

# **Shabuot Reader**

## **Torah Readings and The Book of Ruth**

**with Laws and Commentaries**

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## **Shabuot Reader**

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# Halakhot of Yom Tob

## I. Overview

There are six days of Yom Tob each year from the Torah:

- the first day of Pesah, Nissan 15
- the seventh day of Pesah, Nissan 21
- Shabu'ot, Sivan 6
- Rosh Hashanah, Tishri 1
- the first day of Sukkot, Tishri 15
- Shemini Aseret, the eighth day from Sukkot, Tishri 22.

Yom Kippur (Tishri 10) is not counted amongst Yamim Tobim as it is not a celebratory day. Each Yom Tob commemorates and celebrates a different significant feature regarding the Jewish Nation's essence and reality and has profound implications for the life of each individual. Pesah commemorates the Almighty's redemption of the Jewish People and its entry into His service via the Exodus from Egypt; Shabu'ot, the Giving of the Torah and the establishment of the Covenant on Har Sinai; Rosh Hashanah, Divine kingship and human accountability; Sukkot, the Almighty's ongoing protection and providence.

In the Diaspora (outside Israel) there are twelve Yom Tob days each year: the first two and last two days of Pesah, two days Shabu'ot, two days Rosh Hashanah, the first two days of Sukkot and two days Shemini Aseret.

The reason we observe two days Yom Tob in the Diaspora follows: In Mishnaic times there often was a doubt in lands outside Israel as to which of two possible days was declared Rosh Hodesh, as a lunar month is 29 1/2 days. The Bet Din awaited witnesses to testify to the New Moon's appearance. If witnesses did not arrive when expected, the following day was declared Rosh Hodesh. Communications being what they were, the doubt outside Israel was not always resolved by the time the holiday arrived. Not to violate the holiday's sanctity, they observed two

days. The two day observance was retained even in later Talmudic times, when a fixed calendar was used and there was no doubt, out of concern that things may return to their confusion. Although modern communications make such confusion inconceivable, established legislation of the High Court (Sanhedrin) cannot be annulled without reconvening another High Court, which has not been done these many centuries. Hopefully, we will merit its speedy reestablishment.

## **II. Prohibited and Permitted Work and Activities**

Work and activities prohibited on Shabbat, whether from the Torah or rabbinical, are prohibited on Yom Tob with certain major exceptions. Writing, building, weaving, buying and selling, etc. are prohibited. The Torah permits work of “Okhel Nefesh,” actions on foodstuff for eating purposes of the day. Thus, kneading, baking, cooking, shehita and salting meat, are permitted.

Actions that are part of the overall system of “Okhel Nefesh”, but from whose results one does not generally eat the day they are performed, such as harvesting, threshing, grinding and hunting, are prohibited.

Using fire and carrying are permitted. Since these are so pervasively intertwined with “Okhel Nefesh” they are permitted in and of themselves, even if not specifically done for eating, provided they are done for some benefit that will be derived during the day. Thus, heating water with which to wash one’s face, arms and legs is permitted.

Generating a new fire, however, is prohibited, even if done for the purpose of preparing food. The permissibility of using fire requires a pre-existing fire. This halakha is clear from the Talmud, Rambam and Shulhan Arukh. Hakham Obadiah Yosef writes that this prohibition includes striking a match. He acknowledges that several substantial rabbis of recent past generations considered a match as equivalent to containing fire in its tip. However, he states, this is not the view of the overwhelming majority of great

rabbis and those accustomed to striking matches on Yom Tob should discontinue doing so.

One may turn on a gas range which has a pilot light as this does not involve generating a new fire but extending an extant fire. Many of the new gas ranges create a new fire when turned on and are the equivalent of striking a match.

Wheeling a carriage, playing ball and roller skating are permitted on Yom Tob. Of course, if something breaks it is prohibited to repair it on Yom Tob just as on Shabbat. “Muqseh“ applies to Yom Tob as Shabbat; thus, although carrying is permitted on Yom Tob, carrying or moving money, etc. is prohibited.

Cooking on one day of Yom Tob for another day, whether the second day is a weekday, another Yom Tob or Shabbat, is prohibited. This applies to all permissible melakhot of Yom Tob. However, it is permitted to cook during the day for the upcoming evening meal if the meal will be started before nightfall (This is common on Shabu’ot when we pray arbit of the second day early).

When Yom Tob falls on Friday, it is necessary to prepare an Erub Tabshilin from before Yom Tob to permit cooking on Friday for Shabbat. The erub, comprising a cooked item, is designated part of the Shabbat meal; thus, preparation for the Shabbat meal is considered to have been begun before the onset of Yom Tob. It is usual to use a hard boiled egg and a loaf of bread (or matzoh) for the erub. A berakha ‘Al Misvat Erub’ is recited. The erub cannot be eaten before Shabbat or before the conclusion of cooking on Friday for Shabbat. When Yom Tob is Thursday and Friday, the erub only permits cooking on Friday.

Although today we use a fixed calendar and know that the first day of Yom Tob is the Torah holiday and the second day is derabanan, both days are treated equally except for the following few exceptions:

- It is permitted to engage in burying the dead on the second day

- The Shabbat rabbinic prohibitions on medication for someone not in danger do not apply the second day.
- In accordance with the famous rule, “doubts” on the first day are generally resolved strictly while on the second day leniently.

The first two exceptions do not apply to Rosh Hashanah.

### **III. Candle Lighting**

Candles (or oil) are lit for Yom Tob, customarily by the woman of the home just as for Shabbat, with a berakha - Lehadliq Ner Shel Yom Tob. Sheheheyanu should not be recited at this time as it will be recited in qiddush. In the case of Yom Tob, if candles were not lit before the beginning of the holiday, they may be lit in the evening, since the use of fire is permitted.

The evening qiddush of Yom Tob always begins with the berakha on wine, followed by a berakha that includes mention of the particular Yom Tob. If it is also Shabbat, the holiday qiddush is still recited with mention of Shabbat included in the second berakha. On the last two nights of Pesah these are the only two berakhot. On the other ten Yamim Tobim, sheheheyanu is also recited. On Sukkot, if one is eating in a sukkah, Lesheb Basukkah is attached to the qiddush.

When Yom Tob falls on Saturday night, qiddush includes habdala. The first two berakhot are recited as usual for Yom Tob, followed by the berakha for fire (on a candle) and the berakha of habdala. If it is a Yom Tob requiring sheheheyanu, this berakha is recited fifth. Fragrant spices are not included in habdala on a holiday.

At the conclusion of Yom Tob, even between Yom Tob and Hol Hamo'ed, habdala is recited except when Shabbat immediately follows Yom Tob, in which case only Friday night qiddush is recited. In habdala at the conclusion of Yom Tob only two berakhot are recited- on wine and the standard habdala berakha.

#### **IV. General Halakhot**

It is a requirement to honor and enjoy Yom Tob just as Shabbat. There is an additional misvah regarding Yom Tob to be happy. One must make special efforts and preparations to fulfill these misvot properly. Families eat together and guests are invited. In our happiness we are required to remember the lonely and needy and share our blessings with them. It is incumbent on all to invite them to participate in our festive meals.

Yom Tob breaks “shib’a” for an individual “sitting” in mourning for a family member including sitting for ones father or mother. This applies only if the mourner sat at least a short time before the onset of the holiday. Yom Kippur also accomplishes this. If someone passed away on the holiday, the seven day mourning period does not begin until after the conclusion of the complete holiday, including Hol Hamo’ed. Until then, only restricted, private mourning is permitted. The second day of Yom Tob which concludes the holiday, being derabanan, counts as day one.

#### **V. Prayers**

A special amida for each prayer is recited reflecting the holiday. If one mistakenly prayed a weekday amida without mentioning the holiday he must repeat, reciting the Yom Tob amida. Musaf is recited. Tefillin are not donned on Yom Tob. A special psalm connected to the theme of the day is recited for each Yom Tob, evening and morning.

Hallel is recited except on Rosh Hashanah. On the first two days of Pesah, Shabu’ot, and all nine days of Sukkot-Shemini Asseret, it is complete Hallel with a berakha; the later days of Pesah it is recited without a berakha.

Special holiday portions are read from two Sifre Torah. There are at least five olim plus maftir on Yom Tob. The Torah is not read at minha (unless the holiday falls on Shabbat, in which case the Torah is read for Shabbat).

Yaale Veyabo is recited in birkat hamazon. If one concluded birkat hamazon and realized he did not recite it, he does not repeat, except on the first night of Pesah and the first night of Sukkot in the sukkah, as on these two occasions the requirement to eat a kazayit matzoh or bread is from the Torah. If one realized he did not recite Yaale Veyabo after concluding the third berakha but before beginning the fourth, he should make the relevant insertion as found in the mahzor.

## On the Love of Torah

*Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik z"l delivered this lecture in 1973 upon completion of the first chapter of Hullin at Yeshiva University.*

The Jew unceasingly seeks, indeed craves, Kedushah (sanctity) and Torah. The Ramban explains that the preface to the *Shir Shel Yom* is always “Today is the first (second, third, etc.) day in the Shabbat (cycle)” because the Jew counts each day with longing, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Shabbat. In a similar vein, the *Chinukh* explains that the counting of the Omer reflects the Jew’s awareness that the goal of the Exodus from Egypt was the receiving of the Torah, and by counting the days, the Jew demonstrates his impatient longing for Torah. Similarly, the mitzvah of *Tosefet Shabbat*, of ushering in the Sabbath some small time before its obligatory commencement at sunset, exemplifies the Jew’s impatient yearning for Kedushah.

This search for Kedushah is really a search for The Holy One, Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself. Real Kedushah is found only when He “spreads the shelter of His peace (*sukkat shalom*)” over us.

The Talmud (Pesachim 113a) says that one who leaves over wine from the havdalah cup for the following week’s kiddush, is worthy of a share in the world to come, for such a person symbolizes that, even when one Shabbat is leaving, he is already anticipating the next one.

The Gemarah (Yoma 19b-20a) relates that once Yom Kippur was not properly observed in Nehardea and God explained that it was because of “*lapetach chatat roveitz*” (Genesis 4:7). In order to experience Yom Kippur properly, adequate preparation is needed. We start preparing on Rosh Chodesh Elul and gradually ready ourselves for Yom Kippur. During Elul, we must climb a very steep mountain. Yom Kippur is the summit, the apex, the day of reconciliation between God and man. One cannot cross immediately and directly into Kedushah. At the entrance to Kedushah (*petach*), if there is insufficient preparation, there is sin

(*chatat*). In Nehardea, they were not prepared to experience the sanctity of the day.

Muktzeh, which actually means something not prepared from before Shabbat, may not be used on Shabbat because one must prepare for Shabbat. Preparation which is so important for experiencing Kedushah, is also important for Talmud Torah.

In a certain sense what Kedushah is for the Jew, Torah is for the *talmid chakham*. Torah should not just be an intellectual pastime. True, one can enjoy the intellectual creativity involved in Talmud Torah, but Talmud Torah should be an emotional experience as well; one should feel a tremor when engaged in it. The Torah should be seen not just as a book, but as a living personality, a queen like the *Shabbat Malketa*, with whom one can establish an I-thou relationship. In many places, the Torah is referred to as a personality, as for example: “The Torah said before The Holy One Blessed Be He.” The study of Torah should be a dialogue, not a monologue. If I look at the Gemarah as simply paper and print, as merely a text, I would never be creative; Torah is a friend.

“Say to wisdom (Torah), thou art my sister” (Proverbs 7:4). If the Gemarah is approached as a plain text you might master it but you cannot be creative. To become a *lamdan* you must look at the Torah as an individual- a living personality. Then it becomes a part of you. I feel *committed* to defend the Rambam. Torah becomes a delight; it inspires you. There is a feeling of joy at having something precious, at having a treasure. But just as there is no Shabbat or Yom Kippur without preparing and questing, so also is this true concerning Talmud Torah.

To be a *lamdan* requires *hatmadah* and inquisitiveness and curiosity. If I love someone I am inquisitive, I am interested in him and in his plans.

If I were asked how an emotional experience can be had through studying the laws of monetary fines and damages etc., I would say that it is true that the exterior of Torah is formal and abstract, but behind the shell of conceptual abstractions there is a great fire burning, giving warmth and love, and one can love the

Torah in turn with great passion. When you apprehend the Torah as a personality, not just as a book, it infiltrates your emotional as well as your intellectual life. An *am haaretz* cannot have this experience, and one cannot be a *lamdan* without it.

“Blessed art Thou...Who has commanded us to be involved (*la'asok*<sup>1</sup>) in the words of the Torah.” Torah is not only to be studied but demands an all encompassing involvement, *la'asok b'divrei torah*. Tosafot (Berakhot 11b sub. shekvar) asks why the blessing for Torah, recited once in the morning, suffices for each time one learns during the day no matter how many interruptions have taken place (e.g. one has gone to work), while the blessing for residing in the Sukkah must be recited anew each time one returns to the Sukkah after leaving it. They answer that since the obligation of Talmud Torah is continuous, *v'hagita bo yomam valailah* (Joshua 1:8) - one is always conscious of the mitzvah. However, any discontinuity of awareness (*heseich hada'at*) relating to the mitzvah of sukkah effectively requires that a new *berakhah* be recited each time the observance of the mitzvah is terminated and then subsequently renewed.

Apparently there are two kinds of awareness according to Tosafot. The first is an *acute awareness*; clearly this is lacking when one thinks about other matters. The second is *latent awareness* and this awareness is still present even though one is engaged in other matters.

When a mother plays with her child there is an acute awareness of the child. But even when the mother works at a job or is distracted by some other activity, there is a natural latent awareness of her child's existence. This latent awareness remains throughout her entire lifetime and can never be extinguished. It is expressed in commitment, devotion, and in a feeling of identification, a feeling that I and the baby are one. The infant is the center of gravity of the parents' lives. They feel they cannot live without their child.

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<sup>1</sup> This is in accordance with the Ashkenazic tradition. Sephardim recite “Al Dibre Torah” [Ed.]

The same is true with regards to Torah. There may not be an acute awareness of Torah for twenty four hours each day. But the latent awareness never ceases. The injunction which forbids discontinuity of awareness from Torah is measured in terms of “*pen yasuru milevavekhah*” (lest Torah be forgotten from your heart-Deut. 4:9), not in terms of “*pen yasuru mililmod*” (lest Torah not be studied). All the injunctions against *heseich hada’at* from Torah do not refer to a discontinuity of acute awareness. Rather they refer to a discontinuity of latent awareness, which, as already mentioned is expressed in commitment, devotion, and self-identification with Torah. When even the latent awareness-the commitment to Torah- is forgotten and is dismissed from mind, then one is “worthy of death.” This is the reason we say “*la’asok b’divrei Torah.*” *La’asok* implies that even when we are mentally involved with something else, we are aware of Torah. This awareness of Torah should become part of one’s I-awareness. Just as I am always aware of my existence without having to walk around saying “I exist, I exist,” so should I be aware of Torah.

If the blessing were “*lilmod Torah*” (to study Torah) and related only to the cognitive act, then any discontinuity of the acute awareness of Torah would require that a blessing be recited every time Torah study commenced anew after a previous discontinuity-just like the blessing for the Sukkah must be repeated with every new entry.

*V’hagita* (in the verse “*V’hagita bo yomam valaila*”), refers not to the actual study of Torah, but to the mitzvah of latent awareness of Torah. *Higayon* does not refer to thinking in the sense of pure intellectual detached thought. Rather it refers to awareness of personal desires, wishes and concerns; it refers to a deeply felt longing and questing, as in “*v’hegyon libi*” (Psalms 19:15), which refers to awareness of one’s prayers and petitions. No matter how much involved one is in other matters, there should always be an awareness of the appreciation of Torah as the highest value.

For this reason when we make a *siyum* we say *hadran alakh-* we still return to you. As far as acute awareness is concerned we

are through, we are leaving this chapter. But the latent awareness remains and for that reason we still return again to learn Chullin. It is just like when a mother leaves her child and says “I’ll be back.” She does not say this merely to encourage the infant. She expresses a basic truth. A mother leaves only to return; otherwise she would never leave.

*Daatan alakh-* in our latent awareness we are still committed to you.

*V'daatakh alan-* we hope you won't forget us. We hope that you, the tractate, will also keep us in mind, and if we view the Torah as a friend, the Torah will indeed be able to watch over us.

# On the Minhag of Studying Torah Leil Shabuot

*Partly from the article written by Rabbi Asher Margalioṯ z"l for a Sephardic Institute publication.*

The Magen Abraham, based on a Midrashic account, states: “At the Revelation at Sinai, when the time came for the Torah to be given, many fell asleep and the Almighty had to awaken them. We must rectify this through our staying awake and studying Torah through the night” (Orah Hayim 494). How many times during the year have we slept or idled away time during which we should have been studying Torah! How many times were we inattentive while listening to the Torah being read! Indeed, it is appropriate to express our regret at these shortcomings before commemorating receiving the Torah. The Hoq Ya’aqob, based on the Zohar, explains that the pious remain awake and labor in Torah all night as an expression of eagerness and anticipation for a great, precious event. “Let us go to our possession, the sacred inheritance designated for us and our children.” The Zohar commends those who thus could anticipate the hour of receiving the Torah, when the people of Israel became joined to the Torah and both became as one. Rabbi Israel Nagara elaborates thus: “since the hour of the giving of the Torah is, as it were, the hour of wedding between Israel and the Torah, it is proper to be engaged in preparing the ornaments of the bride the previous night”.

The Rambam, in codifying our ancient traditions regarding the approach to the study of Torah all year long, states: “A person learns most of his wisdom by night.” Perhaps the later rabbis chose to establish the main learning of Shabu’ot at night to also reflect this concept.

The Shelah Haqadosh relates that on Leil Shabu’ot the Divine Presence was revealed to Maran Rabbi Yosef Karo and his companions, who were studying Torah all that night, and said to

them: “Happy are you and happy is your portion.” Those who dedicate their speech, actions and thought to Torah study on this night more readily merit the revelation of the Torah’s intricacies and achieve a deeper understanding in their learning.

The Kabbalah sages prescribed an order of study, or tiqqun, for Leil Shabu’ot, comprising passages from each Parasha and each Book of the written Torah, plus selections from Mishnah and Zohar. The Ten Commandments are read twice. Megillat Ruth is entirely read as it relates the inspiring story of a non-Jewess fully turning to Judaism.

Some communities read a brief synopsis of the 613 mitzvot. Some communities, in accordance with the Midrashic statement that the Torah was very difficult to understand until Mishle was written, read the entire Book of Mishle, for its parables contain the key to much of the Torah.

Regarding those not initiated into the Kabbalah reading the Zohar portions of the tiqqun, or any other portions of Zohar, there are two opinions. Some say reading Zohar is “good for the soul” even if one does not understand what he is reading. Others claim that it is more appropriate to skip the Zohar and study those portions of the Torah which one may understand.

The Hoq Ya’aqob is of the opinion that the tiqqun was established for the unlearned, but a scholar may study whatever Torah subject his heart desires. In many great Ashkenazic yeshivot the custom of staying up all night was observed but the order of study was Talmud, not the tiqqun. Today many scholars do follow the practice of reading the tiqqun on this night.

The Ben Ish Hai writes that even if one cannot stay up all night for whatever reason, he should nonetheless recite the Tanakh portion of the tiqqun.

May we all continue to go from strength to strength and merit rewards for our study and contemplation of Torah especially on this Festival of the Giving of the Torah.

# Counting Time

*Dvar Torah by Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, for Shabbat Perashat Emor, May 8<sup>th</sup> 2004.*

THE HUMAN BODY CONTAINS 100 TRILLION CELLS. Within each cell is a nucleus. Within each nucleus is a double copy of the human genome. Each genome contains 3.1 billion letters of genetic code, enough if transcribed to fill a library of five thousand books. Each cell, in other words, contains a blueprint of the entire body of which it is a part. The cumulative force of these scientific discoveries is nothing short of wondrous. In ways undreamt of by our ancestors, we now know to what extent the microcosm is a map of the microcosm. From a single cell, it may be possible to reconstruct an entire organism.

Does this apply to Judaism?

I want in this study to look at an apparently tiny detail of Jewish law - a single cell, as it were, of a highly complex structure. Could it be that patient and detailed study of this fragment will reveal to us something of the totality of Judaism's spiritual world? If so, more may be at stake than understanding one aspect of Judaism. We might begin to see how halakhah and aggadah are related, law and narrative, practice and philosophy. Judaism might then begin to disclose itself to us as more than a series of laws - as, in fact, nothing less than an entire way of seeing the world and responding to it with the totality of our being. We might discover a more expansive way of studying Jewish texts.

We are at the moment in the midst of fulfilling one of the commands in this week's sedra [perasha], the counting of the Omer:

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.”

Historically, this passage had profound reverberations within Judaism because of the ambiguity in the phrase, "from the day after the Sabbath." This was important because on it depended the date of Shavuot, Pentecost. Some groups in ancient Judaism read the phrase literally to mean Sunday, with the result that for them Shavuot always fell on a Sunday seven weeks later. Others, relying on oral tradition, interpreted it to mean "from the day after the festival [i.e. the first day of Passover]." That is our custom. The resulting argument over the calendar was one of the major disputes within Judaism in the late Second Temple period. However, that is not our concern here.

While the Temple stood, the counting was initiated by bringing an offering of new grain. Since the destruction of the Temple, the command has been fulfilled by counting alone - each night for seven weeks. A question arose during the period of the Geonim (between the closure of the Talmud and the era of its great commentators, i.e. between the eighth and eleventh centuries). What is the law for someone who forgets to count one of the 49 days? May he continue to count the rest, or has he forfeited the entire command for that year? There were two sharply contrasting views. According to the Halakhot Gedolot (a work usually attributed to R. Shimon Kayyara) the person has indeed forfeited the chance to fulfil the command. According to R. Hai Gaon he has not. He continues to count the remaining days, unaffected by his failure to count one of the forty-nine.

How are we to understand this disagreement? According to the Halakhot Gedolot, the key phrase is "seven full [temimot, i.e. complete] weeks." One who forgets a day cannot satisfy the requirement of completeness. On this view, the 49 days constitute a single religious act, and if one of the parts is missing, the whole is defective. What is this like? It is like a Torah scroll. If a single letter is missing, the entire scroll is invalid. So too in the case of counting days.

According to R. Hai Gaon however, each day of the 49 is a separate command - "Count off fifty days." Therefore, if one fails to keep one of the commands, that is no impediment to keeping

the others. If, for example, one fails to pray on a given day, that neither excuses nor prevents one from praying on subsequent days. Each day is a temporal entity in itself, unaffected by what happened before or after. The same applies to the Omer. Forgetting one day does not invalidate the others.

The final law mediates between these two opinions. Out of respect for R. Hai, we count the subsequent days, but out of respect for the Halakhot Gedolot we do so without a blessing - an elegant compromise.

