringing compositions that were made for singing before the worshippers - they are compositions, poems and hymns that are made for happy occasions or sad occasions. It is rare that such compositions will be included in a part of the prayer books, and because of that A.B. became the only stage that is before the new writers. This is like a mutual favor for both sides, they are giving their compositions to A.B., and the newspaper is giving them a stage that helps their composition to be in front of the eyes of all members of the community who really like to read them with loud voices. They read, they are impressed, they criticize - and by this the writer enjoys double publicity of his composition and also from the feedback of the readers. Those enjoyments encourage the authors to continue their authorship.

In turn the editors contribute their part by beautiful layouts in the A.B., sometimes shortening long lines, in order that the composition will not miss its beautiful frame, or by correcting spelling, and sometimes by correcting the writing by replacing words that don't exist, or corrections of style that assert information in the wrong regard.

Frequently we are receiving complaints from new writers about changes that are made by us in their compositions. If in fact they themselves saw the corrections, or somebody else [took care to stimulate them] notified them of the editors' corrections - what can we say? It seems the publicity of their compositions in A.B. increased their self-evaluation in their own eyes, until they wondered how the editors dared to correct their compositions.

They always add threats that they will not publish any future compositions in A.B., or at least they consider that.

There is not any sense to be in distress because more than the cow wants to give milk the cattle want to suckle. In this case the cow is the Editor of A.B.

The Editors explain that they see these corrections that they make to the new compositions as both right and obligatory and for the favor of the writer. It is hard for us sometimes to resist the temptation to publish the composition as it was written, and to put

the writer to shame. However, if we would do that we will hurt our role as Editors who insist on a nice presentation of the newspaper that continues to be a source of pride to the community. We also consider how the writer will be presented before the eyes of the next generation that never knew our generation. Don't judge us wrongly, we don't change the spirit of the writings.

Every composition continues to identify its writer, not to mention that every writer repeats many times his own style of writing which will be his identification before the next generations.

Recently in one of the hymns that was published in A.B. we found its writer giving our priest the title of those who wear the Urim and Tammim, exactly like that. In another hymn they are called "incense burners." Since we don't always have the time to show the writers the mistake before publication, we ourselves make the necessary corrections that these titles will be phrased in the form of a wish towards the end of days.

These two titles fit the period of the days of goodwill [Rhuta], and they are not valid to the time of hiding faces started [Fanuta], in the year 261 after the entrance of the people of Israel to the Holy Land. These two titles, those who wear the lights of completeness, and burn the incense [in regard to the priests] were valid in the days that the tabernacle of Moses, the first tabernacle of the people of Israel existed. From the second year of their presence in the Sinai desert until the year 261 from the time of their entrance into the land. For three hundred complete years the tabernacle worship was active until it was hidden by the Almighty. Since the time it was hidden, the worship of sacrifices on Mount Gerizim was ceased. The temple and its utensils, including the lights of completeness [urim and tammim] and incense burners were hidden until the end of the days when the temple would be rediscovered and goodwill for the people of Israel would be in effect a gain.

It was the Rabban Yusef ben 'Aazzi, of the late 13th century that showed the difference between a priest of Rhuta to a priest of Fanuta. The Rabban Yusef was a high priest in office in Damascus who arrived in Nablus in the year 1290 CE to be the high priest of the Samaritan people near Mount Gerizim. There he stayed in office as the high priest until his death in the year 1308 CE. Most likely he was the one who invented the style of praise hymns [Yishtabach] because there are no hymns in this style before his time. He also wrote two important compositions that we sing loudly on Yom Kippur: Eh Il Re'om Wanon, God of Mercy and Compassion, and Yam Arremmem, [= Sea of Mercies], during the afternoon prayer and sunset prayers on Yom Kippur.

In those two compositions Rabban Yusef mourns the disappearance of the tabernacle and days of goodwill. He called them "the days of complete enlightenment" and "the days of burning the incense" and "the days of lighting the candles" and "the days of the pure table." Regarding the sacrifice, in the days of goodwill, and who offered them he said in an inarguable expression, "no priest is in charge [Ne'anim], and we have no more sacrifices." We are always laughing to ourselves frequently about those worshipers who make their voices louder, especially in this verse, because it actually means that they

criticize the priests of our days - although they understand the word "Ne'anim" as though it is in regard to honesty or belief. However, this is not the meaning of the word.

The Rabban Yusef himself was a descendant of the glorious family of the priests, the sons of Pinchas, the grandson of Aaron the first priest who wore the Urim and Tammim [lights of completeness]. He meant in the word "Ne'anim" in regard to taking charge and responsibility and fulfilling the role as Moses was described by the Almighty in that "he is faithful in all my house." [Numbers 12:7]. Therefore, "Ne'anim" in this regard was connected by the Rabban with the reality of the tabernacle worship. Priests in charge, according to him, are those who are responsible for the worship of the tabernacle and its utensils, among them the high priest who had the sole right when the tabernacle existed to wear the lights of completeness, and the priest that was in charge of the worship also served as the burners of the incense, Aaron and his sons. In this way the Rabban Yusef emphasized the clear difference between the priests of Rhuta to the priests of Fanuta.

The later are not in charge of any utensils from the utensils of the tabernacle because the tabernacle was hidden and they are not offering sacrifices anymore.

The only sacrifice that is not connected with the worship of the tabernacle, the pascal sacrifice, continues to go on and be offered on Mount Gerizim, but this sacrifice is a sacrifice of the people and their status when they offer it is like the status of the priests. This is why the editors corrected the line that described the priests by ancient titles to be written in the form of a wish that they will someday wear the lights of completeness.

A.B. Services

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