

Kehillat Tiferet Shalom

Newsletter - Sivan 5767 - May 2007



DVAR TORAH

As we approach the holiday of Shavuot and dwell on our collective memory of the giving of the Law at Sinai, we might also choose to emphasize those aspects of our tradition that lean toward religious pluralism. One particular midrashic tradition comes to mind, found in P'sikta D'Rav Kahana, which comments on how the Torah describes the beginning of the Ten Commandments:

R. Levi said: God appeared to them like one of those statues (ikonin) which seems to be facing in all directions; a thousand different people might be looking at it, with each feeling that that the statue is looking directly at them.

Such was the case when the Praised Holy One spoke with the people of Israel, each and every one of them said, "God is speaking to me" – why, the text does not state "I am the Lord your God (in plural form), rather, "I am the Lord your (in singular) God".

The Midrash tries to convey that each individual present at the giving of the Law heard the words issued directly from God's mouth in a very personal way. This is not about relativism – that is, that every individual, or for that matter, nation, possesses an autonomous truth. There are surely certain concepts and precepts upon which all would agree. But regarding the nuances, those slight differences in particular laws and opinions, it seems, at least to my understanding of this Midrash, that not all would agree on exactly what was heard. To be sure, our oral tradition is filled with disagreement. Often the details of a given law in the Torah differ between one passage and another.

Even in Islam, despite its image in the world, there are many followers who look for ways to engage in meaningful dialogue with representatives of other faiths. They quote the verse below which I heard often at the conference devoted to interfaith dialogue in Doha, Qatar that I recently attended:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ رَسُولُهُمْ قَضَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ (سُورَةُ يُنُسُ ٤٧)

And for every Ummah (a community or a nation), there is a Messenger; when their Messenger comes, the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged.

(Quran, Sura Yunus, 10:47, trans. Mohsin)

Many in Israel and around the world adhere to their religious beliefs and traditions in a way that negates that which is sacred to others. At this time of receiving the Law at Sinai, Hag Hashavuot, let us remember that the Words were heard, and continue to be heard, in different ways by each person present. Let us remember that while the Jewish tradition is the one that most suits us in our communal and personal endeavors, there are many around the world – whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or other – who have a spiritual tradition of their own, one that they believe will bring them salvation and justice.

Hag Sameah,
Rabbi David Lazar

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

ORIT KERET EXPLORES ANOTHER MEANING OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

We're counting the Days of the Omer and soon it will be Shavuot. You probably know it's also called the harvest holiday, and on this day the Torah was given. We're also all familiar with the customs, old and new, and the food associated with this holiday. It was the custom to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple, and through the ages we eat dairy products, like delicious cheese cake.

If you've been reading this column you know by now that I'm looking for the less familiar aspects of the holiday, and so I'd like to talk about a "new immigrant" whom we read about in the Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth tells the story of Naomi, who moved with her family from Judea to Moab. In Moab Naomi's two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. When Naomi's husband and her two sons died, Orpah chose to remain in Moab. In Hebrew her name is from the same root as 'oreph', the back of the neck, and accordingly Orpah turned her back on Naomi. But Ruth declared that she would go with Naomi: "Your people are my people and your God is my God." Naomi and Ruth returned at harvest time and were helped by Boaz, who allowed the stranger, Ruth, to gather wheat from his fields. He fell in love with her and the two were married, and become the great grandparents of King David. Some traditions maintain that King David was born and died on Shavuot.

When Ruth left Moab and followed Naomi to Judea she was a "new immigrant," and had to adjust to new customs and traditions that may not have always been easy to accept. About 400 years before that, seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael agreed to accept the Torah, and continued on the march to their new land, where they would be new immigrants. From then on, for the past three thousand years, new immigrants keep on coming, and each generation of "old timers" greets them warily.

This is a good time to tell you about another new immigrant, also named Ruth, who was called Ruti-Shmuti. She was the new girl in Karni's class, and stood out because she behaved and dressed differently. The kids laughed at her and didn't want to play with her, all except Karni, who befriended her. When the rest of the children realized in what difficult conditions Ruti lived they opened up to her and she became one of them. The author of this story, Rivka Keren-Friedlander, was herself a new immigrant, and tells the story from both girls' point of view. About two thousand years separate Ruth the Moabite and Ruti-Shmuti, but there are still "Ruths" who depend on the kindness of strangers and "Karnis" who reach out to them.