We might, before moving on, note one salient fact. Usually in the case of a dispute about Jewish law, the doubt lies in us, not in the biblical text. God has spoken, but we are not sure what the words mean. In the case of counting the Omer, however, the doubt lies within the biblical text itself. Unusually, the command is specified in two quite different ways:

1. "Count off seven full weeks"
2. "Count off fifty days"

There is a view that this dual characterization signals two distinct commands, to count the days, and to count the weeks. However, as we have seen, it also suggests two quite different ways of understanding the counting itself - as a single extended process (Halakhot Gedolot) or as fifty distinct acts (Hai Gaon). This duality was not born in the minds of two halakhic authorities. It is there in the biblical text itself.

Within Judaism there are two kinds of time. One way of seeing this is in a Talmudic story about two of the great sages of the Second Temple period, Hillel and Shammai:

They used to say about Shammai the elder that all his life he ate in honour of the Sabbath. So, if he found a well-favoured animal he would say, "Let this be for the Sabbath." If he later found a better one, he would put aside the second for the Sabbath and eat the first. But Hillel the elder had a different approach, for all his deeds were for the sake of heaven, as it is said, "Blessed be the Lord day

by day" (Ps. 68: 20). It was likewise taught: The school of Shammai say, From the first day of the week, prepare for the Sabbath, but the school of Hillel say, "Blessed be the Lord day by day."

Shammai lived in teleological time, time as a journey toward a destination. Already from the beginning of a week, he was conscious of its end. We speak, in one of our prayers, of the Sabbath as "last in deed, first in thought." Time on this view is not a mere sequence of moments. It has a purpose, a direction, a destination.

Hillel, by contrast, lived each day in and for itself, without regard to what came before or what would come after. We speak in our prayers of G-d who "in his goodness, each day renews the work of creation." On this view, each sequence of time is an entity in itself. The universe is continually being renewed. Each day is a universe; each has its own challenge, its task, its response. Faith, for Hillel, is a matter of taking each day as it comes, trusting in G-d to give the totality of time its shape and direction.

The dispute is strikingly similar to the more recent disagreement about the nature of light. Is it a continuous wave or a series of particles? Paradoxically, it is both, and this can be experimentally demonstrated.

The argument, however, goes much deeper. Much has been written about two highly distinctive forms of time consciousness.

Ancient civilizations tended to see time as a circle - cyclical time. That is how we experience time in nature. Each day is marked by the same succession of events: dawn, sunrise, the gradual trajectory of the sun across the sky to its setting and to nightfall. The year is a succession of seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Life itself is a repeated sequence of birth, growth, maturity, decline and death. Many of these moments, especially the transition from one to another, are marked by religious ritual.

Cyclical time is time as a series of eternal recurrences. Beneath the apparent changes, the world remains the same. The book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) contains a classic statement of cyclical time:

Generations come and generations go,  
but the earth remains forever.

5 The sun rises and the sun sets,  
and hurries back to where it rises . . .

7 All streams flow into the sea,  
yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from,  
there they return again . . .

9 What has been will be again,  
what has been done will be done again;  
there is nothing new under the sun.

In Judaism, priestly time is cyclical time. Each part of the day, the week and the year has its specific sacrifice, unaffected by what is happening in the world of events. Halakhah - Jewish law - is priestly in this sense. Though all else may change, the law does not change. It represents eternity in the midst of time.

In this respect, Judaism did not innovate. However, according to many anthropologists and historians, a quite new and different form of time was born in ancient Israel. Often, this is called linear time. I prefer the phrase covenantal time. The Hebrew Bible is the first document to see time as an arena of change. Tomorrow need not be the same as yesterday. There is nothing given, eternal and immutable about the way we construct societies and live our lives together. Time is not a series of moments traced on the face of a watch, always moving yet always the same. Instead it is a journey with a starting point and a destination, or a story with a beginning, middle and end. Each moment has a meaning, which can only be grasped if we understand where we have come from and where we are going to. This is time not as it is in nature but as it is in history. The Hebrew prophets were the first to see G-d in history.

A prophet is one who sees the end in the beginning. While others are at ease, he foresees the catastrophe. While others are mourning the catastrophe, he can already see the eventual consolation. There is a famous example of this in the Talmud. Rabbi Akiva is walking with his colleagues on Mount Scopus when they see the ruins of the Temple. They weep. He smiles. When they ask him why he is smiling, he replies: Now that I have seen the realization of the prophecies of destruction, shall I not believe in the prophecies of restoration? They see the present; he sees the future-in-the-present. Knowing the previous chapters of the story, he understands not only the present chapter, but also where it is leading to. That is prophetic consciousness - time as a narrative, time not as it is in nature but in history, or more specifically in covenant history, whose events are determined by free human choices but whose themes have been sent long in advance.

If we look at the festivals of the bible - Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot - we see that each has a dual logic. On the one hand, they belong to cyclical time. They celebrate seasons of the year - Pesach is the festival of spring, Shavuot of first fruits, and Sukkot of the autumn harvest.

However, they also belong to covenantal/linear/historical time. They commemorate historic events. Pesach celebrates the exodus from Egypt, Shavuot the giving of the Torah, and Sukkot the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. It follows that the counting of the Omer also has two temporal dimensions.

On the one hand, it belongs to cyclical time. The forty-nine days represent the period of the grain harvest, the time during which farmers had most to thank G-d for - for "bringing forth bread from the ground." Thus understood, each day of the counting is a separate religious act: "Blessed be the Lord day by day." Each day brought forth its own blessing in the form of new grain, and each therefore called for its own act of thanksgiving. This is time as Hillel and R. Hai Gaon understood it. "Count off fifty days" - each of which is a command in itself, unaffected by the days that came before or those that will come after.

But the Omer is also part of historical time. It represents the journey from Egypt to Sinai, from exodus to revelation. This is, on the biblical worldview, an absolutely crucial transition. The late Sir Isaiah Berlin spoke of two kinds of freedom, negative liberty (the freedom to do what you like) and positive liberty (the freedom to do what you ought). Hebrew has two different words for these different forms of freedom: chofesh and cherut. Chofesh is the freedom a slave acquires when he no longer has a master. It means that there is no one to tell you what to do. You are master of your own time.

This kind of freedom alone, however, cannot be the basis of a free society. If everyone is free to do what they like, the result will be freedom for the strong but not the weak, the rich but not the poor, the powerful but not the powerless. A free society requires restraint and the rule of law. There is such a thing as a constitution of liberty. That is what the Israelites acquired at Mount Sinai in the form of the covenant.

In this sense, the 49 days represent an unbroken historical sequence. There is no way of going directly from escape-from-tyranny to a free society - as we have discovered time and again in recent years, in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. Here, time is an ordered sequence of events, a journey, a narrative. Miss one stage, and one is in danger of losing everything. This is time as Halakhot Gedolot understood it: "Count off seven full weeks," with the emphasis on "full, complete, unbroken."

Thus, both forms of time are present in a single mitzvah - the counting of the Omer - as they are in the festivals themselves.

We have traced, in the argument between the two authorities of the period of the Geonim, a deeper duality, going back to Hillel and Shammai, and further still to the biblical era and the difference, in consciousness of time, between priests and prophets. There is the voice of G-d in nature, and the call of G-d in history. There is the word of G-d for all time, and the word of G-d for this time. The former is heard by the priest, the latter by the prophet. The former is found in halakhah, Jewish law; the latter in

aggadah, Jewish reflection on history and destiny. G-d is not to be found exclusively in one or the other, but in their conversation and complex interplay.

There are aspects of the human condition that do not change, but there are others that do. It was the greatness of the biblical prophets to hear the music of covenant beneath the noise of events, giving history its shape and meaning as the long, slow journey to redemption. The journey has been slow. The abolition of slavery, the recognition of human rights, the construction of a society of equal dignity - these have taken centuries, millennia. But they happened only because people learned to see inequalities and injustices as something other than inevitable. Time is not a series of eternal recurrences in which nothing ever ultimately changes. Cyclical time is deeply conservative; covenantal time is profoundly revolutionary. Both find their expression in the counting of the Omer.

Thus an apparently minor detail in Jewish law turns out, on inspection under the microscope of analysis, to tell us much about the philosophy and politics of Judaism - about the journey from liberation to a free society, and about time as the arena of social change. The Torah begins with creation as the free act of the free G-d, who bestows the gift of freedom on the one life-form that bears His image. But that is not enough. We must create structures that honour that freedom and make it equally available to all. That is what was given at Sinai. Each year we retrace that journey, for if we are not conscious of freedom and what it demands of us, we will lose it. To see G-d not only in nature but also in history - that is the distinctive contribution of Judaism to Western civilization, and we find it in one of the most apparently minor commands: to count the days between negative and positive liberty, from liberation to revelation.

## Feast of Weeks - What's in the Name?

*The following was published for Shabu'ot on June 11, 2005 in Efrat, Israel by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin.*

What is the real significance of the Festival of Shavuot, the only Festival of the bible without a name which truly defines its essence?! Unlike Pesach, which refers to the Pascal lamb sacrifice which was the defining moment of Israelite commitment to the G-d of Abraham in defiance of the gods of Egypt, thereby making them worthy of, and setting the stage for, their exodus from Egyptian slavery, and Sukkot which refers to the booths in which the Israelites dwelt during their miraculous sojourn in the desert, Shavuot connotes the weeks leading up to a specific day rather than to the day itself! Is it not mandatory for us to attempt to truly understand the message of this second - and major - "pilgrim" festivals (the second of our shalosh regalim)

Fascinatingly enough, both the precise date as well as the true meaning of this "mystery" Festival of Shavuot is dependant upon a famous historical controversy which raged between the Pharisees and Saducees, two ideological "parties" which vied for ascendancy during the Mishnaic period (c.200 BCE - 200 CE). The Saducees, who traced their origins to the well-known priestly clan of Zadok and were committed to the plain meaning of the Bible without the inclusion of the Oral Traditions, maintained that the Biblical command to count seven weeks (Sefirah), "You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath" (Lev. 3:15), refers to the first Sunday after the onset of Passover, from when you must continue to count seven complete weeks (from Sunday to Sunday), at the conclusion of which "you shall make the Festival of Shavuot (Deut.16:10)".

These seven weeks fall out during the first harvest period in Israel, beginning with the harvest of the barley (which is the initial omer sacrifice to be brought on that Saturday night) and culminating in the wheat harvest which is expressed by the two

loaves of wheat which is the central vegetation Temple sacrifice and “first - fruits” gift of Shavuot.

The Pharisees, who are the forerunners of the Talmudic Sages and who endowed “last-word” authority to the Oral Tradition of Biblical interpretation (Hebrew *perush*), insisted that the Biblical phrase “the morrow of the Sabbath” refers to the day following the first day of the Passover Festival (taking the Hebrew *Shabbat* to be identified in this context with *Shabbaton*, which is Biblically used for Festival elsewhere in that very same Biblical passage of Lev. 23). It is apparent that the date for the Shavuot Festival would differ, depending upon which ideological position determined from when you begin your count!

So divisive did this difference of opinion prove itself to be - after all, the unity of the Jewish people is clearly dependent upon the commonality of the Hebrew calendar - that the day in which this controversy was settled (obviously in accordance with the Pharisees, which is our current practice) was declared to be a semi-Festival upon which one should neither fast nor recite a eulogy (B.T. *Taanit* 17b, *Menahot* 65a, based on *Megillat Taanit*).

What was the real significance of their debate? I heard from my revered teacher Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik the following interpretation. According to the Saducees, the Festival of Shavuot is completely separate and apart from the Festival of Passover, relating not at all to the exodus from Egypt but only to the agricultural reality of the Land of Israel; hence a unit of seven complete weeks - from Sunday to Sunday, beginning the first Sunday from the onset of Passover only because Passover also happens to fall out in the harvesting season - spans the barley to wheat harvest, which is to be seen as a separate period of thanksgiving to G-d, for an agricultural rather than an historical reason. From this perspective, Shavuot is a separate agricultural Festival specifically celebrating the climax of the period with the wheat harvest, but logically incorporating within its name the entire 7-week period of harvest, from barley to wheat.

The Pharisees have a totally different interpretation. The very fact that the Oral Tradition insists that the sefirah count begin on the night following the first day of Passover - even if it falls out in the middle of the week (as it usually does) - links the seven week count inextricably to the Festival of Passover, with the Biblical “until the day following the seventh week you shall count, fifty days” coming out 50 days from the onset of Passover! This indissoluble bond between Passover and Shavuot is not all necessarily true according to the Saducees.

For the Pharisees, Shavuot contains an historical as well as an agricultural significance; the Oral Law defines Shavuot as the time in which we received the Torah from Mount Sinai. Indeed, from the perspective of the Pharisees, Passover is an incomplete Festival, awaiting its completion in the Festival of Shavuot. Passover is merely our freedom from physical bondage, awaiting our freedom from spiritual bondage (the internal blandishments of temptations and addictions) which only comes with the giving of the Torah on Shavuot; Passover is “freedom from” (herut), which, unchannelled, can lead to wild recklessness and licentiousness, awaiting the mission of Torah which will provide us with “freedom for” (aharayut). On Passover we only get as far as the desert, an alien, hostile and undeveloped expanse, awaiting our entrance into Israel and construction of our Holy Temple which the Bible identifies with Shavuot, the Festival of the First Fruits Temple sacrifice; Passover is the first step, our Festival of Fate when G-d forced us out of Egypt with His “outstretched arm and strong hand,” whereas Shavuot is our Festival of Destiny, when - by our truly choosing to follow the dictates of Torah - we will lead the world to peace and redemption from the backdrop of Israel and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2, Micah 4).

Hence, Shavuot is named by the Pharisaic Sages of the Talmud Atzeret, which means “conclusion”, with the days of the omer count serving as a connective “holo shel moed” between the beginning of our freedom on Passover and freedom’s culmination in redemption on Shavuot. The progression from the one to the other demands rigorous introspection and repentance, commitment to our Torah and its ideals for world repair; the days

of the Sefirah must be days of perseverance, preparation, penitence and purification. After all, did not the sanctity of G-d's heavenly throne appear to the elders of Israel at the Sinai Revelation as "white-blue sapphire," and are not the mystical sefirot the emanations of the Divine with which we must sanctify ourselves and our world?

Therefore the culminating Festival of this period is known by the days of preparation, Shavuot; it itself does not yet have a name because we have not yet reached the level of complete redemption. And we read the Book of Ruth, the last chapter of which takes place between the barley and wheat harvest, and which tells of a Moabite woman inspired by the loving Torah of the land of Israel and from whose womb will eventually come the king - redeemer - but only when we become truly worthy!

# Reflections on Megillat Ruth

by Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. Introduction

Megillat Ruth is a superbly-crafted short story possessing all the elements of great literature. While sparing of descriptive detail, it contains a consistently charming, idyllic setting, astutely portrayed characters, deft dialogue, dramatic use of tension in scenes of subtle expectation, disappointment and felicity, and a profusion of rich, potent allusions. On the surface it is an example of G-d's reward for righteous behavior, specifically that of *hesed*, and illustrates how with such behavior one may rise from the most humble state to royal heights, providing thereby messages of profound and universal import. It also possesses a metaphoric dimension that transmits hope and inspiration to a nation in despair. This very possibly was the reason for its composition and inclusion in Scripture, a matter we shall discuss later in the study.

On the basic narrative level, the Megilla describes the trials and tribulations of Ruth, a young Moabite woman of excellent character, who possessed a remarkable degree of love and devotion to her deceased husband's family, particularly to her widowed and bereaved mother-in-law. It depicts her courageous, unwavering decision to forsake her family, nation and god to remain with her mother-in-law and join Israel and its G-d, despite the significant hardships and stigma that were involved in doing so. This was particularly exceptional as she had not had any children.

Although not a word is said concerning her personal considerations in making such a life-altering decision, one cannot ignore the message transmitted between the lines. She had a Moabite family to which she could have returned, as Naomi continually advised, even pressed, her to do, and as Boaz acknowledged in his expression of admiration for her decision to leave father and mother to join a people she had not known

before. But she obviously had been deeply and compellingly impacted by the family she married into, despite it having separated from its patrimony and intermarried with Moabites. In light of the problems she would be expected to face as a Moabite in Israel, her choice is an impressive testimony to her appreciation of the merit of Israel's heritage, essentially its G-d and His Torah, as Boaz remarked concerning her decision, referring to her relationship with the G-d of Israel, "that you have come to take refuge under His wings" (Ruth 2:12). Ultimately, she is rewarded with marriage and progeny from which stem Israel's national royal family.

In illustrating how the most glorious outcome may result from humble and alien origins, provided there is sincerity, goodness and perseverance, the Megilla is an important commentary on the Torah. Underlying the narrative is the theme of G-d's behind-the-scenes involvement, influencing events to help the righteous succeed in pursuing their worthy goals. But there is much more as we shall discuss in due course.

## **2. Allusions to Abraham and Yishaq**

Ruth's extraordinary comportment is given fuller meaning, indeed, momentous significance, by the author's rich allusions to events in the lives of Abraham and Yishaq. Parallels are drawn between Hashem's לְךָ-לְךָ call to Abraham to leave his father's home to proceed to the Promised Land - a foundational act in establishing the nation of Israel - and Ruth's doing so. The account of Divine Providence at work in Abraham's servant successfully finding the appropriate wife for Yishaq is the backdrop to Ruth's meeting Boaz and the preliminaries that eventually lead to their marrying. We will survey the linkage, pointing out how extensive it is. -

G-d's selection of Abraham entails the test of Abraham taking leave of land, kinfolk and father's home to go to a land he does not know - לְךָ-לְךָ מֵאֲרָצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלֶדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָצְךָ (Gen. 12:1). Ruth's decision to attach herself to Naomi contains similar elements and is described in strikingly comparable language.

When Naomi tried to dissuade her daughters-in-law from accompanying her from Moab to Judah, she said: לְכַנָּה שְׁבֹנָה אִשָּׁה לְכַנָּה לְבֵית אִמָּה “go, return, each to her mother’s home” (Ruth. 1:8). As a woman speaking to women to return home, the more emotional-laden “mother’s home” is substituted for the more technically-correct “father’s home.” Ruth’s response includes אֶל אִשְׁרַי תִּלְכִּי אִלַּי recalling לְךָ-לְךָ (v. 16). She continues with a comprehensive commitment to the nation of Israel and its G-d, corresponding to Abraham’s response - silent but nonetheless salient - in hearkening to the Divine call to go to a land he does not know. Later, Boaz strikes similar notes in commending Ruth for וַתַּעֲזָבִי וְאֶבְיָךְ וְאֶמְךָ מוֹלְדֹתֶיךָ וְתִלְכִי אֶל-עַם אִשְׁרַי לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ “you left father, mother and land of your birth and moved to a nation you did not previously know” (ibid. 2:11).

When Abraham’s servant - on his mission to find a wife for Yishaq - arrived at his destination, he was נֹצֵב, “standing watchfully” at the well from which the town’s young ladies drew water. He prayed הַקְרֵה-נָא לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם וַעֲשֵׂה-חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם “make it chance before me this day and do kindness with my master Abraham” (Gen. 24:12). Ribqah’s magnificent response to his request included: אֶשְׂאֵב עַד אִם-כִּלּוּ לְשֵׁתֹתַי “I will draw until they conclude drinking,” quenching their thirst (ibid. v. 19). When the servant’s character test - essentially looking for kindness - was concluded, he asked, “whose daughter are you?” Immediately upon her answer - learning that she is from the right family - he gives her gifts. Each of these elements has a thematic or distinctive linguistic parallel in the corresponding Megilla scene.

When Ruth first went out to the fields to pick gleanings, וַיִּקֶּר מִקְרָהּ, “it chanced for her to come upon the portion of the field that belonged to Boaz” (Ruth 2:3). Boaz asked his assistant הַנֹּצֵב “who stood watchfully” over the harvesters, “to whom is this girl?” (ibid. v. 5). (In the following verse the foreman is again mentioned as הַנֹּצֵב עַל-הַקּוֹצְרִים.) Immediately upon being told of Ruth’s family connection, Boaz, having heard of her beneficence, begins extending her great kindness. He tells her that when she becomes thirsty she may go to the vessels מֵאִשְׁרַי יִשָּׂאבוּן וְשָׁתִיתִי, “and drink from where the lads draw” (ibid. 2:9),

introducing both a water-drawing site as well as a thirst-quenching gesture into the narrative.

Abraham's servant gave thanks to Hashem: בְּרוּךְ ה'... אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ וְאֱמִתּוֹ "Blessed is Hashem... who has not forsaken His kindness and truth from my master" (Gen. v. 27). He states his appreciation that Hashem led him to his master's brethren. Although his mission still required great effort to bring the indicated result to fruition, G-d had spoken and the servant realized it; he now focused his efforts on bringing about the marriage. Meanwhile, Ribqah goes home and reports to her family (לְבֵית אָמָהּ) on what transpired (ibid. v. 28).

Ruth returns to her mother-in-law and relates the day's events. Although there is a long way to go, Naomi immediately senses Divine Providence at work and the matrimonial and redemption potential for her daughter-in-law, which she must nurture with great skill to actualize. She expresses her thanksgiving to Hashem with the following words: ... אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ. "Blessed be he to Hashem who has not forsaken His kindness" (Ruth 2:20). It is noteworthy that these Genesis and Ruth usages of the phrase חֶסְדּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב are the only two attestations of this locution in Tanakh. Naomi proclaims that Hashem has led Ruth to a relative - קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִגְּאֻלָּנוּ הוּא, using words very similar to those of the servant, that Hashem has led him to take the daughter of "אָחִי אֲדֹנָי" (my master's brother) for his son. In redemption contexts "redeemer" and "brother" are employed virtually synonymously (see Lev. 25).

Ruth added a detail: Boaz had also told her, "Stay close to my workers until all my harvest is finished" (Ruth 2:21, NJPS). She employed the phrase "עַד אִם-כָּלוּ," just as Ribqah did when telling the servant that she will draw water until the camels were through drinking. Again, these are the only two attestations of this locution in Tanakh.

Upon the servant being seated in his hosts' home, he made a point of his desire to expedite his responsibility: "I will not eat until I speak my words" (Gen. 24:33). When Naomi senses that Boaz

recognizes his responsibility, she comments that he will “not be silent” until he concludes the matter that very day (Ruth 3:18).

Finally, when Yishaq marries Ribqah, it states, וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לוֹ (Gen. 24:67). When Boaz and Ruth marry, it states, וַיִּקַּח בְּעוֹז וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה (Ruth 4:13). These are the only two attestations in Tanakh of this compound phrasal formula. The succeeding phrase in the Megilla, “וַיָּבֵא אֶלְיָהּ” is alliteratively linked to the immediately preceding phrase in that corresponding Genesis verse, “וַיָּבֵאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים.”

With this full constellation of correlations the message is unmistakable. Ruth was a sincere convert to the nation of Israel; she sensed G-d’s call, following in the footsteps of Abraham (and Ribqah). As G-d intervened on behalf of Abraham to provide the proper wife for his son so did He on behalf of Naomi, to provide the proper husband for her daughter-in-law. Things come about in ways that to the casual observer might appear as happenstance but to the discerning eye are clearly Providential. Superlative virtues distinguished both Ribqah and Ruth. As Yishaq and Ribqah deserved each other so too did Ruth and Boaz, and a notable future was in store for the latter couple as had materialized for the former one.

### 3. The Moabite Connection

The Torah legislation regarding Moabites is seemingly necessary to fully understand certain facets of the Megilla:

An Ammonite or Moabite may not enter the congregation of Hashem (קהל ה'); even unto the tenth generation they may not enter the congregation of Hashem, ever, because they did not come forward toward you with bread and water when you were on the journey coming out of Egypt and for hiring against you Balaam... to curse you (Deut. 23:4-5).

The Talmud limits the prohibition to males, one interpretation being that it is essentially the males’ responsibility to come forth with bread and water to weary travelers and another being that the

terms *עֲמוּנֵי וְמוֹאָבִי* imply males (BT *Yeb.* 76b-77a). Since the logic of making a distinction between males and females was not so apparent, this permissibility for females was variously contested and not fully accepted in all places at all times. The Talmud, in its *aggadic* fashion, asserts that at one point it was necessary to threaten force to have the distinction accepted (*ibid.*).

When discouraging her daughters-in-law from returning with her by referring to the difficulty of marriage in Israel, Naomi may have been alluding to the potential problem related to the concept ensconced in these verses. When Naomi and Ruth entered Bethlehem, the whole town buzzed with surprise over them, but, tellingly, and contrary to general practice when a needy and bereaved widow returns home, there is no indication of any significant befriending of them, undoubtedly because of the Moabite stigma.

Although Boaz was greatly impressed with Ruth and encouraged her to remain in his fields, provided for her protection from molestation and allowed her privileges not accorded the other poor, in certain ways he remained aloof. He did not inform her of his being a close relative of her late father-in-law. He did not relieve her of the necessity to stand all day in the sun gathering gleanings for her and her mother-in-law to survive. He made no effort to contact Naomi and took no initiative regarding redemption of the land. Despite his compassionate expressions these were disappointing omissions; based on the continuation of the story we may surely assume that they resulted from his fear of the Moabite connection.

It appears that Naomi's awareness of that fear explains why, at the end of the season, when she realized Ruth's contact with Boaz was about to conclude, she advised her to take matters into her own hands. She sensed that it was necessary to present Boaz with a powerful and clear-cut opportunity to face up to his responsibility and take the appropriate action, even if the only tactic available bordered on seduction. Her tactic recalls Tamar's strategy with Judah (Gen. 38). Oftentimes, even high-quality individuals are victims of fear and inertia and do not address

matters of social justice that lie within their immediate sphere of human interaction until they are directly challenged, at which time they rise to the occasion.

When the relative closer than Boaz was informed that the condition of redeeming Elimelekh's property involved marrying Ruth to establish the deceased's name on his property, he backed off, fearful it will ultimately damage his estate. He was concerned that the law concerning a Moabite may one day be thought of as prohibiting marriage to Ruth. Boaz declared his willingness to redeem the land and marry Ruth. He called the elders and others to witness his intent and there was a large, public ceremony to confirm the transaction. The halakha was firmly established that Ruth was permitted and everybody extended their blessings.

Boaz' name means "in whom is courage." He took the correct stand in accepting Ruth, although it may have been unpopular and although he knew that it would require ongoing steadfastness in the future.

#### **4. Another Aspect of Meaning**

Additionally, the Megilla is a tale of a family's resurrection after having almost reached the point of obliteration. During a famine a man with his wife and two sons left Bethlehem of Judah to live in Moab. The singular and anonymous *וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ*, with the general tone of the first verse, indicates that he left while others were not leaving Judah. We later discover that this man, Elimelekh, possessor of a distinguished name meaning "my G-d is king," had been a landowner from a prominent family. Moving to Moab, he abandoned his heritage and people. He soon dies. His wife Naomi, "pleasantness," is left with the sons, Mahlon and Khilyon, names meaning "sickness" and "destruction" respectively. Obviously these are symbolic names, for people do not so call their sons. Indeed, all the Megilla's names appear to be symbolic.

Both sons marry Moabite wives and after ten years they also pass away, childless, leaving forlorn widows. All that remained of the family were the bereaved mother beyond child-bearing years and

her two Moabite daughters-in-law. Upon Naomi's urging, Orpah returns to her family, her name perhaps referring to the "back of the neck," derived from her action of turning away. The family that abandoned its spiritual legacy is now practically decimated, a significant statement about the negative consequences associated with leaving the land of Israel.

Nevertheless, the Megilla teaches, as long as there is life there is hope and redemption is possible. The restoration was brought about in a way impossible to have imagined - through the superlative loyalty, kindness and sacrifice of the remaining Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth.

In the Talmud (BT *B.Batra* 14b) the view is expressed that Megillat Ruth was written by the prophet Shemuel, at the end of the era of the Judges (pre-1000 BCE), relatively close to the time of its setting. However, the literary evidence indicates that it was composed centuries later. It states, "Thus was the custom in former times in Israel... to validate a transaction, one man would take off his shoe and hand it to his fellow" (Ruth 4:7), implying a significantly later era, when the old custom not only fell into disuse but was widely unknown. Its opening verse, "And it was in the days when the Judges ruled" (ibid. 1:1), is more suitable for an author describing a time long past. While the Megilla's language is classic Biblical, some of its diction and word usage appears more consistent with the exilic period, such as the words "*te`agena*" (1:13), "*vayisbot*" (2:14), and others. Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon ר"ט was of the opinion that it was probably written about the time of the Babylonian exile of Judah in 586 BCE, part of the prophetic output of Jeremiah, when the national situation was bleak with the people deep in despair and in great need of encouragement to counteract their pessimism and prompt them to believe that there was hope for restoration.

The family's decline and resurrection may very well be an allegory referring to the nation of Israel going into exile, the enormous trials and tribulations befalling it there, and its subsequent national revival and restoration when the remnant, perhaps a tiny part of the remnant, chose to sincerely commit

itself to the Covenant. Although the principles of repentance and return are detailed in the Torah, theoretical statements benefit from a story manifesting the principles at work. Indeed, when reading the last portion of the Deuteronomy execration section predicting the final chastisement in the land followed by exile with the problems continuing there (Deut. 28:59 ff.), one cannot help but think of the two sons who died prematurely and childless, מְהָלוֹן וְנִלְיוֹן (“Sickness” and “Destruction”). The relevant Deuteronomy text explicitly speaks of sicknesses with the words הָקָלִים and הָקָלִי (ibid. vv. 59, 61) followed shortly afterwards by עֵינָיו וְנִלְיוֹן (ibid. v. 65)!

Rabbi Sassoon understood the name Ruth as derived from the Aramaic word ירוּתָא “inheritance,” corresponding to the Hebrew word ירוּשָׁה, consistent with the rules of ש and ת transference between these languages. Thus, the heroine’s name appropriately strikes the theme of the message. It is noteworthy that on the Moabite stone (9th Century BCE), the word for ירוּשָׁה appears written with a ת. (See *Natan Hochmah Lishlomo*, Heb. pp. 101-2)

## 5. Ruth and Tamar

As pointed out, Ruth’s sincerely motivated clandestine attempt at union with Boaz (Ruth 3:9) recalls Tamar’s sincere deception of her father-in-law Judah (Gen. 38), from which Peres, Boaz’ paternal ancestor, derived.

There is unmistakable structural and conceptual linkage between the Genesis narrative concerning Tamar and that of Ruth. At the head of the families are Judah and Elimelekh. Judah separates from his brothers and home locale, marries a Canaanite woman and has sons (three), two of whom die prematurely and childless. Elimelekh leaves his land with his two sons who marry Moabite women and who also die prematurely and childless. In both narratives carrying on the name of the deceased - *yibum* or redemption - through the available widow becomes a central theme of the narrative as well as a primary goal of a female protagonist, but is postponed or avoided by the males. Judah wrongly fears possible death for his remaining son through contact with Tamar while Elimelekh’s relative fears marriage with

Ruth, which may “destroy” his estate, probably because of the Moabite connection.

At a critical point, when it appears that *yibum* or redemption will be put off indefinitely, the women act boldly. Tamar is told that Judah will be going to shear his sheep, a traditionally joyous time for sheep owners, while Ruth is told that Boaz - Elimelekh's relative who replaces him in the schematic plan - having concluded the harvest, will be winnowing his crop, also a joyous occasion, comparable to the sheep-shearing. At a time when Tamar knew Judah was vulnerable (he had been consoled upon the death of his wife), Tamar removes her widow's clothing, dresses appropriately and stations herself for her task of seducing Judah in a location where he cannot help but notice her. Ruth bathes, anoints herself, dresses appropriately and uncovers Boaz' sleeping blanket and slips under it at his feet. Tamar used deceit while Ruth employed stealth.

Judah yields to the temptation and Shelah, who was the more appropriate *yabam*, is pre-empted. The progeny that derives from that liaison includes Boaz. Boaz, on the other hand, exercises self-restraint - “she lay at his feet until morning” (Ruth 3:14) - explaining to Ruth that there is one relative closer with whom the primary rights and responsibilities reside. (Rabbi Sassoon thought this should be viewed as representative of Boaz correcting Judah's impetuosity.) When the first-in-line refuses to exercise his right Boaz marries Ruth. The blessing of the people and the elders includes, “And may thy house be like the house of Peres whom Tamar bore unto Judah” (ibid. 4:12). From that relationship derives King David (ibid v. 17).

## **6. General Remarks**

As a Moabite, Ruth derived from Lot's liaison with his elder daughter (Gen. 19:37). Thus, King David, derived from Boaz and Ruth, had these formative “illicit” relationships on both paternal and maternal pedigree lines. The wife of David's son Solomon, the mother of Rehab'am, through whom the royal line was carried

forward, was Na`ama Ha`Ammonit (1 Kings 14:21), a descendant of Lot's liaison with his younger daughter (Gen. 19:38).

That the royal line of Israel derives from such relationships teaches that a background of lowly birth does not relegate an individual to an ignoble life. Divine Providence comes down on the side of purity of heart when joined with ongoing compassionate, altruistic and innocent intentions, as opposed to favoring the strict letter of the law.

In an interesting comment on the long reign of King David, in contrast to the much shorter one of King Saul, Talmudic Sages state: "We do not appoint a *parnas* over the public unless a קופה של שרצים (a basket of rodents, signifying questionable background) is hanging from behind him, so that if he becomes haughty and arrogant, we can say to him 'look at your background'" (BT *Yoma* 22b).

The Yalkut Shimoni (Ruth 608) points out that every verse in Ruth begins with a "vav" except for eight. Rabbi Hiya expounds: this hints at Ruth's deep attachment to the Covenant. Whether this statement was intended as *peshat* or not, the digit eight (as well as its decimal multiples) does signify the Covenant (see our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah From the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon*<sup>1</sup>). It surely is noteworthy that the Megilla proper (excluding the five-verse epilogue which is a genealogical addenda) is composed of exactly 80 verses.

Regarding the custom to read Ruth on Shabu`ot (cited in *Masekhet Sofrim* 14:16), the following may be said: Since on that day we celebrate the nation's entering into the Covenant, it is appropriate to read the inspiring story of an extraordinary individual who recognized the great value of sacrificing to be part of Israel and its heritage. It is also heartening to read of the magnificent reward G-d bestowed upon her. In addition, on this auspicious occasion it is proper to remind ourselves that the heritage of Israel is open to all sincere individuals who genuinely

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<sup>1</sup> Referenced studies of Rabbi Shamah may be found online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org)

accept the responsibilities of the Torah, regardless of national or genealogical background, and that based on their personal merit they may rise to attain the foremost eminence within the nation.

**מועדים בשמחה ותזכו לשנים רבות**

# Megillat Ruth

by Rabbi Ralph Tawil

As is well known the Jewish custom is to read Megillat Ruth on Shabuot. Yet there are diverse opinions about how and when to read it. Masekhet Soferim<sup>2</sup> records the practice of reading Megillat Ruth with a blessing “al miqra megilla” (“on the reading of the scroll”) on Shabuot.

Ruth is read on the end of the first day of “gathering” (mosa`e yom tob rishon shel asseret) until half the book and it is completed at the end of the second day. And there are those who say that all (the megilla readings) are begun on the night after Shabbat before the holiday and thus the people have practiced.... (4:18)

This source records two customs regarding the reading. Interestingly, the popular custom as recorded above is not practiced anywhere today. Currently, there are four customs concerning the reading of Megillat Ruth on Shabuot. The Sephardic custom is not to read the megillah during prayer services at all. Rather, the Megillah is read as part of the “tiqqun lel Shabuot” (the portion learned on Shabuot night). It is also read during the holiday; half of the scroll is read on the first afternoon of the holiday and half on the second afternoon (similar to the first custom that Masekhet Soferim recorded.)

The Galician Hassidic groups read the megilla before the second day's Torah reading (in the diaspora). They read from a humash and not from a scroll and they read individually (“beyahid”). The custom of the Mitnagdim is to have the cantor read publicly from either a scroll, if one is available, or from a humash--without a

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<sup>2</sup> Masekhet Soferim, in its present form, dates to the middle of the eighth century, though it is based on much older traditions. It contains rules for production of Torah scrolls and regulations of public Torah reading. It can be found in the common edition of the Babylonian Talmud (along with other “minor tractates”) after Masekhet “Horayot.”

prior blessing. Some groups in Israel who follow the rulings of R. Elyahu of Vilna, read Megillat Ruth from a scroll with a blessing (Zevin, *Hamoamidim behalacha*, pp. 327-328).

Yalqut Shimoni (Yalqut Shimoni Ruth, 596) explained the association of Megillat Ruth with the festival of Shabuot, (called “the period of the giving of the Torah”, by the sages).

What is the association of “Ruth” with “Asseret” (“Gathering Festival”), that it is read during “Asseret” at the time of the giving of the Torah? To teach that Torah is only given through affliction and poverty. As it is written: “Your tribe dwells there; O God, in Your goodness You provide for the needy.” (Psalms 68:11)

Other explanations of the association between Ruth and Shabuot include the fact that the main events of Ruth occur during the grain harvest, which is also the season of Shabuot, or that Ruth's decision to become part of Naomi's people and to accept her God, is similar to the “conversion” that the Israelites underwent when they became God's people (Hamanhig, Abudraham). B.S. Jacobsen extended the latter idea, suggesting that since Israel alone received the Torah, there was a need to show that the Torah beckons the righteous of all nations by describing Ruth's sincere conversion (Netiv Binah vol. 4 p. 148). Other reasons include Boaz's adherence to the laws of leaving behind grain for the needy, described after the offering to be given on Shabuot in Leviticus 23 (Levush 494); another association is that King David was born on Shabuot and this scroll describes King David's ancestors (Bekhor Shor, Baba Batra 13b).

## **The Story and Storytelling**

The story is simple. An impoverished Israelite widow, Naomi, and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, return to Bethlehem after both their husbands died in Moab. Boaz, a wealthy relative of the former father-in-law marries the daughter-in-law and inherits the rights of the deceased. They have a son, Obed, who ends up being David's grandfather. Though simple, the story is a fine example of the art of biblical narrative. Sparse detail, importance of dialogue,

“type-scenes,” allusion, word-play, poetic-prose, varying perspectives etc. are all used to create a story that is as meaningful as it is interesting to read. Let us examine some of these literary elements.

## Literary Foils

The book develops three main characters: Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. It is the interplay between these three that determines the main action of the book. Megillat Ruth highlighted two of these characters, Ruth and Boaz, by using literary “foils.” Ruth's character, for example, is displayed by using her sister-in-law Orpah as a foil in a scene leaving Moab with her mother-in-law, Naomi. In this case the foil, Orpah, is very devoted to her mother-in-law, Naomi. She is equal to Ruth in devotion after Naomi's first plea to leave.

And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping and said to her, “no, we will return with you to your people.”

There is no differentiation between the daughters-in-law...yet. After Naomi's second impassioned plea for them to leave,<sup>3</sup> there is a contrast between the daughters-in-law.

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<sup>3</sup> Naomi's selfless character is palpably depicted in her arguments to her two daughters-in-law:

Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me.

Naomi has only her daughters-in-law's best interest in mind and is giving them the best advice she can. Her situation would be better off with her daughters-in-law, yet she does not consider that at all when giving them advice. She does not just make a show of insisting they return to a better situation, she makes reasoned arguments to convince them. Naomi's arguments center around one issue only, the likelihood of there being another chance to continue the name of their deceased husbands.

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and Ruth clung to her. (1:14)

These both seem to be positive reactions of remaining with Naomi. The attachment between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law is great—"kissing" and "clinging" both describe close attachment. We do not know what the result of Naomi's speech was--until Naomi informs us in her next plea to Ruth that Orpah's kiss was a farewell kiss.

So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law."

We are not even sure to whom Naomi is talking until the next verse has Ruth replying. The character "Orpah" highlights Ruth's loyalty by displaying great loyalty, but not as much as Ruth. The conclusion one reaches is that though Orpah is good, Ruth is better.

Boaz is also set off by an anonymous minor character ("peloni almoni" "so and so") who almost redeems Elimelekh's lands and marries Ruth. Boaz presents the issue to the redeemer as a matter of property rights. The redeemer initially agrees to redeem the property. He demurs when Boaz reveals that he would also have to redeem the wife of the deceased, Ruth.

The redeemer replied, "Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate." (4:6)

The danger associated with marrying Ruth and how precisely that would "impair his estate" (4:6) is open to various explanations<sup>4</sup>,\*\*\* yet what is clear is that Boaz did not consider

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<sup>4</sup> Rashi, following a rabbinic opinion, explained that the other redeemer did not properly understand the Torah's prohibition of marrying a Moabite (the rabbinic understanding of Deuteronomy 23:4). He understood the prohibition to apply to men and woman, whereas it only applied to the men. Alternatively, he might be referring to financial ruin with the need to support two more women. Or perhaps the reference is to bringing a source of contention into his family by having a child from a "forced" marriage who might quarrel with his other children. Assuming he was married, then he might be unwilling to marry a second wife with all its associated problems.

these factors when deciding to marry Ruth. Boaz, when first becoming aware of the situation, says:

Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich. And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are. But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I. Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! Let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as the Lord lives! Lie down until morning. (3:10-13)

Boaz realizes Ruth's loyalty and other qualities. These qualities are the only thing that is driving him to act on her behalf. Boaz's concern is for people, and not for self-gain. Boaz is clearly set apart from this non-redeeming redeemer (Incidentally, note the repetition of the verb g.a.l. in these two sections; even the word "egleh" in verse 4:4 is playing with the same string of letters).

The way this anonymous character is introduced into the story creates dramatic suspense. We, the readers, expect and even want the very good man, Boaz, to marry Ruth. We are already aware of his fine character and his concern for Ruth. He is much better than a "so and so," though the other person has the stronger claim. The other redeemer's initial affirmative response to Boaz's informing him of his opportunity to redeem his kinsman's land disappoints us to some extent--until he finally refuses to redeem--because of Ruth, the very reason Boaz sought to redeem.

### **Symbolism**

Another literary technique is the symbolic use of names. Naomi herself makes us aware of the importance of the names by making a play on her name upon returning to Bethlehem. Naomi's name comes from the word N.'M. which means pleasant. When she returned widowed and destitute from Moab the people of Beth

Lehem exclaimed in their astonishment, “Can this be Naomi?” Naomi replied:

So not call me Naomi...Call me Mara (bitterness) for Shaddai has made my lot bitter. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi, when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me. (1:20-21)

The names of the minor characters are not important enough to record (“peloni almoni”=“so and so”, although this might be a way of not mentioning a character whose behavior is less than admirable) and are even symbolic (it is hard to imagine people naming their children “Mahlon” and “Khilyon”=“sickness” and “destruction,” although symbolic names were sometimes given by prophets and others). Orpah’s name probably derives from the word “oref” which means the “back of the neck,” the part of the body shown when you turn away from someone, as she ultimately did. The name of the heroine of the story, Ruth, is less clear. One interesting possibility is reflected in the Peshitta (the Syriac translation of the Bible). There her name is “Re’uth” which derives from the word “re’a” which means “friend.” This might reflect her loyalty to her mother-in-law. Rabbi S.D. Sassoon explained “Ruth” in another way. “Ruth” would be similar to the Aramaic translation of the word “to inherit” (Hebrew “yarash”= Aramaic “yarat,” see the targum to Numbers 24:18; apparently Moabite was similar to aramaic in this respect as the Moabite stone also has the word “yeruta”). Ruth carried with her the inheritance of Elimelech.

### **Literary Allusion**

In the evening meeting between Ruth and Boaz (chapter 3), the story also alludes to two similar situations--Lot's daughters (Genesis 19:31ff), and Tamar, Yehuda's daughter-in-law (Genesis 38). The three situations have common features, most notably, that there are women who have little prospect of having further children and who take actions to insure their own offspring. Additionally, each of the cases has the death of two husbands. The differences in the Ruth story emphasize Ruth's modesty and

Boaz's self-control. Ruth, unlike Lot's daughters, makes only a symbolic advance to Boaz, who had been drinking of his own accord. Lot's daughters get their father drunk and have relations with him. Boaz's self-control, in contrast to Yehuda's impulsive behavior, allows him to follow the proper procedure regarding the more rightful redeemer. Rabbi Sassoon explained that the meeting between Ruth and Boaz is a "tiqqun" (rectification) of the previous two encounters. Ruth is the descendant of the product of the first encounter, Moab, and Boaz is a descendant of a product of the second encounter, Peress. It is the correction of these earlier encounters that eventually leads to the birth of the ruling dynasty in Israel.

## **Purpose**

Although various interesting suggestions have been proposed<sup>5</sup>, the question of the book's purpose was already raised by the midrash:

R. Ze'ira said: This scroll does not have in it impurity or purity, prohibited or permitted, why was it written? To teach the great reward for those who give graciously (gomleh hasadim). (Ruth Rabbah 2:14)

According to R. Zeira the book is about hesed. Ruth, the Moabite, is the character most roundly praised for her "hesed." Yet, it is the Moabite lack of kindness which leads to them being excluded

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<sup>5</sup> Amongst the various purposes attributed to the book are:

1) a description of David's ancestry. The book ends with David's genealogy, which is uncharacteristically absent from the book of Samuel.

2) "Presentation of the disagreeable fact of David having a Moabite ancestor in the best possible light" (Licht, Storytelling in the Bible, p. 125). David's Moab kinship could be inferred from the fact that he sends his family to Moab for refuge when he fled from Shaul (see 1 Samuel 22:3-4). The book of Ruth emphasizes that from David's father's side he is from the tribe of Yehuda. His Moabite relative is only his very worthy great-grandmother.