SAVE THE DATE - FRIDAY, JUNE 22ND

The 8th National Masorti Women's Study Day will take place at the Schechter Institute, Jerusalem, 8:30 AM - 2:30 PM. This year's theme is "Women in Literature: Rabbinic, Shakespearean & Modern."

A SPECIAL WEDDING ON SHAVUOT

Shavuot is the only one of the three pilgrimage festivals - Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot- not assigned a particular historical meaning in the Chumash. Nor does the Chumash prescribe how to celebrate, other than to sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. After the destruction of the Temple and the

custom seems to have been more prevalent in Sephardic and Mediterranean communities, it is known in Ashkenaz as well. Various versions of this “Ketubah” are filled with the language of Piyyutim and reflect the traditional standard Ketubah. The document is read as the symbolic betrothal between God and Israel, specifying the conditions, obligations and declarations of the parties.

The most common version is that composed by the Israel Najara, a mystic poet from Safed. Here are a few excerpts:

“Thus the sum total of the contract and the dowry, with the addition of the positive and negative commandments, amounts to the following: ‘Revere God and observe His commandments; this applies to all mankind’ [Ecclesiastes 12:13]. The Bridegroom, desiring to confer privileges upon His people Israel and to transmit these valuable assets to them, took upon Himself the responsibility of this marriage contract, to be paid from the best portions of his property.....”

“All these conditions are valid and established forever and ever. The Bridegroom has given His oath to carry them out in favor of His people and to enable those that love Him to inherit substance. Thus the Lord has given His oath. The Bridegroom has followed the legal formality of symbolic delivery of this document, which is bigger than the earth and broader than the seas. Everything, then, is firm, clear and established...”

The text of the Ketubah, including a special version for the festival if it falls on Shabbat, is shown in Fig. 1. It was written in Italy in 1661 for a member of the Finzi family in Pesaro. The text is that of Israel Najara, who died some 35 years earlier in Safed.

The second example (Fig. 2) is from Ancona, Italy, from around 1800. The scribe was one Yom Tov Nianiati. It contains a separate text for the second day of Shavuot as celebrated in his community. The decoration of the title page may reflect the custom in Italy of decorating Ketubot.