3) Countering the early second-temple opposition to marrying foreign women, including specifically Ammonites and Moabites. (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 10:29-31; 13:24-27)

4) To show how David's birth was the hand of God acting against significant odds. (Klein, Olam Hatanakh p. 74)

from the “congregation of God” (understood to mean prohibition of marriage).

An Ammonite or a Moabite is not to enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation no one from them is to enter the assembly of the Lord, for the ages, on account that they did not greet you with food and with water on the way at your going out from Egypt.... (Deuteronomy 23 4-5; SB)

Ruth is the one who rises above her “breeding” and displays hesed and loyalty. She is obviously worthy of becoming part of God's assembly.

We can now return to the issue raised at the beginning of this essay, namely, the Megillah's association with Shabuot—answering in a homiletic vein. The display of hesed that is the mainstay of this short book is living Torah. Loyalty, commitment, righteous behavior, sexual propriety, respecting the rights of others, concern for the disadvantaged--all elements essential to the Torah--are illustrated in this book. The Torah, whose beginning and end is hesed (Sotah 14a), which was given in this season, is exemplified by the behavior of Ruth and Boaz, the main characters of Megillat Ruth.

# The Moment

by Rabbi Ezra Labaton

One could argue that the Ten Commandments, (or better: Ten Pronouncements or Statements) given on *Har Sinai*, were the most important piece of legislation that the world has ever known. Certainly it has outlived the ancient law codes of the Mesopotamians, Hittites, and Hammurabi – though these predated the Torah by five to eight hundred years. Is there any law code more famous? These Ten Commandments have formed the basic legislation of the entire Western world and has impacted strongly on at least three billion people (1.2 billion Moslems, 1.8 billion Christians) – fully half of the world’s population. This code has changed the course of world civilization. That moment at *Har Sinai*, celebrated on the Holiday of *Shabuot*, should be seen and appreciated as the most important moment in human history. It is most appropriate to analyze the factors that made this law code and this moment so significant and so impactful.

First, we should point to the Torah’s two internal characterizations of the Ten Commandments. These characterizations will be helpful in understanding why the Ten Commandments were so impactful. *Shemot* 30:15 describes the Ten Commandments as *Luhot Ha-edut*– The Tablets of Testimony. What are the implications of this designation? To what do they serve as witness? One would not be far off the mark in suggesting that these *Luhot* serve as witness to *Bore Olam*’s ongoing involvement and concern with the world He created. Not only is the Almighty the Creator and Sovereign – but He serves as Master Legislator, as well. God is concerned enough to provide his creations with a proper legal system with which to govern - a legal system that intends to guide mankind towards a proper Messianic end. Further, this code of law based on the Divine word, testifies to the absolute nature of the moral system He legislated. The Israelites, and by extension all of humanity, are to strive to live by these absolute Divine, moral and legal norms. Whether one sees these norms as “Natural law” implicit in the human heart, mind and soul, or as “Revealed legislation,” these

norms are rooted in Divine concern about human behavior and the absolute nature of God's moral legislation. *Har Sinai* testifies to this concern.

As well, *Shemot* 24:7 calls these Ten Commandments *Luhot Ha-berit* – The Tablets of the Covenant. This legislative act is viewed by Torah as a contractual/covenantal agreement between the Creator and the Israelites. We are to become His chosen people and He is to be our God. (see *Shemot* 6:7). As a result, we are responsible for bringing these Divine norms to the attention of all others – of sanctifying His Name. God, in turn, will guarantee our ongoing vitality as a nation. “I shall be your God and you shall be My Nation,” underscores the indissoluble bond – the contractual agreement – between the Israelite nation and the God of our forefathers. This everlasting relationship is rooted in the “berit” that was contracted at *Har Sinai*. These two terms, *Luhot Ha-edut* and *Luhot Ha-berit*, serve as the basis of this Divine-human relationship. The Ten Commandments, and this legal system, are the result of this encounter – cemented at *Sinai*. A holy moment indeed.

As such, these Ten Commandments have to be viewed as central in the relationship between *Am Yisrael* and *Haqadosh Barukh Hu*. A violation of the covenant (the golden calf) has to result in the smashing of these tablets (Moshe Rabenu). Here, the violation is viewed not only as disloyalty to God, but also as a violation of one's contractual/covenantal obligations. No relationship is possible with this sort of violation and disloyalty.

Having established how Torah views these Commandments, and their centrality in this Divine/human encounter, we now turn our attention to the geographical and environmental factors that define the moment of this experience. First, we note that the site chosen was the empty, barren desert of *Sinai*. One may raise the question: Why the desert? Why not give the Commandments in this or that country? Here, the Rabbis of the Midrash significantly point out that the desert is open and free to all. No one nation has sovereignty over the desert. So too, the law of *Bore Olam* is free and open to all. Other nations and individuals may avail

themselves of the opportunity of binding themselves to the Creator by adopting this set of Divine legislation.

Next, the starkness of the desert is highlighted by the mountain chosen for this event. Unlike the Canaanites who chose the high and mighty *Har Hermon* as their “holy mountain,” and unlike the Greeks who chose Mount Olympus as their “temple of the gods,” *Haqadosh Barukh Hu* chose a small, nondescript mountain - barely noticeable - and immediately forgotten after the event. (Note: There is no intrinsic holiness to this *har* - it’s only God’s presence that sanctifies, and with the withdrawal of that Presence, no sanctity remains). Even more to the point is the root of the name *Sinai*. The Biblical commentators see this name as rooted in the Hebrew word *sanui* - that which is hated and abandoned by one and all (despite the change in spelling). And the alternate name, *Har Horeb*, derives from the Hebrew word *Hurban* - devastation and destruction. This mountain - not a very pleasant place - did not welcome visitors - nor did it fascinate or attract because of its majestic bearing. God specifically chose this abandoned, avoided, stark, desolate mountain upon which to reveal these Ten Commandments. The focus had to be on the majestic presence of *Bore Olam*, revealing His Divine glory, and not on the mountain itself.

The natural elements also play a role in this revelatory moment. Torah goes out of her way to describe these factors. Thunder and lightning, fire and brimstone, all serve to heighten the tension (Shemot 19:16) and establish the moment as unforgettable. The mountain itself is described as trembling with the presence of the Almighty descending upon the mountain - surrounded by clouds and smoke - all aflame. This moment was intended to last for an eternity and to shape a people into God’s chosen. It had to be awe-inspiring - a spiritually uplifting, overwhelming moment. And it was. Torah records the fear felt by the people and their words begging Moshe to speak, rather than the Creator - *pen-namut* (Per chance we may die). Moshe attempts to allay their feelings of trepidation by noting that this moment was intended to strike a note of fear and trembling into

their beings, so that they never conceive of violating the norms of the encounter.

The geography and natural elements all conspire to establish this moment as “The Moment” – a one time event in human history. But it wasn’t enough – more was necessary to establish The Moment. Prominent at the *Har Sinai* experience was the sound of the *shofar* (*Shemot* 19:16, 19; 20:16). One wonders why? What did this primitive sound symbolize to the Israelites at that moment? What images did it evoke? What feelings did it inspire? Prior to this moment, we don’t have any record at all of the *shofar* as ritually or spiritually important.

Yet, Torah goes out of her way to note again and again how prominent was this sound, along with the thunder that filled the heavens. Did the *shofar* strike fear into their hearts? Amos 3:6 asks rhetorically: “Is the *shofar* ever sounded in the city and the people not tremble?” Evidently, at a later time, the *shofar*’s blasting signaled fear. Though this verse is spoken five hundred years after the Sinaitic moment, perhaps the *shofar* played the same role earlier? Or did the blasts of this instrument signal freedom to the ancient Israelites, as it does on Yom Kippur of the Jubilee year? (*Vayiqra* 25:9) Our Torah text does not enlighten as to any of these options, leaving us guessing as to the true symbolic meaning of the *shofar* – though we are quite sure of its significance.

But this is not all. Along with the geographical, environmental and humanly initiated *shofar* blasts comes Moshe’s demand that the people must prepare themselves for the great moment about to be experienced. Proper *hakhana* (preparation) only serves to intensify the feelings of anticipation. First, the people must self-sanctify by washing their clothes. (*Shemot* 19:10) Though we are not told why sanctification comes about in this fashion, and why this was significant, perhaps it may be explained as symbolic of a new beginning. Next, they were prohibited from coming close to a woman (*Shemot* 19:15) Here, Moshe had lead them away from any physical sensations. The Moment must be viewed as purely spiritual. The focus is not to be on anything human, but

exclusively on the Divine. And then, finally, on the third day, the Moment was to be experienced. (Shemot 19:11). For the first time in human history, a throng of people – a nation transformed - shall stand witness to what no other nation ever witnessed.

Three thousand, three hundred years later, the nation of Israel still commemorates and celebrates The Moment. How could it not? Passed on from that Moment - from father to son and mother to daughter - were the sights seen, the sounds heard, the emotions felt. This Moment was preserved in the collective unconscious heart, mind and soul of this nation.

Our legal system, the ethics and ritual that define us as a people, were all rooted in that Moment at *Har Sinai*. The Ten Commandments established the covenantal relationship between the Almighty and His Chosen Nation. Our task now stands to pass on the power of this Moment to the next generation, as it is to pass it on to the other member nations of the world – to the Creator's other children.

# Psalm 68- The Ark of the Covenant

by Mr. Ronald Benun

Psalm 68 is one of the most impenetrable in Tehillim. The NJPS prefaces its English translation by noting, “The coherence of this psalm and the meaning of many of its passages are uncertain.” It is the only psalm that warrants such a comment. Among its difficulties is that it contains many words that do not appear anywhere else in the Bible and are therefore hard to interpret. We will demonstrate that the key to the psalm lies in understanding its frequent references to the famous celebratory Song of Deborah in Judges 5 which poetically recounts the battle against Sisera. Awareness of this ancient historical backdrop in conjunction with intertextual links will enable us to clarify the obscure imagery, difficult wording, and central themes of the psalm.

We will begin by providing a brief synopsis of Judges 4 and 5.

## The Deborah Narrative

The Song of Deborah is introduced in the chapter preceding it (Judges 4) by a historical recap of the political circumstances in the land, and the Israelites’ ensuing battle with the Canaanite forces (ca. 12th century B.C.E). The story opens on the note that as Israel continued in their sinful ways before G-d, He “sold them off” (v.2) to the Canaanites. The Israelites were severely oppressed by the Canaanites for 20 years. The Canaanites had a powerful army that included 900 iron chariots - *תִּשְׁעַת מְאוֹת רֶכֶב* (Jud. 4:3), the strongest weaponry available, iron being the most expensive metal of the period.

The battle is initiated by Deborah who relays her prophecy to Barak that he must gather an army of 10,000 foot soldiers from Kedesh Naphtali to fight Sisera, a paltry army compared to the mighty forces of Sisera’s chariots. They are directed to the Qishon Wadi where G-d will “hand over” the army of Sisera. Barak

congregates the army, and moves south and west of Kedesh Naphtali towards Har Tabor. Meanwhile, Sisera is headquartered at חֲרֻשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם (approximately 1650 feet above the narrow valley of Qishon, in a near vertical slope to the valley).<sup>1</sup> When Sisera receives news of the whereabouts of the Israelites he heads northeast along the Qishon River to battle the Israelites. Normally, the Qishon River is a trivial stream that flows through the Jezreel Valley, with a permanent flow only at its western extremity. During the wet season, normally the winter months of November to February, there is a possibility of floods caused by the overflowing of the Qishon Wadi.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, a chariot army would not initiate a war during those months when there could be catastrophic consequences. Therefore this war surely took place during the spring/summer season. (See map from Olam HaTanakh:)



<sup>1</sup> Although the precise location of חֲרֻשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם cannot be identified, the approximate location provides a better picture of the stages of the battle. <Baly, Denis. The Geography of the Bible: a Study in Historical Geography. New York: Harper & Row, 1957, pg. 130>

<sup>2</sup> Mazar, Benjamin, et. al. eds. Illustrated World of the Bible Library. Vol. 2. Jerusalem: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960, pg. 83

The text then states that G-d cast Sisera and his army into a panic and the mighty chariots were defeated by the Israelites. In Judges 5, we learn that a flash-flood overfilled the Qishon river causing Sisera's chariots that were traveling in the Wadi to be swept away with the water. Sisera then flees by foot with Barak in pursuit. Seeking refuge, Sisera comes to the tent of Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite. Yael, knowing that Sisera is evil, gives him milk and curds provoking him to fall asleep, affording her the opportunity to kill him with a tent peg. Yael then greets Barak and delivers the body of the dead general to him. This scene then leads into Judges 5 and the Song of Deborah.

With the context of the Judges 4 narrative, which serves as the backdrop for the Song of Deborah, we will now proceed to take note of how the psalmist incorporates the elements and imagery from Deborah's song into Ps. 68.

## Psalm 68 and the Song of Deborah

In Ps. 68, the psalmist recounts the events of the Battle at Qishon quoting many phrases from the Song of Deborah. The Song of Deborah is one of five such "songs" in the Bible - the Sea<sup>3</sup> (Ex. 15), עלי באר (Num. 21), האזינו (Deut. 32), Deborah (Jud. 5), and דוד (2Sam. 22 - repeated almost verbatim in Ps. 18).

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<sup>3</sup> Although we will not attempt to discuss in detail the similarities between Ps. 68, the Song of Deborah, and the Song of the Sea, there are many points of similarity and intertextuality that deserve a study of their own. Some of these similarities include: הרים נזלו (Jud. 5:5) to נצבו כמו נד נזלים (Ex. 15:8) מן שמים (Jud. 5:20) to ונדד איש מלחמה (Ex. 15:3) הלא ומצאו וחקקו שלל (Jud. 5:30) to ונת בית תחלק שלל (Ps. 68:13). Ex. 15, Jud. 4-5, and Ps. 68 all contain imagery of chariots and water. In Ps. 68:29 - ופעתת לנו; צנה אלה-יך ענך עונה אלקים זו פעתת לנו, coming within close proximity in the Bible, only occurs once more in Exodus 15 - זו קנית - in v. 16 and פעתת in v. 17. Ps. 68:30 references Jerusalem- מהיכלך על רושלם, Ex. 15:17 alludes to Jerusalem - מקדש אדני-י ... בהר נחלתך. Ps. 68:23 - ממצלות גם, to Ex. 15:5 - נרדו במצולות.

Although Ps. 68 does not have a title that classifies it as a “song” as the other songs do, its unique superscription<sup>4</sup> - לְמִנְצַח - לְדָוִד מְזִמֹּר שִׁיר does contain the word שִׁיר. The same words are found in the superscription of Ps. 65 with the two middle words inverted. In fact the word שִׁיר (song) is found in all the superscriptions of Pss. 65-68, forming a sub-unit of these psalms, which reach a climactic conclusion in Ps. 68. Aside from the superscription, the word שִׁיר occurs once as a noun in v. 26 - שָׁרִים, and twice more as an imperative verb calling the reader to “sing to G-d...who rides on the clouds” in vv. 5 and 33. Note how v. 33 repeats and elaborates on v. 5’s call to “sing to G-d” forming an envelope with the opening of the psalm<sup>5</sup>.

תהילים 68: 5 שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹהִים זָמְרוּ שְׁמוֹ סִלוֹ לְרִכָּב בְּעַרְבוֹת בְּנִי-הַ שָׁמוּ וְעֲלוּ לְפָנָיו :  
 “Sing to G-d, chant hymns to his name; extol him who rides the clouds; the LORD is his name; exult in his presence.”

תהילים 68: 33 מִמְּלְכוֹת הָאָרֶץ שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹהִים זָמְרוּ אֲדֹנָי-יְיָ סֵלָה :  
 “O kingdoms of the earth, sing to G-d; chant hymns to the Lord, *selah*.”

In addition to the repeated usage of the root שִׁיר, the joyous scene of the procession welcoming the Aron in Ps. 68:25-26 with singers and musical instruments, conveys the imagery of the celebratory scene we would imagine taking place during Deborah’s recitation of the victory song.

The call to praise G-d in Ps. 68:5 parallels the praise of G-d in the Song of Deborah, Judges 5:3.

<sup>4</sup> As we demonstrate in our other commentaries (e.g. Ps. 22), superscriptions are an essential tool for analyzing a psalm.

<sup>5</sup> The general word שָׁמוּ in v. 5 becomes the specific name אֲדֹנָי-יְיָ in v. 33. סִלוֹ in v. 5 shares its consonants with סֵלָה in v. 33 and may also share a musical instruction. סֵלָה may mean to strike the final note while סִלוֹ is a command to sing. בְּעַרְבוֹת in v. 5 refers to G-d riding in the clouds, and is the ancient imagery of G-d, paralleling the ancient skies בְּשָׁמַי שְׁמַי קָדָם in v. 34. שְׁמִי in v. 34 shares sounds with שָׁמוּ from v. 5 and may also hint to its meaning, making v. 34 read “to the one who rides with the ancient names” one of which was specified in v. 5 וְעֲלוּ לְפָנָיו שָׁמוּ. בְּנִי-הַ שָׁמוּ in v. 5 meaning “exult before him [in song]” parallels תִּגְדּוּ עֹז לְאֱלֹהִים in v. 35 meaning “ascribe might to G-d [in song]”. עֹז shares both of its consonants with עֲלוּ and is often used in conjunction with singing as in Ex. 15:2 and Ps. 59:17-18. An important difference between the two verses is that v. 5 only speaks to the צַדִּיקִים, while v. 33 speaks to מַמְלְכוֹת הָאָרֶץ. We see a build up within the psalm.

תהילים 5: 68 **שירו לאלקים זמרו** שמו סלו לרכב בערבבות בנה שמו ועלוזו לפניו : שופטים 3: 5 שמעו מלכים האזינו רזנים אנכי לידוד אנכי **אשריה אומר לידוד אלה-י ישראל :**

“Hear, O kings! Give ear, O potentates! I will sing, will sing to the LORD, will hymn the LORD, the G-d of Israel.”

In fact, Jud. 5:3 is the only verse outside of Psalms that contains the roots זמר, שיר and the name of G-d (אלה\*ם/הוה) in a single verse. Furthermore, three verses later in Ps. 68 we have an explicit reference to the Song of Deborah. After she proclaims “I will sing to the Lord” she begins the song by recalling how G-d “went out from Seir” - **ידוד בצאתך משעיר**, and “marched from the country of Edom” - **בצעדך משדה אדום**. The “went out - marched” pair is duplicated in Ps. 68:8 but replaces “fields of Edom” with “the desert”. In addition, there are striking parallels between both texts in the imagery they use of the “earth shaking” - **ארך רעשה** and the “heavens pouring” **שמים נטפו**. Finally, both use the unique phrase “זה סיני”, as well as the phrase **אלה-י ישראל** -

שופטים 4: 5 **ידוד בצאתך משעיר בצעדך משדה אדום ארך רעשה גם שמים נטפו גם עבים נטפו מים :**

“O LORD, when You came forth from Seir, advanced from the country of Edom, the earth trembled; the heavens dripped, yea, the clouds dripped water.”

שופטים 5: 5 **הרים נזלו מפני ידוד זה סיני מפני ידוד אלה-י ישראל :**  
 “The mountains quaked- before the LORD, Him of Sinai, before the LORD, G-d of Israel.”

תהילים 8: 68 **אלקים בצאתך לפני עמך בצעדך בשימון סלה :**  
 “O G-d, when You went at the head of Your army, when You went at the head of Your army, when You marched through the desert, *selah*”

תהילים 9: 68 **ארך רעשה אף שמים נטפו מפני אלקים זה סיני מפני אלקים אלה-י ישראל :**  
 “the earth trembled, the sky rained because of G-d, yon Sinai, because of G-d, the G-d of Israel.”

Many are of the opinion that the imagery of the “earth shaking” - **ארך רעשה** in Jud. 5:4 and Ps. 68 reference the imagery of the theophany at Sinai - **ויחרד כל ההר מאד** - “and the whole mountain trembled violently” (Ex. 19:18). While the imagery does bring the theophany at Sinai to mind, the continuation of Jud. 5:4 - **גם שמים נטפו גם עבים נטפו מים** - “the heavens poured the clouds poured water” gives a description of rain that is not

associated with the theophany. The description at Exodus 19:16 includes lightening and a description of G-d represented through the עֲנַן כָּבֵד “dense cloud” (Exodus 19:16); however, there is no literal mention of rain at Sinai. On the other hand, the imagery of a blessed rain comes up repeatedly in Ps. 68, such as in v. 9: אֶרֶץ מִיָּמִים נָטְפוּ מִמֶּנִּי אֲלֵקִים, “the sky poured because of G-d,” and then again in the following verse (10): גָּשְׁמִים נְדָבוֹת תִּגְיֵן אֲלֵקִים, “You released a bountiful rain.”

This description of rain in Ps. 68 and the Song of Deborah are alluding to the same miraculous rain that G-d brought to the Jezreel valley during the battle at Qishon. In Judges 5:5 Deborah praises G-d and describes how the mountains flowed with water from the rain - הָרִים נָזְלוּ, which is echoed in Ps. 68 vv. 9-10 (גָּשְׁמִים נְדָבוֹת). She later states that the “heavens” fought with Sisera - מִן שָׁמַיִם נִלְחָמוּ (v. 20), and recalls that the Qishon Wadi “swept” Sisera’s chariots - נָחַל קִישׁוֹן גֶּרְפָּם (v. 21). The reader now gets a clear picture of the great miracle that happened at Qishon where it began to rain in the middle of the dry season! This flash-flood caused the Qishon Wadi to quickly fill with water, thereby drowning and sweeping away Sisera’s army. In Ps. 68 verse 15 the psalmist recounts this miracle, and asserts: בְּפִרְשׁ שַׁדַּי מְלָכִים בָּהּ, “When Sh\*dai scattered the kings in it, it was like a snowstorm in Zalmon.” Zalmon appears to be a place where it never snows, but with G-d’s miraculous intervention, the impossible becomes a reality – it pours in the middle of the summer. Indeed, without G-d’s intervention the Israelites had no chance of defeating their oppressors; they were fighting a superpower with foot soldiers and limited weaponry.<sup>6</sup> With the backdrop of the miraculous rain at Qishon, the psalmist’s description of rain in Ps. 68:10 - גָּשְׁמִים נְדָבוֹת תִּגְיֵן אֲלֵקִים נִחְלַתְךָ - “You released a bountiful rain O G-d; Your land languished, You sustained it” - corresponds well with the

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<sup>6</sup> As a modern analogy, this war is similar to the wars modern Israel has fought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially the Independence war – a great miracle considering that the new-born nation was faced with battling all of its Arab neighbors on all sides simultaneously with a paltry army and limited weaponry, yet emerged victorious.

Judges account. Perhaps the word נִלְאָה corresponds to the mighty oppression the Canaanites exercised over the Israelites: לָחַץ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחָזֶק “and he had oppressed Israel ruthlessly” (Jud. 4:3). The rain that caused the flood is one that is certainly a bountiful donation from G-d - גֹּשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת תִּנְיָי and is a “measure for measure” for those who donated to the war effort, described in Jud. 5:2 – בְּהִתְנַדֵּב עָם, “When people dedicate themselves” and Jud. 5:9 – הַמִּתְנַדְּבִים בְּעָם, “with the dedicated of the people.”

Under normal circumstances Sisera’s iron chariots were the pride of his army; once G-d initiated the flash flood, however, they became a liability, as the torrential rains quickly filled the Wadi, bogged down, drowned or swept away the chariots causing confusion. This is reflected in onomatopoeia that describes the sounds of the horses’ hooves as they tried to plod through the muddy waters in the Wadi – אָז הִלְמוּ עֵקְבֵי סוּס מִדְּהָרוֹת דְּהָרוֹת – אַבְיָרוּ, “Then the horses’ hoofs pounded as headlong galloped the steeds” (Jud. 5:22). Sisera was forced to flee by foot through the quagmire. The psalmist appears to mock Sisera and the other kings with him in Ps. 68:13 – מַלְכֵי צָבָאוֹת יִדְדוּן יִדְדוּן, “the kings and their armies are in headlong flight” that is, the מַלְכֵי צָבָאוֹת, who are יִדְדוּן (also onomatopoeia), now move very slowly.<sup>7</sup> Although Sisera may be running at top speed, he is moving slowly.

In Ps. 68, the story of Israel’s victory against the Canaanites is retold using the Song of Deborah as a backdrop. The miracle at Qishon and the defeat of Sisera exemplifies a time in the nation’s history where, although faced with extraordinary odds, the nation put their faith in G-d and triumphed over their enemies. The psalmist is writing at a time when the nation finds itself in similarly dire circumstances, and therefore conveys this inspirational message. Here the psalmist will focus on two major aspects of the Deborah narrative: the role of women as the heroines, and G-d’s presence in the Aron leading Israel to victory.

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<sup>7</sup> Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon

In the following sections we will analyze each of these two themes separately.

## The Heroines

One important theme in Ps. 68 is the central role of women in the narrative. The Judges story is unique in that Deborah, a woman, is not only the prophetess/judge of the nation, but she is also well-respected among the soldiery and their leader. Barak refuses to go to war without her joining him, even though she warns that he will receive no glory with this approach; Sisera will then be delivered to the hands of a woman. Barak, however, is a G-d fearing individual who prioritizes the security of the nation above his own ego, and is willing to forsake his status as the hero of the war (Jud. 4:8-9).

Another woman, not part of the Israelite nation, is also a heroine of the story. During the description of the battle, the text makes an abrupt detour in v. 11 to provide a background note about חֲבֵר הַקֵּינִי and their lineage from Hobab (Moshe's father-in-law). This statement foreshadows the appearance of Yael who is אִשֶּׁת חֲבֵר, noting this as she will continue her family's tradition of acting as allies to the Israelites and doing what is moral. For her bravery and faithfulness to the Israelites, Deborah calls the time period the "Era of Yael" - בְּיַמֵּי יַעֲלֹ (Jud. 5:6), and blesses her from all the women of the tent - תְּבַרַךְ מְנַשִּׁים יַעֲלֹ אִשֶּׁת חֲבֵר הַקֵּינִי מְנַשִּׁים - בְּאֵהָל תְּבַרַךְ, "Most blessed of women be Yael, wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of women in tents" (Jud. 5:24). Ps. 68 pays homage to Yael by remarking how a housewife, albeit a courageous and sensitive one, puts her life in danger. Yael could have easily refrained from interceding, but knowing that Sisera is evil, she realizes that she has the opportunity to help the Israelites, and kills Sisera, the mighty general of the Canaanite forces. In Ps. 68:22 a reference is made to Yael's brave act - "G-d will smash the heads of his enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks about in his guilt." In Jud. 5:26 the same words are used to describe how Yael took the peg from the tent and drove it into Sisera's head.

תהלים 68: 22 אַךְ אֵלֶקִים יִמְחֹץ רֹאשׁ אִיבֵיו קִדְקֹד שַׁעַר מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּאֲשָׁמוֹ:

שופטים 26:5 גְּדָה לִיָּתֵד תִּשְׁלַחְנָה וַיִּמְיֶנָה לְהִלְמוֹת עַמְלִים וְהִלְמָה סִסְרָא  
מְחַקָּה רֹאשׁוֹ וּמְחַצָּה וְחִלְפָה רַקְתּוֹ :

“Her (left) hand reached for the tent pin, her right for the workmen’s hammer. She struck Sisera, crushed his head, smashed and pierced his temple.”

The psalmist captures the imagery of a young general (later it is his mother who awaits for his arrival, not his wife) with a “hairy head filled with guilt.” The use of קְדָדָד שְׁעָרַי plays off of the Judges story, where Sisera, full of his ego and evilness, will end up with his head smashed by a housewife. The psalmist continues this imagery in v. 24 - לְמַעַן תִּמְחָץ רַגְלֶךָ בְּדָם - “that your feet may wade through blood.” Blood from Sisera’s head is gushing from the peg that Yael drove through his skull. Now the psalmist recalls how Yael’s feet were soaked in the blood of Sisera.

Another psalm allusion to the Yael and Sisera scene is made by hinting at Sisera’s arrival at Yael’s tent - אֶלְקִים מוֹשִׁיב יְהוּדִים - בְּיָתֶהּ מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בְּכוֹשְׁרוֹת אֵךְ סוֹרְרִים שְׁכָנוּ צְחִיחָה “G-d restores the lonely to their homes, sets free the imprisoned, safe and sound, while the rebellious must live in a parched land” (Ps. 68:7). Here the word סוֹרְרִים is hinting at Sisera<sup>8</sup> who came to Yael and asked for a drink, because he was “parched” - צְחִיחָה. Sisera runs to Yael because there is peace between them (Jud. 4:17), but Yael’s true loyalty is to Israel. Upon his arrival at her tent she begins formulating a plot to kill him. In a stroke of brilliance, she gives him milk to drink as well as curds instead of water, making him even drowsier, prompting him to fall asleep, and allowing her to kill him. She takes the tent peg, perhaps the only item fit for the purpose available to her (surely not the ideal weapon), and strikes Sisera dead.

In the Song of Deborah, Yael is contrasted to Sisera’s mother, who is described with vivid imagery. She is standing by the window, peering through the lattice at the distance - בְּעֵד הַחַלּוֹן -

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<sup>8</sup> This is supported by a play on Sisera’s name in Judges 4:18 - וַתִּצַּא יָעַל לְקִרְאָתָא - סִסְרָא וַתֵּאמֶר אֵלָיו סוֹרָה אֲדֹנָי סוֹרָה אֵלָי אֵל תִּירָא וַיִּסַּר אֵלָיָהּ הָאֵלָה וַתִּכְסְהוּ בְּשִׁמְכָהּ סוֹרְרִים, which comes from the same root as סוֹרְרִים.

בְּדוּעַ בְּשֵׁשׁ - נְשִׁקָּהּ וְתִיבֵב אִם סִיסְרָא בְּעַד הָאֶשְׁנָב (Jud. 5:28) puzzled at why she does not hear the clatter of her son's returning chariots - מְדוּעַ בְּשֵׁשׁ - רָכְבוּ לְבוֹא מְדוּעַ אַחֲרוֹ פְּעַמֵי מְרַכְבוֹתֵינוּ? She is sure that the battle with the Israelites is an effortless undertaking, therefore she repeats what her “wise” maidens had assured her – Sisera must be at that very moment dividing the Israelite spoils and raping the women. The term used for raping is - רָחַם רַחֲמַתִּים לְרֹאשׁ גֹּבֵר - “A damsel or two for each man” (Jud. 5:30). The phrase לְרֹאשׁ גֹּבֵר is only used here in the entire Bible. The word לְרֹאשׁ - “to the head of a man,” appears to be a play on the previously described crushed “head” of Sisera in v. 26. Sisera's mother and her friends reveling in the rape of captive women is despicable. The vulgar description of the rape as “a womb or two to each man” is abominable. This imagery is immediately contrasted to what actually is happening at that moment. Sisera's mother is correct - he is located with a woman, and between the legs of that woman; however, that “hairy head walking in all his guilt” is now lying dead, smashed and bloodied between the legs of Yael! - בֵּין רַגְלֶיהָ כָּרַע נָפֶל שָׁכַב - “At her feet he sank, lay outstretched” (Jud. 5:27). The description at Ps. 68:13 highlights the irony. It is not mighty Sisera who is divvying up the loot, but rather - וַיִּנָּת בֵּית תְּחִלָּה שָׁלַל - a housewife is sharing in the spoils.<sup>9</sup> Yael, who Deborah praises as “a woman of the tent,” - מְנַשִּׁים בְּאֹהֶל תְּבָרַךְ, i.e. a housewife, is holding Sisera's dead body in her tent and now calls Barak to show him the man he seeks.

Furthermore, when Yael approaches Barak who is searching for Sisera their encounter is described as follows - וַהֲגִה בָּרַק רֹדֵף אֶת סִיסְרָא וַתֵּצֵא יַעֲלֵ לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָךְ וְאַרְאֶנְךָ אֶת הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה וַהֲגִישׁ לְךָ אֶת סִיסְרָא וַהֲגִי אֵלָיָהּ וַהֲגִישׁ לְךָ אֶת סִיסְרָא נָפֶל מֵת וַהֲיָתֵד בְּרַקְתּוֹ “Now Barak appeared in pursuit of Sisera. Yael went out to greet him and said, ‘Come, I will show you the man you are looking for.’ He went inside with her, and there Sisera was lying dead, with the pin in his temple.” (Judges 4:22). Aside from this verse, every other

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 68:31 reechoes this imagery - בְּרָצִי כֶסֶף בְּזָר עַמִּים קָרְבוֹת יְהַפְצוּ - tying in with Jud. 5:19 - עַל מִי מִגִּדוֹ בָּצַע בְּסֶף לֹא לָקְחוּ - The psalmist may be playing on the irony that those who ran after money - רָצִי כֶסֶף (Sisera) didn't get any - בָּצַע בְּסֶף לֹא לָקְחוּ.

occurrence of the phrase וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ in the Bible refers to sexual relations. Of course Yael's encounter with Barak is purely business – she has come to hand over Sisera to the Israelites, but the unusual usage points out the irony. In addition, when the text describes Yael's encounter with Sisera it states - וַתֵּצֵא יָעֵל לְקִרְאָתוֹ סִיסְרָא וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו סוּרָה אֲדֹנָי סוּרָה אֵלַי אֶל תִּירָא וַיָּסֹר אֵלֶיהָ הָאֵהָלָהּ וַתִּכְסֶהוּ בְּשֹׁמֵיכָהּ, “Yael came out to greet Sisera and said to him, ‘Come in, my lord, come in here, do not be afraid.’ So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.” (Judges 4:18). It seems strikingly odd that the text would use the term אֵלֶיהָ with Barak, with its sexual implications, when it should have used the words אֵלֶיהָ הָאֵהָלָהּ as it did with Sisera. It appears that the ambiguity here is purposeful. As we explained, in the Song of Deborah the ambiguous imagery - בֵּין רַגְלֶיהָ כָּרַע נָפֶל שָׁכַב (5:27) served to highlight the poetic justice of the plot vis-à-vis Sisera and his evil mother. Here this ambiguous term is used with Barak, because in this context the words וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ, certainly do not have the implication it usually does. It is used here instead, as are all the other double entendres in this story, to reveal irony and poetic justice.

Verse 12 of Ps. 68 is another difficult phrase that scholars often grapple with.<sup>10</sup>

תהלים 68: 12 אֲדֹנָי-יְהוָה אָמַר הַמְבַשְׂרוֹת צָבָא רַב :

The NJPS translates: “The Lord gives a command; the women who bring the news are a great host:” With the backdrop of the battle in Judges 4-5, this otherwise difficult verse fits perfectly with the rest of the psalm. It is not any women bringing news, but the news that the two heroines, Yael and Deborah, brought to Barak regarding the war.<sup>11</sup> The אָמַר is referring to G-d's prophecy to Deborah to gather an army and fight Sisera –

<sup>10</sup> Robert Alter calls verse 12 an “obscure verset.” All other translations mistranslate this verse as well.

<sup>11</sup> Note that the war imagery in Ps. 68 is also supported by other later verses we will comment on. Ps. 68:30 states - מִהִיכָלְךָ עַל גְּרוֹשְׁלָם לֵךְ יוֹבִילוּ מַלְכִים שִׁי. The words יוֹבִילוּ...שִׁי appear only once more in Tehillim in Ps. 76:12 - נִדְרוּ וְשָׁלְמוּ - לְדַוֵּד אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כֹּל סִבִּיבוֹ יוֹבִילוּ שִׁי לְמוֹרָא 68 with the battle against Sisera and Ps. 76 against Aram.

שופטים 6:4 ותשלח ותקרא לברק בן אבינעם מקדש נפתלי ותאמר אליו הלא צנה ידנד אלהי ישראל לך ומשכת בהר תבור ולקחת עמך עשרת אלפים איש מבני נפתלי ומבני זבולן:

“She summoned Barak son of Abinoam of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, ‘The LORD, the G-d of Israel, has commanded: Go march up to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun.’”

Deborah relays her prophecy to Barak in which she was commanded - צנה ידנד - to gather a large army, the 10,000 soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun that Barak will muster to fight the 900 chariots of Sisera - the צבא רב. Ps. 68:29 alludes to the commandment G-d gave Deborah with - צנה אלקיך ענד עונה אלקים - “Your G-d has ordained strength for you, the strength, O G-d, which You displayed for us”. At the end of the war, Yael also brings news regarding the צבא, telling Barak that Sisera has been killed.

שופטים 22:4 והנה ברק רדף את סיסרא ותצא ועל לקראתו ותאמר לו לך ואראך את האיש אשר אתה מבקש ונבא אליה והנה סיסרא נפל מת והנד ברקתו:

Notice that the same words ותאמר and לך are used to describe the news Yael and Deborah brought. These two women are contrasted to Sisera’s evil mother who tells herself that her son is probably raping and pillaging the village, using the root אמר.

שופטים 29:5 חכמות שרותיה תענינה אף היא תשיב אמריה לה: “The wisest of her ladies give answer; she, too, replies to herself:”

In Ps. 68, a reference is made to Izebel, the evil queen, further contrasting Deborah and Yael with evil women. Verse 24 describes- “that your feet may wade through blood; that the tongue of your dogs may have its portion of your enemies.” Similarly, In 2 Kings, Izebel is cursed that the horses will trample her blood - ונז מדמה אל הקיר ואל - 9:33 and that the dogs will eat her flesh - יאכלו - 9:36. והפלבים את בשר איזבל

To summarize, until this point, we have clarified some of the difficult phrases in Ps. 68 by examining the Judges 4-5 story and placing it as the backdrop for this psalm. The association between the two texts allows us to recognize a thematic flow in the psalm, focusing on praise for the great miracle at Qishon and recalling the bravery of the heroines in the story.

## The Ark

The major theme in Ps. 68 is the imagery of the Aron (the Ark) containing the tablets. In this section we will explain how the Aron is symbolic of G-d's presence, and how the Numbers 10 context, the Judges narrative, and Ps. 68 share the common theme of G-d represented by the Aron battling Israel's enemies, using similar imagery and words to convey this theme.

The opening of Ps. 68 makes an explicit reference to Numbers 10 where the Aron leads the nation into battle –

תהלים 68: 2 **יְקוּם אֱלֹהִים יַפְּצוּ אוֹיְבָיו וַיִּנְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאָיו מִפְּנֵיו :**

“G-d will arise, his enemies shall be scattered, his foes shall flee before Him.”

במדבר 10: 35 **וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעַ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה יְדָוֹד וַיַּפְּצוּ אוֹיְבֶיךָ וַיִּנְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאֶיךָ מִפְּנֶיךָ :**

“When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say: Advance (Rise), O LORD! May Your enemies be scattered, and may Your foes flee before You!”

The Numbers imagery represents the earliest stage of G-d conquering His enemies during Israel's travels through the wilderness as well as in the conquest of Canaan. When the Israelites would go into battle, the Aron would precede the soldiers - **וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעַ הָאָרֶץ** - As the troops would march forward into the battlefield, Moshe would pray, summoning G-d to rise - **קוּמָה** and scatter his enemies - **וַיַּפְּצוּ אוֹיְבֶיךָ**, from before him – **מִפְּנֶיךָ**. When the Aron was stationed, Moshe would recite the rest of the prayer (v. 36) - **וּבִגְנוּחַ יֹאמֶר שׁוּבָה יְדָוֹד רַבְבוֹת אֶלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** - that G-d should return all the soldiers back safely from the battle.

In Judges 4:14 Deborah summons Barak to battle –

וַתֹּאמֶר דְּבִרָה אֶל בָּרַק **קוּם** כִּי זֶה הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְדָוֹד אֶת סִיסְרָא בְּיַדְךָ **הֲלֹא יְדָוֹד יֵצֵא לְפָנֶיךָ וַיַּךְ בָּרַק מֵהָר תַּבּוֹר וַעֲשֶׂתָּ אֶלְפִים אִישׁ אַחֲרָיו :**

“Then Deborah said to Barak, ‘Up (Rise)! This is the day on which the LORD will deliver Sisera into your hands: the LORD is marching before you.’ Barak charged down Mount Tabor, followed by the ten thousand men”

Barak is summoned using the same verb as in the prayer Moshe recites to summon for G-d to rise and scatter his enemies in

Numbers 10:35 – קוּם. Deborah then says that G-d is going out before him יֵצֵא לְפָנֶיךָ הָלֵא יְדֹד, similar to the statement in Numbers 10:35 - וַיִּנְסוּ מִשָּׁנְאֶיךָ מִפְּנֶיךָ - , where the Aron metaphorically goes out from before G-d and scatters his enemies. While Deborah's words are meant to encourage Barak, ensuring him that G-d will bring victory to the nation, she is also reminding him that G-d, represented by the Tablets in the Aron, is going to lead the Israelites into battle. Presence of the Tablets recalls the battles in the desert when the Israelites were a new nation and put their faith in G-d. Now, as Barak and his army face a battle against an enemy much stronger than they, Deborah reminds Barak that these are the same Tablets and Aron, meaning G-d that fought for the nation in the past will surely fight again. Ps. 68 recalls the historic Canaanite battle, and the backdrop of the battles against Israel's oldest enemies as a hopeful vision that G-d will continue to fight for Israel like he had done in the past. The imagery of G-d scattering Israel's enemies - יַפְּצוּ (v. 2) is repeated again later in Ps. 68.

תהלים 68: 15 בְּפָרֵשׁ שָׂדֵי-י מְלָכִים בָּה תִשְׁלַג בְּצִלְמוֹן :

“When Sh\*ddai **scattered** the kings, it seemed like a snowstorm in Zalmon” (or metaphorically speaking, if necessary He will make it snow in summer.)

תהלים 68: 31 גֵּרַע חַיֵּת קִנְיָה עֲדַת אֲבִירִים בְּעִגְלֵי עַמִּים מִתְרַפֵּס בְּרָצִי כֶסֶף בָּזוּ  
עַמִּים קָרְבוֹת יִחַפְּצוּ :

“Blast the beast of the marsh, the herd of bulls among the peoples, the calves, till they come cringing with pieces of silver. **Scatter** the peoples who delight in wars!”

The prayer for return of the soldiers from Numbers 10:36 - שׁוּבָה יְדֹד רַבְּבוֹת אֶלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, is alluded to in Ps. 68 as well. In v. 23, G-d is described as saying he will return from Bashan and the depths of the sea - מִמְצֻלוֹת יָם - אָשִׁיב אָשִׁיב מִבְּשָׁן אָשִׁיב מִמְצֻלוֹת יָם doubling the word אָשִׁיב (return) which comes from the same root as the word שׁוּבָה in the prayer at Numbers 10. The reference to Bashan, the mountainous area immediately East of Hazor, which may also include Hazor, is mentioned in Jud. 4:2 - וַיִּמָּכְרֵם יְדֹד בְּיַד יַבִּין מֶלֶךְ - “And the LORD surrendered them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. His army commander was Sisera, whose base was Harosheth-goiim.” The “depth of the

waters” - , מִמְצֹלוֹת יָם, refers to the overflowed Qishon Wadi (Jud. 5:21). Similar to Moshe’s prayer in the desert, the psalmist recalls how G-d returned the Israelites during the war with Canaan, both those who fled to the Bashan mountains, escaping the oppressive Canaanites, as well as the Israelite soldiers who fought in the Qishon Wadi. In addition, in Ps. 68:18 G-d’s chariots are described as being “myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands” - רָכַב אֱלֹקִים רַבְתִּים אֶלְפֵי שְׁנָאן . This recalls the words in Num. 10:36 - רַבְבוֹת אֶלְפֵי , where Moshe prays that the myriads of thousands of Israelites be returned from battle. The psalmist uses the Numbers reference to make a sharp contrast to the description of Sisera’s 900 chariots, which of course cannot compare to G-d’s chariots.

The intertextual references between these three are striking. In Numbers 10:29, directly preceding the description of the Aron going out to battle, there is a short account of Moshe’s dialogue with Hobab (his father-in-law).

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹבָב בֶּן רְעוּאֵל הַמִּדְיָנִי חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה נֹסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְיָ אֱתוּ אִתָּנוּ לָכֶם לָכֶה אֲתָנוּ וְהִטַּבְנוּ לָךְ כִּי יֵדְוֶךָ דְבַר טוֹב עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל :  
 “Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, “We are setting out for the place of which the LORD has said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us and we will be generous with you; for the LORD has promised to be generous to Israel.”

This is followed by -

וַיְהִי בְנִסְעֵ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה יְיָ וְנִפְצוּ אִיבֵיךָ וְנִסּוּ מִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ מִפְּנֵיךָ :  
 Shortly prior to Deborah summoning Barak to battle, we find a one-verse digression about the Heber clan, which as stated, foreshadows the heroic acts of Yael.

שׁוֹפְטִים 11:4 וְחֹבַר הַקֵּינִי נִפְרָד מִקְּוֵן מִבְּנֵי חֹבָב חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּט אֶהְלוֹ עַד אֵלוֹן בְּצַעְעָנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵת קִדְשׁ :

“Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, descendants of Hobab, father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent at Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh.”

This is followed by -

שׁוֹפְטִים 14:4 וַתֹּאמֶר דְּבִרָה אֶל בָּרַק קוּם כִּי זֶה הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְיָ אֶת סִיסְרָא בְּיַדְךָ הַלֵּא יֵדְוֶךָ יֵצֵא לְפָנֶיךָ וַיִּרְדּוּ בָרַק מֵהָר תִּבּוֹר וַעֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ אַחֲרָיו :

Similar to the Numbers 10 context and Judges 4, Ps. 68 opens on a reference to קוּמָה יְיָ and then alludes to Yael, a descendent of Hobab. This seeming pattern further suggests that these

intertextual references are purposeful, all focusing on the imagery of the Aron from Numbers.