Fig. 2

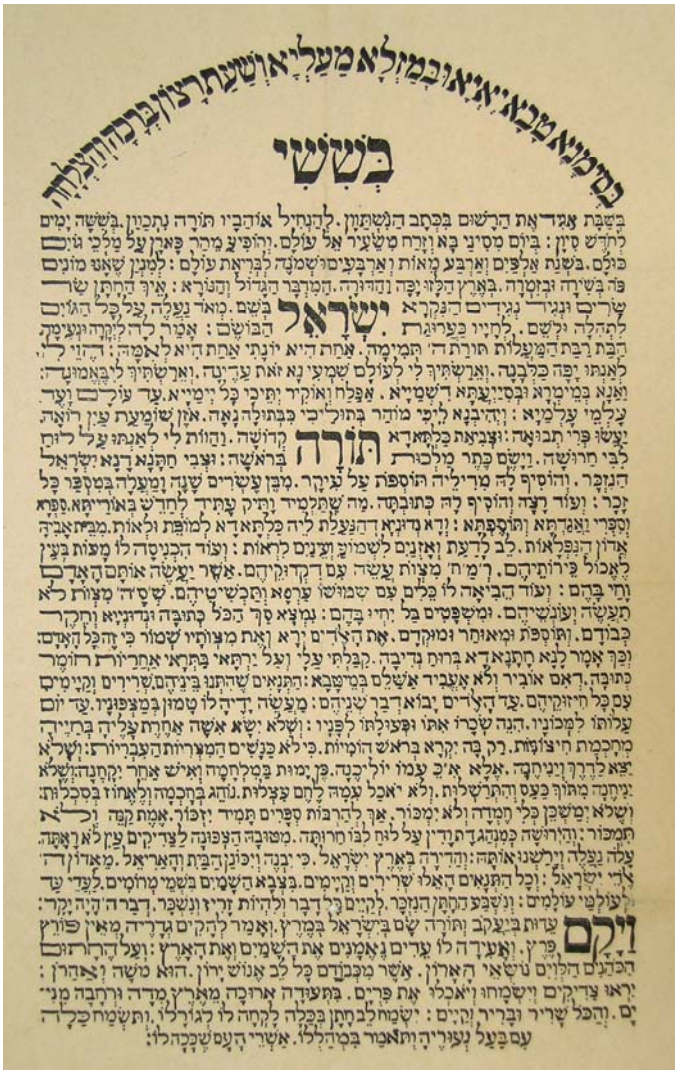


Fig. 3

dispersion, meanings needed to be developed to consecrate the festival. Today we eat dairy foods, conduct Tikkun Leil Shavuot, read the Book of Ruth, and celebrate God's handing down the Torah at Sinai. Each of these customs and others are worthy of a whole article to explain the historical process by which they evolved, and the meaning Jewish tradition gave them from generation to generation.

One interesting, less familiar, meaning assigned the festival is that Shavuot is like a wedding between God, the groom, and the people of Israel, the bride. The Torah itself is sometimes seen as the dowry and at other times as the contract, the Ketubah, between God and the Jewish people.

To highlight this idea some Sephardic communities erected a Chupah over the table on which the Torah was read. Newly married couples were especially honored on this day. The image of love and mutual commitment between God and the Jewish people is, of course, a very consistent theme throughout the Torah.

In the last few hundred years a special Ketubah was prepared and read before the reading of the Torah on Shavuot morning, to concretize the concept of this special wedding. While this

CONTRIBUTIONS

- Nechama Arnon-Kelev
- Limor Menachem
- Idit Shalem-Avidar and Doron Avidar
- Annette and Moshe Bode, in memory of his mother, Gittel Erenberg Bode
- Orit and Yoram Carmel, in honor of the naming ceremony for their grandchildren
- Barbara and Dan Drench, in honor of Rabbi Lazar
- Kochava and Yaacov Harari, in honor of her nephew's bar mitzvah
- Simcha and Ruth Malin, in memory of his father
- Marga Michaeli, in memory of her husband Kalman Michaeli
- Debora and Ed Pizer, in honor of David Feingold's birthday
- Vala Rabo, in memory of Steven Kenitz
- Shirley Rosenberg, in memory of her mother Pauline Landy
- Dvora Sherman to the Book Fund, in memory of Osnat Frydman
- Pat Slonim and Alfred Slonim, in memory of their mother Ida Slonim
- Bobbi and Yacov Vendrigger, in honor of the Kaplan granddaughter and the Gross grandson
- Bobbi and Yacov Vendrigger, in memory of Jayne Robinson
- Bobbi and Yacov Vendrigger, in honor of her mother Bea Reshes and their son Yoni and his organization Students for Peace

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE NEEDY

- Annette and Moshe Bode
- Nora and Eli Gur
- Barbara and Yoram Harel

IN MEMORY OF ROBERT ROSENBERG

- Debora and Ed Pizer
- Bobbi and Yacov Vendrigger

IN HONOR OF LEE LIEBERMAN'S 80TH BIRTHDAY

- Annette and Moshe Bode
- Elaine and David Feingold
- Orah and Irv Kaplan
- Debora and Ed Pizer
- Pat Slonim
- Bobbi and Yacov Vendrigger

IN HONOR OF JUDY FEATHERMAN AND LEE LIEBERMAN'S ANNIVERSARY

- Annette and Moshe Bode
- Elaine and David Feingold
- Orah and Irv Kaplan
- Debora and Ed Pizer
- Pat Slonim
- Bobbi and Yacov Vendrigger

The third example (Fig. 3) is a printed Shavuot Ketubah from somewhere in Eastern Europe, dedicated in memory of a woman named Clara. The most likely date is early 20th century and reflects the appearance of this custom in Ashkenazi Europe.