Ps. 68 contains extensive imagery of the Aron. The opening reference to the Numbers description of the Aron, with G-d's enemies fleeing "before him" – מִפְּנֵי in v. 2, is expanded upon in subsequent verses. The root פָּנִי occurs eight times in the eight verses between verses 2 and 9: מִפְּנֵי (v. 2); מִפְּנֵי אֵשׁ (v. 3); מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹקִים (v. 3); לִפְנֵי אֱלֹקִים (v. 4); וְעָלוּ לִפְנֵי (v. 5); אֱלֹקִים בְּצִאתְךָ (v. 5); לִפְנֵי (v. 8); מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹקִים (v. 9); מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (v. 9). Each time it is used with G-d's name or referring to Him. These repeated usages are extensions of its usage in v. 2 with the imagery of the Aron from Numbers 10, where the word פָּנִי is used to describe the enemies fleeing before G-d. These eight repetitions highlight that G-d, represented in the Aron which contains the Tablets from Sinai, is going before the nation. In v. 25, there is an explicit reference to G-d being **in** the holy – רָאוּ הַלִּיכוֹתַיךָ אֱלֹקִים "Men see Your processions, O G-d, the processions of my G-d, my king, into the sanctuary." The psalmist, once again stresses G-d's presence represented by the Aron.

Ps. 68:19 uses imagery of the Aron fighting Israel's battles recalling the battle in Judges 4-5.

תהלים 68:19 **עֲלִיתָ לְמִרוֹם שְׁבִיתָ שְׁבִי** לְקַחַת מִתְּנוֹת בְּאֲדָם וְאִף סוֹחְרִים לְשָׁכֵן  
:הֶ-אֱלֹקִים

"You went up to the heights, having taken captives, having received tribute of men, even of those who rebel against the LORD G-d's abiding there."

שופטים 10:4 **וַיִּזְעַק בָּרַק אֶת זְבוּלוֹן וְאֶת נַפְתָּלִי קִדְּשָׁה וַיַּעַל בְּרַגְלָיו עֲשָׂרַת אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ וַתַּעַל עִמּוֹ דְּבוֹרָה** :

"Barak then mustered Zebulun and Naphtali at Kedesh; ten thousand men marched up after him; and Deborah also went up with him."

שופטים 18:5 **זָבָלוֹן עִם חֶרֶף נִפְשׁוּ לְמוֹת וַנִּפְתָּלִי עַל מִרוֹמֵי שָׂדֵה** :

"Zebulun is a people that mocked at death, Naphtali – on the open heights."

שופטים 12:5 **עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי דְבוֹרָה עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי דְבָרֵי שִׁיר קוּם בָּרַק וַיִּשְׁבֵּה שְׁבִיךָ בֶן אַבִּינוֹעַם** :

"Awake, awake, strike up the chant! Arise, O Barak; take your captives, O son of Abinoam."

In Ps. 68:19 the phrase **עָלִיתָ לְמָרוֹם** is used to capture the idea of the Aron going up Mount Tabor with the Israelites.<sup>12</sup> While in the psalm it is the Aron that went up **לְמָרוֹם** in Judg 5:18 Barak is **עַל מְרוֹמֵי שָׂדֵה**. The textual link is especially striking since the phrase **שָׁבִיתָ שְׂבִי** occurs only in this psalm and in Jud. 5:12 (aside from Deut. 21:10 - the law of the woman taken captive in battle).

Beyond the psalm's description of the Aron representing G-d going forth in battle, the Aron is introduced in verse 5 with the imagery of being the "chariot of G-d." That verse extols G-d as the one who "rides the clouds," - **לָרֶכֶב בְּעַרְבוֹת**. With the backdrop of Judges 4-5, it is evident that this imagery was not used solely for poetic purposes, but is another allusion to the miracle at Qishon, where G-d brought rain from the "clouds." The imagery of the chariot appears again in v. 18 - **רָכַב אֱלֹקִים רִבְתִּים** - as well as in v. 34 - **לָרֶכֶב בְּשָׁמַי שְׁמֵי קְדָם** - non-literally translated as "Him who rides the ancient highest heavens." This imagery is also found in Deut. 33:26 - "O Jeshurun, there is none like G-d, riding through the heavens to help you, through the skies in His majesty" - **רָכַב וַיִּרְכַּב עַל כְּרוּב וַיַּעֲרֹךְ וַיִּבְנֶאֱוֹתוּ שְׁחָקִים**. In Ps. 18:11, the imagery of the Aron, specifically serving as G-d's chariot is used - **וַיִּרְכַּב עַל כְּרוּב וַיַּעֲרֹךְ**, "He mounted a cherub and flew, gliding on the wings of the wind." The cherubim, that rest on the *kaporet* on the Aron, are described metaphorically as the "chariot" of G-d, using the same imagery of riding through the skies used twice in Ps. 68.

The most striking statements regarding the Aron are found in Psalm 68:9,18 and Judges 5:5.

תהלים 68:9 אֶרֶץ רָעֵשָׁה אֶף שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹקִים **זֶה סִינֵי מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹקִים**  
**אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** :

תהלים 68:18 רָכַב אֱלֹקִים רִבְתִּים אֶלְפֵי שָׁנְאוֹ אֲדֹנָי-יְהוִה **בָּם סִינֵי בִקְדָשׁ** :  
 שופטים 5:5 הָרִים נָזְלוּ מִפְּנֵי יְדֹד **זֶה סִינֵי מִפְּנֵי יְדֹד אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** :

In the Song of Deborah, she recalls the events of the war describing the rain dripping down the mountain from the overflowed Qishon, with the words **מִפְּנֵי יְדֹד** flanked on both sides of the statement **זֶה סִינֵי**. Once more, the **מִפְּנֵי** recalls the imagery of

<sup>12</sup> Although Mount Tabor is not a very high mountain, it is higher than the surrounding mountains and is a strategically important location. (Harpers Bible Dictionary)

the Aron, only here a stunning play on words is made with the words הַ סִּינִי. Deborah is stating that the miracles happened because of G-d's presence with the Aron, followed by a demonstrative phrase - this is Sinai! To what is Deborah pointing when she says "this" is Sinai (the mountain where Israel received the Tablets?) As Rabbi S. D. Sassoon taught us, Deborah is pointing to the Aron, more specifically to the Tablets, which are from Sinai, carved from the mountain itself! Thus, Deborah's statement to Barak that the Aron is joining him is exceptionally inspiring. She relates to him that the Aron accompanying him to battle contains the original Tablets handed down from Moshe! The presence of the original Tablets represents an unbroken chain of tradition that G-d will come through for the nation. The Jud. 5:5 verse is repeated almost verbatim in Ps. 68:9. In v. 18, the psalmist describes G-d's chariot - רֶכֶב אֱלֹקִים, which is imagery of the Aron, and states that G-d is among them, Sinai are in them. When recalling the ancient war, the psalmist recalls G-d's presence in the nation, as seen by the fact that the Tablets given at Sinai were in the Holy (Aron). Moreover, there is a structural connection between the two הַ סִּינִי phrases of vv. 9 and 18: there are exactly 80 words from the הַ of v. 9 to the בַּקֶּדֶשׁ of v. 18. As we have seen throughout Tehillim, the number eight and its multiples represent the covenant. The 80-word span is very appropriate structural symbolism as the הַ סִּינִי phrases both represent the Ark of the Covenant.

We can now understand one of the most difficult verses in Ps. 68. The NJPS tortuously translates v. 14 as "even for those of you who lie among the sheepfolds there are wings of a dove sheathed in silver, its pinions in fine gold." The first part of the verse alludes to our Judges context:

תהלים 14: 68 אִם תִּשְׁכְּבוּ בֵּין שֹׁפְתִים כִּנְפֵי יוֹנָה נִחְפָּה בְּכֶסֶף וְאֶבְרֹתֶיהָ בִּירְקָק חָרוֹץ:

שופטים 16: 5 לָמָּה יָשַׁבְתָּ בֵּין הַמְּשֻׁפְתִּים לְשֹׁמֵעַ שְׂרָקוֹת עֲדָרִים לְפִלְגוֹת רְאוּבֵן גְּדוּלִים חֲקָרֵי לֵב:

"Why then did you stay among the sheepfolds and listen as they pipe for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben were great searching of heart!"

In that verse Deborah rebukes the tribe of Reuben: "Why did you stay within your borders listening to the bleating of the flocks"?

Reuben remained on the sidelines as his brothers went to war. In contrast to Reuben who “sat by,” Deborah commends the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali who were the main forces fighting Sisera - זְבֻלוֹן עִם חֶרֶף נִפְשׁוּ לְמוֹת וְנַפְתָּלִי (Jud. 4:6) and זְבֻלוֹן - עַל מְרוֹמֵי שָׂדֵה “Zebulun is a people that mocked at death, Naphtali – on the open heights” (Jud. 5:18). The psalmist likewise praises the tribes who were involved in the war effort against the Canaanites, specifically mentioning Zebulun and Naphtali (v.28).

The **אם תשכבון בין שפתים** statement appears to be a double entendre of sorts. While we think of the rebuke of Reuben, the continuation of the phrase redirects our thoughts. The “wings of a dove covered with silver and whose pinions are covered with gold” is a reference to the old imagery of the Aron and Cherubim. Ps. 68 draws much of its imagery from the ancient conception of G-d and the Aron. Verse 14 plays off of the rebuke of Reuben who stayed “in their borders” to now mean “if you stay **within** the borders/edges of the Aron,” or rather, “if you fulfill the words of the prophecy that ensues from between the Cherubim.” Reuben chose to stay within his borders, perhaps lacking the faith that G-d would save Israel from the Canaanites. Now the psalmist uses these charged words to inspire the nation with the hopeful vision that “if you abide under G-d’s protection [with full commitment],” as the nation had in the past and had been victorious, G-d will come through once again.<sup>13</sup> The results will then be as spectacular as a snowstorm in the summer as described in Ps. 68:15 - בְּפֶרֶשׁ - שְׁדֵי מַלְכִים בָּה תִשְׁלַג בְּצִלְמוֹן **אם תשכבון בין שפתים** - Here, the center consonants **ב** and **ן** are back-to-back, so to speak, the word “between” – **בין** is found at the center of the chiasm (“in-between” the chiasm). The play on the middle letters then means that if the nation upholds what is in the middle of the wings of the cherubim, i.e. the covenant, G-d will protect them as he had in the past.

As Ps. 68 comes to its conclusion, the imagery of the Aron

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<sup>13</sup> This is similar to Ps. 91:1 - יֵשֶׁב בְּסֵתֶר עֲלֵיוֹן בְּצִל שְׁדֵי יִתְלוֹן - and Ps. 91:4 - בְּאַבְרָתוֹ יִסָּד לֵךְ וְתַחַת כַּנְפֵי תַחֲסֶה.

leading the victorious warriors returning from battle inspires the psalmist to burst out in repeated blessing to G-d, recalling Deborah's repeated blessings when she praises G-d in her song. The ברך in imperative form followed by G-d's name is very rare; aside from Ps. 103, it occurs only in Ps. 68:27 and Jud. 5:2,9.

תהלים 20: 68 בְּרוּךְ אֲדֹנָי יוֹם יוֹם יַעֲמֹס לָנוּ הָאֵל יִשְׁעֵתְנוּ סֵלָה :  
 תהלים 27: 68 בְּמִקְהֵלוֹת בָּרְכוּ אֱלֹקִים אֲדֹנָי מִמְקוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>14</sup>  
 תהלים 36: 68 נוֹרָא אֱלֹקִים מִמְקַדְשֵׁיךָ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא נִתְּן עֵז וְתַעֲצֻמוֹת לְעַם  
 בְּרוּךְ אֱלֹקִים :  
 שופטים 2: 5 בְּפָרַע פְּרַעוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַתְּנַדֵּב עִם בָּרְכוּ יְדֹד :  
 שופטים 9: 5 לְבִי לְחוֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמֵּתְנַדְּבִים בְּעַם בָּרְכוּ יְדֹד :

The return of the Aron from battle is accompanied by a parade in G-d's honor, along with singers, musicians, dancers, and maidens playing timbrels all adding to the joyous scene -

תהלים 26: 68 קְדָמוּ שָׁרִים אַחַר נְגִינִים בְּתוֹךְ עֲלָמוֹת תוֹפֹפוֹת :  
 "First come singers, then musicians, amidst maidens playing timbrels."

The blessings turn into intense praise of G-d in vv. 33-35. Verse 36 concludes Ps. 68, with a recap of the major themes in the psalm. It opens with an allusion to the Aron, i.e. G-d in his holy dwelling - נוֹרָא אֱלֹקִים מִמְקַדְשֵׁיךָ. Next is the statement that G-d gives strength to the nation - הוּא נִתְּן עֵז וְתַעֲצֻמוֹת לְעַם, and then closes on the note of a blessing with the 26<sup>th</sup> occurrence of Elokim in the psalm.

תהלים 5: 68 שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹקִים זָמְרוּ שְׂמוֹ סֵלֹו לְרֹכֵב בַּעֲרֻבוֹת בְּיָהּ שְׂמוֹ וְעִלְזוּ לִפְנֵינוּ :  
 תהלים 33: 68 מִמַּלְכוֹת הָאָרֶץ שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹקִים זָמְרוּ אֲדֹנָי סֵלָה :  
 תהלים 34: 68 לְרֹכֵב בְּשִׁמִּי שְׂמִי קָדָם הֵן יִתְּנוּ בְּקוֹלוֹ קוֹל עֵז :  
 תהלים 35: 68 תִּנּוּ עֵז לְאֱלֹקִים עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל גְּאֻתוֹ וְעֵזוֹ בְּשִׁחָקִים :  
 תהלים 36: 68 נוֹרָא אֱלֹקִים מִמְקַדְשֵׁיךָ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא נִתְּן עֵז וְתַעֲצֻמוֹת לְעַם  
 בְּרוּךְ אֱלֹקִים :

<sup>14</sup> Ps. 68:27 shows some parallelism to Jud. 5:9-11.

תהלים 27: 68 בְּמִקְהֵלוֹת בָּרְכוּ אֱלֹקִים אֲדֹנָי מִמְקוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל :  
 שופטים 9: 5 לְבִי לְחוֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמֵּתְנַדְּבִים בְּעַם בָּרְכוּ יְדֹד :  
 שופטים 10: 5 רַכְבֵּי אֲתָנוֹת צְהָרוֹת יִשְׁבִּי עַל מַדִּין וְהִלְכִי עַל דָּרֶךְ שִׁיחוּ :  
 שופטים 11: 5 מִקוֹל מַחְצָצִים בֵּין מִשְׁאֲבִים שָׁם יִתְּנוּ צְדָקוֹת יְדֹד צְדָקוֹת פְּרִזּוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵז  
 יָרְדוּ לְשַׁעְרֵים עִם יְדֹד :

רכבי אתנות צהרות ישבי על מדין והלכי על דרך expands to המתנדבים and (Jud. 5:9-11) מקור means the history of Israel, the early times when it became a nation. מקור also alludes to Jud. 5:11 "משאבים."

## Conclusion

The inspirational message of Ps. 68, given that **נָה סִינִי** refers to the Tablets of the Ark of the Covenant, is especially apropos to Shabu'ot when we commemorate the giving of the Ten Commandments. The Torah makes a point that it is the Ten Commandments that are inscribed on the Tablets<sup>15</sup>. Deborah the judge who led the nation is referred to as **אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה אֲשֶׁת לְפִידוֹת**. Her name is of course a play on **דָּבָר** – “the Word,” alluded to in the song of Deborah – **עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי דְבוֹרָה עוֹרֵי דְבָרִי** (Jud. 5:12). She is first and foremost a prophetess who brings the word of G-d to the nation. She also is the wife of **לְפִידוֹת** – “torches” – which provides an additional description of her. The word of G-d is often referred to as **אֵשׁ** “fire” and in her case she symbolizes the dimension of giving inspiration. The name of Barak, the military leader, translates as “lightening,” another form of fire. He refuses to battle until accompanied by the one who brings the “Word” of G-d. Thus, the story represents the time when the nation put its faith in G-d, focused on the Tablets of the Ark - **בֵּין שְׁפָתַיִם כְּנִפְי יוֹנָה** – and in the message that ensued from it. Today, after wandering through the **“מְדָבַר הָעַמִּים”** “the wilderness of the nations” (Ez. 20:35) for 2000 years, the nation of Israel has been blessed with the wondrous miracle of returning to its land. Many have tried and are trying to destroy Israel but G-d has performed miracle upon miracle. We pray that He will continue to protect us as He did in the past.

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<sup>15</sup> Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13, 10:4

# Reflections on the Decalogue

by Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. Innovative Concepts

The Ten Commandments or the Decalogue – a term derived from the Greek-Latin that more accurately translates “*asseret hadebarim*,” the ten words or pronouncements, a phrase thrice-attested in the Torah (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13, 10:4) – comprises a unique compendium of law that introduced concepts of the highest order to mankind. This compendium appears twice in the Five Books, once in Exodus 20, embedded in the Torah’s narrative presentation of the early stages of Israel’s development as a nation, and again in Deuteronomy, in Moshe’s review of the preceding forty years shortly before his death. (We will address the several differences between the two formulations in our study *On Decalogue Variations*<sup>1</sup>.) The Decalogue is fundamental to Israel’s national identity.

Following are four major features of this remarkable proclamation that manifest original, even revolutionary concepts. Each contains several associated innovative notions.

1. The Decalogue constitutes the essence of Hashem’s Revelation to Israel. Its precepts were the foundation upon which He enacted a covenant with the nation, establishing an intimate relationship between Him and man, an association with far-reaching consequences. The tablets on which the Decalogue was inscribed are “Tablets of the Covenant” (לוחות הברית, Deut. 9:9, 15) while the ark in which they resided is the “Ark of the Covenant” (אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית, Josh. 3:6, et al). It was through acceptance of the Decalogue and the laws understood to be attached to it that G-d had declared He would make Israel His “treasure” among the nations and it would become a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6). Analogous to priests serving within a nation Israel is to serve among the nations, responsible to bring the consciousness of

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<sup>1</sup> Referenced studies of Rabbi Shamah may be found online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org)

Hashem to the world and inspire the nations to fulfill His will. Thus will the hope that He expressed to Abraham at the initiation of the enterprise of creating a new nation from his progeny, that it will be a source of blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3), be realized.

The notion of such a relationship between a deity and a nation was unprecedented, although commitments requiring exclusive loyalty in covenant relationships between suzerains and their vassal nations or with their subjects were popular in the ancient Near East. To formalize the G-d-Israel Covenant the Decalogue contains in a compact form the most essential elements contemporary protocol prescribed for enacting suzerain-vassal treaties:

- The opening verse begins with Hashem's majestic self-identification, stating His name as well as His relationship to Israel.
- This is followed by a reminder of the great benefaction He bestowed on Israel in redeeming it from the house of bondage.
- Next, the fundamental stipulations He demands from His people are enumerated. (It is understood that additional ones would be added.)
- A statement of punishment for violation and reward for compliance is included, attached to the most serious demand, the prohibition of idolatry. In addition, a reward of "length of days on the land" is mentioned with the precept of honoring father and mother.

The remaining covenant requirements, essentially the technical details, which consist of committing the particulars to writing, designating witnesses, providing for appropriate safekeeping, partaking of a ceremonial meal and a declaration of Blessings and Curses, are described in succeeding chapters. Indeed, the Books of Exodus-Leviticus combined on the one hand and the Book of Deuteronomy on the other, each in a self-contained manner, are structured in accordance with contemporary covenant protocol as we hope to demonstrate in a study on covenant format in the

Torah. Utilizing the conventional model for the external framework of the Covenant conferred the highest degree of significance upon it since kings had vigorously insisted on the supreme importance of covenantal commitments. It helped make clear to the recipients, in terms they were familiar with, what was being accomplished.

As the Covenant established a relationship with the eternal G-d who was also concerned for the long-term future, it transformed Israel into a permanent corporate entity. This innovative development, in turn, prompted a number of major applications. Each individual in the nation was to be viewed as in a direct relationship with and personally charged by G-d, having to answer to Him, as opposed to being exhorted by a king, priest or tribal chieftain. This is reflected in the second person singular employed in the Decalogue and is part of the democratization process promoted by the Torah. It is connected to the lofty status granted each human being by virtue of everybody being derived from common human ancestors created by the one G-d and from His having created all humankind “in His image” (Gen. 1:26-27), applications of the Torah’s revolution in thought.

2. The first two pronouncements\* enunciate details of the immense advance in religion related to belief in one G-d. Israel must recognize Hashem as its sole G-d, whose sovereignty extends over all realms of the world, and be completely faithful to Him. All manner and aspects of idolatry are strictly prohibited. When fully developed and applications spelled out by the prophets, the belief that there is only one G-d led to the uncompromising responsibility for consistent moral and ethical action. Superstitions were ruled out as were all sorts of rationalizations for inappropriate and divisive behavior that the belief in multiple deities fostered. Idolatry became recognized as man’s subtle conceit, stemming from his undisciplined raw drives and his unbridled ego, serving his own creations. Belief in one G-d heightened recognition of the universal brotherhood concept latent in the Creation account and promoted abiding concern for all human beings, leading to the vision of an eventual end to wars with peace on earth.

3. Commandment 4, Shabbat, is a multi-faceted innovation of enormous significance with applications in various realms. As a day “for Hashem” on which work must cease that is commemorated on the seventh day of each week without exception, it provides a recurring national reminder of Hashem having created the world and all in it in six days and resting on the seventh. It is a day to be perceived as His having already sanctified and blessed from Creation. And since the prohibition to work is not limited to Israelites but includes the Israelite’s male and female slaves, animals, and “your stranger within your gates” (an individual in your circle, dependent on you), the implication is that G-d’s will is that we be compassionate on all His creations. Releasing the slave from labor for twenty-four hours cannot but prompt thoughts of his welfare and foster advances in social justice.

In the Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue, Shabbat’s primary purposes are defined as, “in order that your male and female slave may rest as you do” and that “you remember you were a slave in Egypt” and Hashem redeemed you from there (Deut. 5:14-15). The Shabbat passage in *Parashat Ki Tissa* highlights the day as a celebration of the Covenant (Ex. 31:12-17).

A day of rest rejuvenates and transforms life in both the physical and domestic spheres. Sanctifying the day and distinguishing it as dedicated to Hashem, in whichever manner such responsibilities were to be put into practical effect, promote spiritual welfare as well as family and communal cohesiveness. We read that in the days of the prophets these purposes were fulfilled by establishing Shabbat as a joyous festival that celebrated the values the day stands for (Isa. 58:13), and making it an occasion to visit a prophet (2 Kings 4:23) or the sanctuary (Isa. 66:23).

Although seven-day units were employed for various purposes in the ancient Near East – reflecting the symbolic prominence of the number seven – it is only Israel that had established the week as an ongoing, regularly occurring subdivision of time. In addition, all Near Eastern major celebrations were then associated with one astral phenomenon or another involving sun, moon or stars. Thus,

it surely is meaningful that the unit of a week does not correspond to any celestial movement and the Shabbat celebration is free of any such linkage.

4. The mode of articulation of most of the Decalogue commandments is unique and in a legally advanced form. Except for those laws demanding exclusive service of Hashem and Shabbat, the other precepts were “on the books” of the world’s great civilizations prior to *Mattan Torah*; regulations prescribing respect for the names of the gods and the honoring of parents and prohibition of murder, adultery, stealing and false testimony had already long been recognized as crucial and legislated in Near Eastern society. However, there are major differences between the manner the pre-Torah world understood and codified these laws and their formulation in the Decalogue. In no pre-Torah society were they recognized as categorical imperatives that derived from a Divine source, incumbent upon each member of society to fulfill at all times regardless of social status or any personal considerations, as they are presented in the Decalogue’s terse and apodictic style.

That the Covenant was contracted before Israel entered the Promised Land, an occurrence that was to be relatively imminent, also possesses an innovative character. It is important for a nation to possess its own land, a matter generally conceived as critical to its identity. G-d had promised a land to Abraham from the very beginning, one of the reasons undoubtedly being for it to become an arena in which the laws of the Torah may fully flourish and an example may be set for other nations. Nevertheless, He did not consider it necessary to establish the Covenant upon the nation’s land. Israel’s self-identity as a nation was established through the Covenant contracted in the wilderness!

## **2. Direct Perception and Moshe’s Mediation**

An ancient tradition recorded in the Talmud (BT *Mak.* 23b-24a) relates that the people heard the first two commandments “מפי ה'” directly from Hashem, whereas the remaining eight they heard through the mediation of Moshe. This is likely based on a

*peshat* interpretation of the Decalogue format as indicated by the syntax. In the first two commandments G-d speaks of Himself in first person, addressing the people in second person: I, Hashem, am your G-d; you shall have no other gods besides Me... for I, Hashem your G-d, am a jealous G-d, etc. In the third, fourth and fifth commandments, He is referred to in the third person: Do not take the name of Hashem your G-d in vain; a Sabbath for Hashem your G-d; that you may have long days on the land that Hashem your G-d is giving you. The last five commandments are case-neutral in this respect, but from the overall context it would appear that they continue along the same line as the previous three.

The reason for the change appears to be described in the brief account immediately following the Decalogue in both Exodus (20:15-18) and Deuteronomy (5:20-24). The people were awestruck and terrified by the overpowering experience of encountering the Divine and felt they could not maintain the high level of discipline required. They were committed to G-d's program but feared that they would die and so they asked Moshe to relate the Divine words to them. Although the text records this request subsequent to the Decalogue, it may very well be describing the people's reaction and dialogue with Moshe that occurred at some point in the midst of the experience, but in order not to interrupt the proclamation, the request was described afterwards.

In his Deuteronomy retrospective, just before recounting the Decalogue, after reminding the people that Hashem spoke to them "face to face from the midst of the fire," Moshe explicitly reminded them that he "stood between Hashem and you at that time to relate to you Hashem's word as you feared the fire..." (Deut. 5:4-5). In the post-Decalogue passage there, the people are described as having expressed the fear that they would die if they "continued" hearing Hashem's voice (5:22), affirming that they did hear some of His words. This probably means they heard the first part, at which point they communicated their fears to Moshe and a change in format was instituted.

In Exodus, when the people requested Moshe's mediation, we are informed that he reassured them, explaining that G-d's purpose for them to have had a direct national prophetic experience was to test them (to challenge and prove them) and to instill in them reverence for Him in order to prevent their sinning. Having such an encounter with G-d etched in its national historic consciousness would be a powerful motivational factor for the nation to maintain its future reverence for Him. In introducing His purpose for Revelation, G-d told Moshe: "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and also so that they shall trust in you evermore" (Ex. 19:9). A purpose of Revelation was for the people to believe that G-d does communicate His will to human beings and that they should be able to trust His legitimate prophet.

In Deuteronomy, after reciting the Decalogue and reminding the nation of its request for his mediation, Moshe elaborates with a somewhat different emphasis. He quotes G-d to the general effect of being satisfied with the people's positive disposition in requesting Moshe's mediation and that He has hope that they would maintain their reverence for Him in the future.

At a later point in Moshe's Deuteronomic discourse, when he exhorts Israel not to heed soothsayers and sorcerers, etc., as do the nations G-d is dispossessing from before them, he returns to our subject. Once again he quotes Israel's statement and G-d's response, with further details:

...not such has Hashem your G-d designated for you. A prophet from your midst, from your brethren, like me, Hashem your G-d will raise for you, him shall you heed. In accordance with what you asked from Hashem your G-d at Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying: "Let me not continue hearing the voice of Hashem my G-d and this great fire let me not see, that I not die." And Hashem said to me, "They did well in what they spoke. A prophet will I raise for them from their brethren, like you, and I will place My words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him" (Deut. 18:14-18).

The prophetic experience was to continue into the future in one form or another. It is the alternative to the various forms of divination that the pagan nations engaged in. The latter practices, steeped in idolatrous magic and wonder-working, are intertwined with abominations (as the previous verses in that Deuteronomy 18 passage make clear), whereas the prophet who receives his inspiration from G-d will lead the nation in the moral path.

The people's decision at the Lawgiving not to see the fire accords with the system of G-d inspiring outstanding individuals with the gift of prophecy for the benefit of the masses. In this regard, one cannot help but think of Moshe's response to his disciple Joshua. Upon hearing the report that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, Joshua asked Moshe to restrain them. Moshe's response: "Are you jealous for me? Would that all Hashem's people be prophets that Hashem place His spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29).

### **3. Symbolism of the Fire**

In Deuteronomy, the people's fear that they would die if they continued to hear G-d's voice was expressed with reference to being consumed by the great fire (Deut. 5:22-23). Regarding that fire – extensively cited by Moshe in Deuteronomy but referred to in a subdued manner in Exodus – and what it represents, it is worthwhile to read Rabbi S. D. Sassoon's statement on the Symbolism of the Fire. (Excerpted and translated from *Natan Hochmah Lishlomo*, Heb. section, p. 191.)

...It may be that most of the Ten Commandments were previously acknowledged, such as You shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, etc., but what was new to their consciousness at Sinai was that these laws possess absoluteness... drawn from the absolute unity of the Creator, which spreads over the whole creation and is reflected within it and brings about an absoluteness to the values of compassion and justice, which are expressions of Hashem's unity.

At Sinai, as Hashem's absolute unity became known to them, they recognized His will is absolute in its demands and that it is the sole dispenser of life and true sustenance to each creature. This reality brings about the situation that whomever distances himself from the path of life that Hashem, blessed be He, revealed is destined for total destruction, whether speaking of an individual or a complete nation.

Hashem's words come out of the fire: "His words you heard from the midst of the fire" (Deut. 4:36), that means to say that the command did not reach your ears and understanding as an arbitrary command, that is, as a proper and worthwhile precept, but as an absolutely required command that does not tolerate annulment, and whose abandonment is complete destruction. It is this destruction that the fire symbolizes: "For lo, they who distance themselves from You shall perish, You destroy all those who stray from You (Ps. 73:27).

It is this absoluteness of the law that is the essential revelation of Sinai, that accompanies the revelation of "that Hashem, He is the G-d in heavens above and on earth below, there is none else" (Deut. 4:39). That is why the term *מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ* in conjunction with Hashem's words at Sinai appears ten times, to emphasize this absoluteness, in Deuteronomy (4:12,15,33,36; 5:4,19,21,23; 9:10; 10:4).

This is also the reason the Torah represents Hashem as fire (Deut. 4:24; 9:3).

Although this fire consumes and destroys all that is in opposition to Hashem's will, it also has the power to illuminate the path in which we should travel. For it is easier for the one who perceives this fire to separate from the evil and unseemly. That is the meaning of what is written that the fire that preceded the nation showed or illuminated the path (Deut. 1:33).

Being that the appearance of fire pointed to Hashem's presence and governance... the prophets prophesied that the

time will once again come when Hashem will illuminate before the nation... (Isaiah 60:19-20; Micha 7:9).

## Endnote

\* There are several views as to how to divide the Decalogue into ten pronouncements. Most of the millennia-old disputes centered on how to interpret the first verse, that of “*Anokhi*.” Though it is essentially a declarative statement and does not contain an imperative verb, *Targum Yonatan* rendered it as the first commandment, as did several Talmudic and Midrashic Sages, followed by Ibn Ezra, Rambam, Ramban and the general tradition. They understand it as requiring the acknowledgment of the existence of G-d, or the recognition that Hashem alone (with a focus on the meaning of His name) is our G-d. Other Sages, the early writers Josephus and Philo, and a number of commentators considered the first verse as introductory. Hasdai Crescas, Abarbanel and others presented strong philosophic arguments against the first view. It should be noted that the prohibition against idolatry – with its “You shall not have,” “You shall not make,” and “You shall not bow to them,” does appear to naturally divide into more than one law.

The Masoretic Text, judging from its *setumot* breaks (understandably, it does not contain a *petuha* break within the Decalogue), appears to consider the first verse together with all the idolatry-related verses as one pronouncement, given that they comprise one block of text. It appears to divide the *lo taḥmod* verses into two commands, each beginning with *lo taḥmod* and a *setumah* between them in Exodus, while Deuteronomy has one *lo taḥmod* clause and one *lo tit’aveh*, with a *setumah* between them.

To the extent that it does not significantly affect our comments, we will use the more prevalent division that views the Decalogue’s first verse as the first precept, the idolatry prohibitions as the second, and both *lo taḥmod* verses (as well as *lo tit’aveh* in Deuteronomy) as the tenth commandment.

# Visiting Iniquity of Fathers Upon Sons

by Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. A Jealous G-d

After prohibiting all forms of idolatry, the Second Commandment concludes with: “For I, Hashem your G-d, am a jealous G-d....” The attribute employed, *קנן*, invokes imagery of an angry husband resentful of his wife’s directing her affections to another. Hashem’s Covenant with Israel – although at this point it may not as yet have fully addressed the issue of the non-existence of other deities – requires exclusive faithfulness to Him; infidelity is construed as provoking His wrath as it does that of a jealous husband. (Marriage imagery in association with the Covenant is attested a number of times in Scripture.)

The verse continues: *פִּקֵּד עֵוֹן אָבוֹת עַל בְּנֵיהֶם וְגוֹ’*, “who visits the iniquity of fathers upon sons, upon the third and upon the fourth [generations] to those that hate Me, and who does kindness to the thousands [of generations] of those that love Me and keep My precepts.”

Multi-generation retribution is attested four times in the Torah, in each instance connected with the most egregious of transgressions. In both Decalogue formulations it is invoked for idolatry. In Exodus 34:7, subsequent to the golden calf apostasy, Hashem includes multi-generation retribution among His attributes in the context of the reestablished Covenant. In Numbers 14:18, Moshe cited it in his prayer for forgiveness following the nation’s rejection of the Promised Land, also a major Covenant breach. Multi-generation retribution appears to be applicable only to cases of major breaches of the Covenant.

How is such retribution to be understood? Does G-d punish innocent children for their parents’ sins? If so, even if the purpose of such a policy is to serve as a deterrent, can it be reconciled with the natural, almost intuitive human definition of justice?

At the outset it must be emphasized that all the cases of multi-generation retribution in the Torah refer exclusively to retribution meted out directly by the Deity in His own legal justice realm. Regarding sentencing measures dispensed by a human court, the Torah states (Deut. 24:16): “Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, nor sons be put to death for fathers; a person shall be put to death only for his own sin.” This verse unquestionably refers to the realm of earthly administration of justice. It appears amid a cluster of human responsibilities and is formulated as a directive to a human court; indeed, a statement concerning the Divine court of justice at that point would be anomalous. The key verb יִמָּתוּ is elsewhere always employed for execution at human hands. King Amaziah quotes this verse as the legal source that prohibits execution of the sons of his father’s assassins (II Kings 14:5-6). Although speaking about the death penalty, this proscription has been understood as totally banning all human vicarious punishment.

Thus, in discussing *poqed `avon abot `al banim*, we are theorizing about what the Deity does in His realm. Whatever explanation we give does not affect the reality of things since it does not relate to any action that may be undertaken by human initiative.

## 2. A Major Qualification

The Talmud (BT *Ber. 7a, San. 27b*) significantly diminishes the scope of *poqed `avon abot `al banim*. It construes it as only applicable when sons continue in the evil ways of their fathers. It cites a verse in the Leviticus execration that implies this principle: “And they that are left shall waste away in their sins... and even in the sins of their fathers that are with them shall they waste away” (בְּעִוֹנֹת אֲבוֹתָם אֲתָם יִמָּקוּ, Lev. 26:39).

Although the Talmud does not cite it, some scholars detect this qualification in the Decalogue passage itself. The *poqed `avon* phrase specifies לְשׂוֹנְאֵי (to those that hate or reject Me, i.e., engage in idolatry). They view this as a reference to the sons that hate G-d, restricting retribution for fathers’ sins to such children. Similarly, His kindnesses that extend to future generations לְאַהֲבָיִ

וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי would extend only to those children who maintain love for Him and are faithful to His *misvot*.

Others, however, understand the word לְשֹׂנְאָי as referring to the sinning fathers, not their children. The syntax fits the fathers very well. Hashem warns: Do not engage in idolatry, for I am a jealous G-d who visits fathers' sins on their sons, for those (fathers) who hate Me. That would imply that the sins of those who do not hate Him (less severe sinners) are not visited upon their children. This supports the distinction pointed out in the previous section between major and non-major transgressions. Either way, לְשֹׂנְאָי restricts the scope of *poqed `avon*.

In the two non-Decalogue Torah attestations of *poqed `avon* the word לְשֹׂנְאָי does not appear. The explanation may be that in those contexts *poqed `avon* is mentioned in the abstract, as one of a number of G-d's attributes, not addressing any specific sinner and therefore not requiring any possible qualification of the action.

It appears that a support for the view that the Decalogue's לְשֹׂנְאָי applies to the sinful fathers may be brought from Deuteronomy 7:9. That verse, in standard chiasmatic fashion, paraphrases the multi-generational reward statement of the Decalogue with sequence reversal of the clauses: "to those who love Him and guard His *misvot*" followed by "until a thousand generations." In this case, "those who love Him" clearly refers to the parents. Analogously, although multi-generational punishment does not appear in that passage, the Decalogue's statement "to those who hate Me" would also refer to the parents. (That this verse speaks of a "thousand generations" in contrast to the Decalogue's "thousands" may be a result of the absence of the word "generations" in the Decalogue. Both mean "indefinitely.")

Scriptural support for the thesis that *poqed `avon abot `al banim* is restricted only to sons who continue in their father's sinful ways has been brought from Jeremiah 32:18-19. In consecutive verses the prophet cites Hashem's attribute of multi-generational reward and punishment immediately followed by the principle of individual accountability.

18. Who does kindness to the thousandth (generation) and compensates the iniquity of fathers upon their sons after them....

19. ...whose eyes observe all the ways of men to give each according to his ways and according to the fruits of his doings.

In order that these verses not contradict one another, not to speak of complementing each another, which surely appears to be the intention, the first has been understood as referring to children who continue in the ways of their parents, the second to those who do not. The qualification need not be explicitly stated as these verses are within a context of the prophet speaking to G-d.

### 3. Interpretations

Concerning the matter of the justice of cross-generational retribution, many have found a “naturalistic” interpretation appealing. G-d created the world with the natural order that possesses a great degree of constancy and the general effects of human behavior and tendencies as we know them. Accordingly, to a certain degree consequences that flow from this state of affairs may be considered as His doings. The reality of the world is that a man’s evil behavior usually influences his children, causing them to commit fresh offenses. A sinner places the burden of his behavior upon his children and to some extent upon their children also. Thus, by virtue of being the author of the natural order, it can be said that G-d visits the iniquity of fathers on sons.

Although all may agree that this reflects the prevalent reality of the world as we experience it, many have considered it strained to assume the Torah translates so naturalistic a process – with its many exceptions – into so active and definite a verbal clause as **פֶּקֶד עֵינָיו אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנֵיהֶם**. Also, why should cross-generational retribution only apply against those that breach the Covenant, as it appears to be so qualified? In addition, naturalistic influences would not account for the huge dissimilarity between four generations of punishment and thousands of generations of reward for the faithful, a point the Torah stresses. Some have answered that negative behavioral influences are only overwhelming when

the father is a flagrant violator and that in several generations positive societal influences neutralize the sinner's impact. And the complex workings of human free will cannot be ignored. In any event, although the questions may not be insurmountable, many have invoked them to reject the naturalistic approach in favor of the view that in *poqed `avon* the Torah is depicting an aspect of G-d's active dispensing of retribution.

M. D. Cassuto refined the naturalistic argument in the following comments (Commentary on Shemot):

...the verse is directed to the [concept of the] totality of the nation being a united entity throughout its generations throughout time. Since man, particularly an Israelite man, is grieved at his children's and grandchildren's afflictions not less but even more than at his own afflictions, Scripture issues a warning, in order to keep man distant from sin, that in the course of the nation's life it is possible that children and grandchildren will suffer as a consequence of their fathers' or grandfathers' sins. From the other angle, Scripture moves our hearts toward the love of G-d by the guarantee that the beneficent results of such love will endure in the life of the nation and will be imparted upon children, grandchildren and their descendants till thousands of generations.

He also stated: The Covenant between G-d and Israel is the essence of the nation's identity and the foundation of its purpose. It is appropriate for every member of the nation to sacrifice a great deal for the opportunity to have this relationship with G-d. If the most potent way to assure the viability of the Covenant in Moshe's time was for G-d to treat father and son to some degree as a single entity such that there is cross-generational reward and punishment, it is understandable.

Such an interpretation is not viewing cross-generational punishment as a case of "the ends justify the means," punishing the son to benefit the father, setting a precedent for a dangerous doctrine. The system directly benefits everybody by providing a deterrent to all – sons are also fathers. In addition, even if the

“natural order” interpretation is not accepted as the full intent of the Torah in this matter, it nevertheless describes a general evil that usually afflicts the sons of sinning fathers. Thus, G-d’s meting out multi-generational punishment could be viewed as a deterrent and would usually ultimately redound to the son’s great advantage, helping to comprehend the justice of G-d’s policy.

Some have explained *poqed `avon abot `al banim* as associated with Hashem’s mercy. In Numbers 14:18, Moshe cites this Divine characteristic in his prayer for forgiveness after the national transgression of refusing to go forward to the Promised Land. This may perhaps be understood as asking Hashem in His mercy to spread the full measure of retribution through the generations, to allow the present generation the opportunity to live and mend its ways or at least to keep the Covenant extant. In this way, the future generations would also benefit. However, such an interpretation does not seem to fit the Decalogue’s tenor, where the statement is used to warn against idolatry.

The significance of four generations appears to be that an average full lifespan usually extends through great-grandchildren. It is these descendants whom we assume the idolater cares about. The righteous, on the other hand, are different. They are not selfish and self-centered and limited in their concern to their immediate descendants. They identify with G-d’s goal for the betterment of the world and care about the welfare of future generations, even very distant future generations. They are particularly concerned as regards their descendants, even thousands of generations later, those future people that they caused to be born into the world. It is great satisfaction to the righteous to know that through their behavior they helped someone, that they participated with G-d in instilling *hesed* into the world, even if they do not specifically know who the recipients will be.

This subject of *poqed `avon abot `al banim* is part of the larger and perhaps most difficult issue in religion, that of theodicy – the fairness of G-d’s system of dispensing reward and punishment. This matter was raised several times by the prophets and

discussed on a number of occasions by the Sages. Although it is not the primary topic of this study, several comments are in order.

#### **4. Additional Comments**

In the Talmud, Rabbi Yoḥanan in the name of Rabbi Yose states that Moshe asked Hashem to reveal to him why some righteous receive a favorable portion in life while other righteous suffer and some wicked receive a favorable portion while other wicked suffer (BT *Ber. 7a*). Rabbi Yoḥanan asserts that the answer Hashem gave was that it depends on the father – a righteous person may suffer because of his wicked father, etc. The Talmud, in an *אמר מר* analysis of a later generation, rejects the possibility that Rabbi Yoḥanan ever transmitted such a view and provides a different explanation as to what Hashem answered Moshe. Those righteous who receive a favorable portion in life are completely righteous while the righteous who suffer are not completely righteous and the same principle applies to the wicked.

The reason the Talmud took the unusual step of rejecting the “tradition” received from Rabbi Yoḥanan and imputed a totally different explanation to his statement was because it accepted as an axiom that “Hashem punishes sons for the sins of their fathers only when they continue in their fathers’ ways.” Accordingly, it assumed that the original formulation cited in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan that he quoted Rabbi Yose had to be mistaken.

In that passage, Rabbi Meir is cited as disagreeing with the statement of Rabbi Yoḥanan stated in the name of Rabbi Yose. He was of the opinion that Hashem never answered that question of Moshe, for *לֹא תִּבְּל לְרֵאוּת אֶת פְּנֵי*, “you cannot perceive My countenance” (Ex. 33:20), meaning that the answer to Moshe’s question is a matter beyond human comprehension. These varying statements cannot be reconciled as the Sages clearly had conflicting opinions.

In the Talmud and within classic rabbinic tradition there is the view that G-d sometimes visits the iniquity of parents even on innocent children, but only when those children are very young.

For example: “Ribi states: For the sin of violating one’s vows, one’s young children may die” (BT *Shab.* 32b). Although the Talmud does not connect it to the Decalogue, some view it as an application of *poqed `avon abot `al banim* and of course only relevant for a violation in G-d’s sphere.

The Rambam wrote: “There are transgressions for which the punishment is exacted from... one’s young children, for a person’s young children who do not yet have *da`at* (understanding) and did not reach the obligation of *misvot* are treated as the parent’s possessions” (MT Laws of Repentance 6:1).

Abarbanel summarizes what he considers the primary rabbinical view:

...this is when very young, before the age of accountability for their own actions, for they are then considered extensions of their fathers and may be punished for his sins... until the fourth generation, those that the original idolater may see in his lifetime... [for he] does not have a close feeling to later descendants... When older, they may be punished for their fathers’ sins only when they continue perpetrating those sins... and only in the case of idolatry. Concerning other sins, even if the son continues his father’s evil ways he will only be punished for his own sins (Commentary to Exodus, 20:5).