The last example (Fig. 4) is an elaborate composition by hand, lavishly



Fig. 1

decorated and illustrated with symbols. These symbols, such as the double-headed eagle and the four animals in the corners, are often found in the decoration of synagogues, tombstones and ritual objects in Galicia and the Ukraine. The writing in a slight semi-circle is also a convention that was often seen in Eastern Europe in Hassidic circles. The document is dated 1934.

The destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust and the mass migration of Sephardim and Mizrachim to Israel changed many celebrations and customs used in synagogue ritual. But it is fitting to look at some of those, such as the Shavuot wedding of God and Israel, and reconsider their relevance for our own customs today.

Hag Sameah.

Bill Gross, President

Fig. 4



INSIDE KEHILAT TIFERET SHALOM (cont.)

OVERSEAS DONATIONS

Cantor Judy and Mel Aranoff, CA
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Arthur Goldberg's 90th birthday
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Avrum and Lila Weinzwieg, IL
Rabbi Miriam Weisel, CA

CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

We welcome contributions "in honor of" and "in memory of." The contribution can be for the General Fund, for the Book Fund, for the fund for "our" army unit, or for a specific purpose that you designate, and should be sent payable to Kehillat Tiferet Shalom, P.O. Box 17386, Tel Aviv 61173.

MAZAL TOV

- Hanna and Shmuel Kaplan, on the occasion of Omer's bar mitzvah, in January
- Cohens, on the occasion of Nitai's bar mitzvah, in January
- Benzurs, on the occasion of Gur's bar mitzvah, in March
- Goldfarbs, on the occasion of Amit's bar mitzvah, in March
- Adi Butbin and Ron Diskin, on their marriage

CONDOLENCES

Our condolences to members in Israel David Feuerstein and to our overseas member Liba Feuerstein on the death of their beloved father and husband, Seymour.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

- Jacob and Saeri Abutbul
- Jonathan and Shira Clayman
- Adi Butbin and Ron Diskin
- Eva Binkowska and Aviad Front
- Sara and Yuval Dagan
- Barbara and Daniel Drench
- Irene Goldfarb
- Roni Kfir-Shurr and Tal Kfir
- Eveline Kluger-Kadish and Alon Kadish
- Oren Modai
- Michelle Morauka and Idan Kazas
- Shuki and Shifra Sherman
- Idit and Asher Shmulewitz
- Einat Spivak and Ronen Dabush
- Debbie and Jason Witow

MEET ARIEH HASID, OUR NEW "BA'AL KOREH"

Ari made aliya last year and has been with us since last October. He studied Hebrew in the Hebrew school and high school of his congregation, Beth Shalom, in New Jersey, and in Ramah summer camps. His major in college (Harvard) was Mid-Eastern Studies, which he teaches at the Ramah High School in Jerusalem, in their 4-month program for American and Canadian students. Ari also attended the Conservative Movement's yeshiva. He is currently a graduate student majoring in American history at Tel Aviv University. As of January he has been reading the Torah at Tiferet Shalom and stands out as one of the few people who pronounces the "mapik" (the dot) when it appears in the letter 'hey' at the end of a word. Yishar koah, Ari!

GENERAL MEETING

The annual general meeting will take place on Sunday, May 20th, at 8:00 PM at the Chess Center. On the agenda:

- Report on activities for 2006
- Financial report for 2006
- Objectives and plans for 2007
- Elections of new Board members
- Rabbi David's report on his visit to Qatar

Your participation will be greatly appreciated, so please save the date.

TIKUN LAIL SHAVUOT

"Mizmor, Midrash, and Music" - On Tuesday, May 22, at 9:00 PM, Tiferet Shalom will hold the traditional "Tikun" for the eve of Shavuot, at the home of Bill and Lisa Gross, Yehudah HaNasi 45, Ramat Aviv. This year's program combines text study of Psalms accompanied by new musical arrangements taught by Vered Harari and Shai Vetzter. Please make reservations by emailing Mor, at mor@tiferetshalom.org.

SPONSOR A SHABBAT OR HOLIDAY KIDDUSH

If you would like to sponsor a Shabbat or holiday Kiddush, contact Orah Kaplan at 641-3422 or Barbara Vendrigger at 642-1075.