## **5. Individual Accountability**

In Ezekiel 18, the prophet resoundingly proclaimed in Hashem’s name the principle of individual accountability. People in Israel used to quote a proverb: “Parents eat sour grapes and their sons’ teeth are blunted” (Ezek. 18:2), referring to the punishment of sons for the sins of their fathers. A short time prior to Ezekiel, in Jeremiah 31:28, amid a series of consoling prophecies, G-d told Jeremiah that days are coming when this proverb will no longer be cited, but that each man will die in his own sin – he who eats the sour grapes, his teeth only will be blunted. It appears that at that point it was not yet recognized to be the operative principle in

theodicy, but there was an assertion of Divine acknowledgement that a transition was in formation.

Ezekiel states in Hashem's name:

What do you mean by quoting this proverb upon the soil of Israel, "Parents eat sour grapes and their sons' teeth are blunted"? As I live - declares the Lord God - this proverb shall no longer be current among you in Israel. Consider, all lives are Mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child are both Mine. The person who sins, only he shall die.... a son who has seen all the sins that his father committed but has taken heed and has not imitated them.... he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, but shall live... and now you ask, "Why has not the son shared the burden of his father's guilt?" But the son has done what is right and just, and has carefully kept all My laws: he shall live! ...The person who sins, he alone shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent's guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child's guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone... And if a wicked person turns back from the wickedness that he practiced, and does what is just and right, such a person shall save his life. Because he took heed and turned back from all the transgressions that he committed, he shall live; he shall not die... Be assured, O House of Israel, I will judge each one of you according to his ways... Cast away all the transgressions by which you have offended, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, that you may not die, O House of Israel. For it is not My desire that anyone shall die... Repent, therefore, and live! (Ezek. 18:2-32, NJPS).

This proclamation, which explicitly states that the righteous son will not share in his wicked father's guilt, etc., contradicts the Biblical verse of "visits the iniquity of fathers upon sons" if taken without qualification. In the Talmud (BT *Mak.* 24a) this contradiction is addressed in a manner other than that cited above:

Rabbi Yose bar Ḥanina said: Four decrees Moshe Rabenu decreed upon Israel – four prophets came and annulled them... Moshe said, “visits the iniquity of fathers upon sons” – Ezekiel came and annulled it, “the person who sins - only he shall die.”

In Ezekiel’s days Israel’s situation had greatly deteriorated and was extremely bleak; indeed, the nation’s very survival was in doubt. Whether this prophecy of Ezekiel was proclaimed after the Temple’s destruction and the nation’s dispersal or shortly before – after the exile of Yehoyakhin together with the leaders, eleven years earlier – is not easily resolved, but in any case the people were in deep despair. They felt doomed by their fathers’ sins and were beginning to give up all hope in a restoration. It was becoming impossible to maintain their commitment to the Covenant without a modification on this critical point. The prophet empathized with their problem and represented their situation to G-d.

Rabbi Yose bar Ḥanina’s language – that Moshe decreed and Ezekiel annulled – is unusual. This is a theological matter of the highest order, describing G-d’s mode of governance in the world! Why is it called Moshe’s decree? How can we understand this degree of relativity in G-d’s governance?

When asked about such matters, Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon commented along the following lines. Genuine prophets, fully dedicated to G-d’s will, play a crucial role in matters of the world that fall into their sphere. Their input possesses cosmic significance. Their monumental efforts kept the Covenant extant. G-d considers the prophets’ comprehension of His mode of governance crucial to His decision-making and He may modify His methods according to their judgment. G-d taught this lesson to Abraham upon the latter’s exemplifying his extraordinary care for strangers in need and in his obvious commitment to instill “Derekh Hashem” into the world through his descendants and followers. G-d asked: “Am I to conceal from Abraham that which I am doing?” (Gen. 18:17). He then revealed to Abraham His plans concerning the destruction of Sodom. In the ensuing

dialogue that He had with Abraham, He was receptive to the arguments of His faithful servant. A faithful servant of G-d, who works with total dedication to promote G-d's will, must have a full measure of personal integrity. Abraham expected a standard of Divine providence that human reason may sincerely embrace and Hashem agreed with him.

Life, humanity and society are complex and dynamic. The prophets' conceptions as to what is "just and appropriate" in G-d's relationship to the world may change from time to time, based on their sincere ego-less position and the circumstances and standards of society. Rabbi Yose bar Hanina teaches that G-d is ever sensitive to His faithful servants' honest conceptions and takes their views – to a certain extent representing the thinking and situations of their constituencies – into account in His governance of the world.

# The G-d-Israel Covenant: On Meaning and Format

by Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. Introduction

The Torah presents Israel's relationship with G-d as based upon a covenant between them, the "*berit*." G-d had established individual covenants with the patriarchs concerning their progeny, that they would become a great nation and inherit the Land of Canaan (as described in the Book of Genesis), but the direct covenant with the descendant nation was of a different order. It was confirmed and actual, no longer subject to the doings of individuals that may have voided it and much more detailed, such that its nature, G-d's expectations and "hopes" as well as consequences for compliance or non-compliance were comprehensible to all. As recounted in the Book of Exodus, the Covenant was contracted shortly after the Exodus from Egypt, at Mount Sinai, in association with G-d's Revelation to Israel and His proclaiming of the Ten Commandments to them. It was promptly followed by the transmission of a major law code.

In the fortieth year from the Exodus, shortly before his death, Moshe led Israel to a covenant reaffirmation as described in the Book of Deuteronomy. (Indeed, most of the Fifth Book is devoted to the overarching subject of covenant reaffirmation, as we demonstrate in our Deuteronomy studies.)

The G-d-Israel Covenant is the essential factor that defines the identity of the nation of Israel as well as that of each individual Israelite. The key features of this relationship include the following:

\* G-d's election of the Israelites, as the progeny of the worthy patriarchs, for a unique role and responsibility in the world, namely, that they become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) that is to bring blessing to the nations of the world through fulfillment of His covenant stipulations

- \* His granting Israel the Land of Canaan as the arena in which it would fulfill its destiny
- \* His providential care and concern for the nation
- \* His pledge to judge it by the degree of compliance or non-compliance with His covenant stipulations
- \* His guarantee of the possibility of repentance and restoration after backsliding and attendant retribution, even after exile from their land.

G-d had established a covenantal relationship with Abraham because of that patriarch's extraordinary merit, especially his commitment to improve the world by teaching the way of G-d, that is, by his example of compassionate behavior and dedication to teach righteousness and justice (see Gen. 18:19). The expectation was that through him and his descendants "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 18:18). G-d's desire is to see man establish a compassionate, just and righteous society on earth (see Jer. 9:23). Although man's free will is a given, a principle established in the Garden of Eden, G-d will at times intervene in human affairs to make an adjustment in the world to set it up in a manner more conducive for man to fulfill His goal. Previously, in bringing the Flood and with His confounding the builders of the Tower of Babel, He had intervened. With the selection of Abraham He intervene with a new strategy. He would work with a nation, nurturing it through history, a nation designated for the task of helping uplift and improve humanity.

After Abraham, G-d transmitted His covenant commitment, with its vision for the future, to Yishaq and then Yaaqob, concluding the period of the patriarchs. Eventually, their offspring, burgeoning into an incipient nation, were living in bondage and affliction in Egypt. At some point G-d recalled His Covenant with the patriarchs. Apparently, this was when the children had come to deeply appreciate the suffering of the oppressed and downtrodden to be receptive to legislation requiring them to forever be sensitive to the plight of such members of society. G-d redeemed the slaves and transformed what had previously been a covenant with individuals into a national covenant, charging the Israelites with their responsibility.

Having a covenant formalize a relationship or agreement was a matter of great significance throughout the ancient Near East. It was understood to include or was equivalent to a most solemn oath, requiring a sincere commitment to fulfillment of the obligations. It invoked Divine retribution upon the party that violated its commitment. In addition, a covenant in any matter of substance would forge a deep bond between all those who were included or choose to join. In the case of Israel, it enabled the members of a national group to have a much deeper sense of mutual responsibilities and far more cohesiveness among them than might otherwise have been the case. This increased the possibility for the nation to endure through the vicissitudes of life that would inevitably arise and erode its unity and identity. It provided great hope for renewal and national restoration when relevant.

The primary signs of the Covenant in the Torah are circumcision of eight-day-old males and observance of Shabbat. The former is an ongoing reminder of the responsibility to sanctify our lives beginning in the most basic sphere of holiness. The drive for self-gratification is the major force that tempts man away from fulfilling G-d's will; the sign of the Covenant in circumcision is a call for the antidote of self-discipline. Shabbat suffuses into the nation a large measure of commitment to social justice and sets the tone for compassion and equity in society on the foundation of dedication to the Creator. Together, these two statutes serve to maintain an elevated level of consciousness of the Covenant and its responsibilities within the nation.

The literary structure of the Torah is replete with symbolic references to the Covenant, detectable on the surface without manipulation of the text. It is so prevalent that the sensitive reader cannot lose sight of it, a matter we will expand upon in an excursus *On Number Symbolism in the Torah From the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon*.

The narratives dealing with the G-d-Israel Covenant and its details are elaborated through a major portion of the Torah. To more properly understand the meaning and placement of many passages

and particulars in the Five Books it is helpful to be familiar with covenant format and protocol of the ancient Near East in times roughly contemporary with *Mattan Torah*. Numerous nuances in the text become more comprehensible in the light of such knowledge.

## **2. Antecedents**

Many examples of ancient Near Eastern covenants have been discovered during the past century. Among the relevant cases are the Hittite treaties of the 14th-13th centuries BCE, shortly before the time of Moshe, when the Hittite kingdom was a major power in northern and central Syria and many small states of the region were Hittite vassals. The form and enactment procedures of these covenants differed according to whether equal partners were involved or a suzerain-vassal relationship was being transacted, such as was the case when the treaty related to subject nations or when a king formalized his relationship with his nationals. In the latter cases a large part of the covenant was an expansion of a loyalty oath to the king, who obligated himself to protect his subjects. In the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE the neo-Assyrian treaties, though not identical, were essentially of similar format to the Hittite ones.

Harper's Bible Dictionary (1985, p. 190) succinctly summarizes the main elements of Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties as follows:

...identification of the treaty-maker (i.e. the great king); a historical introduction (prior beneficial acts done by the great power on behalf of the smaller one); the stipulations (the primary demand is for loyalty); a list of divine witnesses; and blessings and curses. The treaty was recited, a ceremonial meal eaten, and the treaty deposited at the feet of the idol.

It should be added that it was usual to make a commitment to periodically recite the covenant, and, when circumstances significantly changed, such as upon the death of a king, to conduct a full-fledged renewal.

Some of these details are common sense components of a treaty, but specific terminology and usage, sequence of components and overall format, as well as the reduction to writing of most of these elements in a single document, were a sure sign that standard covenant protocol was being followed. That being said, some variation was common.

### **3. In the Torah**

There are two covenants between G-d and Israel narrated in the Torah, the Sinai Covenant contracted shortly after the Exodus and that of the Plains of Moab, enacted near the end of the fortieth year from the Exodus. The latter was a renewal of the earlier transaction (despite a significant amount of new stipulations); the motivation for it was the changed circumstances of the nation with the emergence of a new generation, the impending death of Moshe and the upcoming entry into the Promised Land. The particulars of the former are detailed in the Book of Exodus and concluded near the end of the Book of Leviticus, while the latter extends through virtually the whole Book of Deuteronomy. Although not identical in outward appearance, they are strikingly congruent in that both contain a full measure of covenant elements characteristic of ancient Near East suzerain-vassal treaties. It is not merely the Decalogue pronouncements, which are almost identical in both, and the passages explicitly relating to the Covenant that comprise Covenant substance, but a significant portion of the Torah, including Leviticus, is directly subsumed into the Covenant structure as we shall soon see.

It is noteworthy that as far as what is known today, not a single ancient covenant has been discovered reputed to be between a deity and a nation besides the case of the Torah. Israel's national covenant experience is unparalleled and revolutionary even in conception.

Why would the Torah utilize a model employed by other nations in a political context for so critical an item as the covenant between G-d and Israel? Nahum Sarna answers that since the substance of the Torah Covenant was so innovative and unique in

many ways, it was preferable to employ a known form of treaty to make the new concepts more intelligible. Only against the background of the classical treaty model – when the people (at first, primarily the leaders and the educated class) would have a clear idea of what was being accomplished – could the “originality and independence,” the “wholly new creation” of the Torah Covenant and its contents be adequately appreciated (*Exploring Exodus* p. 136).

Of course, employing the standard model would also facilitate the other nations’ understanding of what was transpiring in Israel. It should be added that the Torah often utilizes previously established forms even in the sphere of religious worship and reworks them in accordance with its new philosophy (see our study *Maimonides on Sacrifices Part I*<sup>1</sup>).

Commenting on the Torah’s use of a political pattern replicating what was the contemporary model, Moshe Weinfeld states: “The religious use of this pattern was especially possible in Israel, for only the religion of Israel demanded exclusive loyalty to the God of Israel... who would suffer no rival... [and] precluded the possibility of dual or multiple loyalties.... So the stipulation in political treaties demanding exclusive loyalty to one king corresponds strikingly to the religious belief in one single, exclusive Deity.... Because of the concept of the kingship of God, relations between the people and their God had to be patterned after the conventional model of relations between a king and his subjects, a written treaty.” (*Commentary on Deuteronomy*, AB pp 8-9).

#### **4. Exodus-Leviticus**

In introducing the Sinai experience in the Book of Exodus, just before Revelation was to occur, G-d transmitted to the people through Moshe a brief prologue in the form of a motivational statement designed to foster widespread and deep allegiance. He briefly recounted the saving act He performed for Israel to “bring

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<sup>1</sup> Referenced studies of Rabbi Shamah may be found online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org)

you to Me,” He described the positive relationship that would ensue between Him and the nation and projected the glorious future awaiting it, all contingent upon loyalty to the Covenant. He said, “You have seen what I did to Egypt, that I carried you on eagles’ wings to bring you to Me; Now, if you hearken to My voice and keep My covenant you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples... you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:4-6).

The people assented, preparations of purification and sanctification were made and the following chapter contains the Decalogue.

In the larger picture, the Decalogue precepts begin the “stipulations” section of covenant format. But as a compact statement containing the core elements of G-d’s demands of Israel and transmitted to the nation directly by Him, the Decalogue was itself structured in covenant format; its formulation focuses on the most substantial covenantal components and should be viewed as a miniature, stand-alone, covenant digest. It begins with G-d’s self-identification and a statement of the relationship between Himself and Israel. A brief historical statement in which He recalls the major benefaction He provided the nation in having redeemed it from bondage is attached. This is followed by His demands for fulfillment of the most basic precepts. It includes the threat of punishment for disloyalty to Him in the case of having another god besides Him and reward for loyalty to Him.

Covenant stipulations continue with the extensive law code that follows (Ex. 21-23), introduced by וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים (“these are the ordinances”). Subsequently, the people reaffirm acceptance of the laws, Moshe writes and recites “The Book of the Covenant,” sacrifices are offered, Moshe sprinkles from the blood on the altar and the people, and the ceremonial meal is eaten (Ex. 24:3-11). The witnesses – of course, only symbolic – were twelve pillars that Moshe set up for the twelve tribes (Ex. 24:4). In the Yaaqob-Laban treaty, which appropriately reflected the older Western Mesopotamian model of treaties between equals, we note the express designation of stones as symbolic witnesses: “this mound

[of stones] shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness” (Gen. 31:52). Following the flurry of activity in fulfilling the “technical” details of covenant protocol, Hashem calls Moshe to ascend the mountain so that He may present him with the stone Tablets, the permanent record of the Decalogue.

The major statement of Blessings and Curses does not appear until near the end of Leviticus, as the subject matter following Exodus 24 until the Blessings and Curses is essentially an “enrichment” program attached to the Covenant. Exodus 25 begins with instructions for construction of the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary that provided for the Divine presence to dwell amidst the nation while traveling to the Promised Land. The Mishkan brought fortification of the Covenant with the Leviticus legislation that was promulgated through it. Its purity and holiness program called upon each individual of Israel to live life with the constant consciousness of G-d’s presence, above and beyond what would have been understood to be the covenantal requirements prior to Leviticus. Sanctuary, priest and ritual became key vehicles in implementing the expanded program that was appended to the stipulations of *Parashiyot Yitro* and *Mishpatim*. The ritual laws of *Parashat Ki Tissa* (Ex. 34:17-26), taught at the time of the Covenant restoration after the golden calf apostasy, that repeated certain laws from Exodus 23:10-19, is perhaps an early manifestation of this new emphasis.

The so-called Holiness Code (Lev. 18-25) required extensive preliminary legislation. The latter extends from the beginning of Leviticus with the prescriptions concerning sacrificial service and the rituals for the dedication of priests and sanctuary through the laws of purity that lead to the holiness legislation. (A major school of thought among the Sages views the entire sanctuary section beginning with Exodus 25 as having been added *in toto* as a corrective program in consequence of the Covenant annulment represented by the golden calf apostasy and inserted where it is. See our study on *Parashat Terumah I*.)

Finally, in Leviticus 26, the Blessings and Curses appear, concluding the Sinai Covenant transaction, as stated in the

immediately following verse closing the chapter: “These are the *hugim*, *mishpatim* and *torot* that Hashem gave between Himself and *Bene Yisrael* at Mount Sinai...” (Lev. 26:46). This verse subsumes into the Covenant all that transpired from the beginning of the Covenant enterprise in Exodus 19 until the point at which it is stated. Leviticus 27, the final chapter in Leviticus, is a type of addendum.

It may be that the first part of the Book of Exodus, from the beginning through chapter 18, is also to be viewed as the historical prologue to the Covenant. The themes that run through this section, namely, G-d exercising His control of the of the natural order to redeem Israel from slavery and to teach Pharaoh and the world of His great power, serve the more fundamental theme of recording His faithfulness to His covenant with the patriarchs by intervening on behalf of their descendants in order to enter into a covenant with them. Since the primary theme of the Book of Genesis is the development of G-d’s covenant with the patriarchs as the forerunner of the covenant with their progeny, in a way, it too, may be viewed as part of the historical prologue to the Covenant.

## **5. Deuteronomy**

Deuteronomy is virtually wholly structured around the overarching theme of the renewal of Israel’s Covenant with G-d, transacted through Moshe in the fortieth year shortly before his death. This is summarized in the verse following the Blessings and Curses, which concluded recitation of the substantial Covenant elements: “These are the words of the Covenant that Hashem commanded Moshe to contract with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the Covenant He contracted with them at Horeb” (Deut. 28:69).

National covenants generally covered future times and included the children (Deut. 29:14). However, since the human spirit does not usually tolerate restrictive agreements for very long, especially when not personally contracted or when conditions have so changed that they may be thought to render the original agreement

inapplicable, it was the widespread practice in the ancient Near East to rekindle motivation through periodic renewals. As mentioned earlier, this was particularly the case when there was leadership change or after the passage of many years, when a new generation came upon the scene. Moshe's impending death was thus an appropriate occasion for such reenactment, especially since the nation was soon going to enter its land and a great deal had transpired during the previous forty years.

The misvah of "*Haqhel*," the national seventh year assembly (Deut. 31:10-13), is a periodic covenant review and reaffirmation ceremony although it did not call for the details of a full-fledged covenant reenactment. The latter was the case at various critical moments in the nation's history, the most prominent case being that performed by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:3).

Most of the first four chapters of Deuteronomy comprise a prologue in the form of a historical survey in which Moshe cited the oath Hashem made to the patriarchs and recounted His kindnesses to the Israelites. In Chapter 4, incorporating details of the Revelation experience for the prologue's conclusion, the historical survey is transformed into a priming force preparing Israel for a review of the Decalogue and the transmission of stipulations for the Covenant renewal. In this chapter Moshe touched on most of the key Covenant elements relating to the nation's bond with Hashem: His Revelation and identification; His relationship with Israel; benefactions; major demands; calling heavens and earth as witnesses and consequences of compliance or non-compliance. After a short third person digression (vv. 4:41-49, a matter we discuss in our relevant study), the next covenant phase begins in Chapter 5, that of the stipulations. This begins with Moshe's review of the Decalogue.

This "priming" relationship between Deuteronomy 4 and 5, in the manner of a rehearsal before a very important ceremony, may be the precedent for a somewhat similar phenomenon found in the Book of Joshua. There, in chapter 23, when Joshua was "old and advanced in years," he assembled Israel's leaders and presented the essentials of the Covenant. In chapter 24 he reassembled the

same groups and presented similar points. No extraneous subject matter intervenes between these chapters! However, in the latter instance it states “and they stood before G-d” (v. 1), a phrase with no counterpart in the previous chapter, a clear sign that only on this latter occasion was the assembly in front of the Ark of the Covenant and that this was “for real.” In contrast to chapter 23, the people respond, reaffirming the Covenant.

In Deuteronomy 5, Moshe launched an extensive and eloquent discourse leading Israel through a comprehensive Covenant renewal. After reviewing the circumstances attendant upon establishment of the original Covenant at Horeb (a substitute term for Sinai), he recited the Decalogue as proclaimed by G-d forty years before (we address the variations from the Exodus statement in our study *On Decalogue Variances*). He continued with moral instruction, interlaced with accounts of G-d’s care for Israel and His loyalty to the Covenant with the forefathers, several statements of consequences for compliance or non-compliance and the presentation of a great law compendium that extended through 26:15. These laws, with the Decalogue, comprise the Covenant stipulations.

Next comes a definitive Covenant-relationship formula, beginning with “*hayom hazeh*” (26:16-19). It articulates the significance of the occasion with a proclamation of mutual relationship and reciprocal commitments and highlights the glorious potential for the nation (one notes correspondence with Exodus 19:4-6).

Immediately following is the call to continue the reenactment process upon entering the Promised Land. Israel is commanded to write “this Torah” on stones upon crossing the Jordan River, build an altar, perform relevant sacrifices, partake of a ceremonial meal and recite blessings and curses (chap. 27-28). The renewal being performed by Moshe is blended with the call for a continuation and finalization of the process after Moshe’s death and upon entering Canaan, thus increasing its impact. This ceremony was, indeed, performed by Joshua (Josh. 8:30-35) “as commanded by Moshe... as written in *Sefer Torat Moshe*” (v. 31).

Deuteronomy 28 contains the text of the Blessings and Curses. The national Covenant-enactment assembly is described in chapter 29. Subsequently, various witnesses are invoked: heavens and earth (30:19; 31:28), the Song of *Ha'azinu* (31:19, 21) and the *Sefer HaTorah* (31:26), the latter term being virtually synonymous with the written Covenant, if not identical with it. The writing of "this Torah" (31:9), providing for the periodic recital of "this Torah" (31:11) and depositing "this *Sefer HaTorah*" by the side of the Ark of the Covenant (31:26) conclude the technical procedures associated with Covenant enactment.

Thus, the various particulars of covenant protocol directly govern the sequence of virtually all of the subject categories of Deuteronomy.

Another feature of Deuteronomy is that the Decalogue structure appears to play a role in the order of large subsections within the law compendium, meaning that just as the Decalogue is in a *misvot, huqim and mishpatim* sequence so is the law compendium (see our *Va'ethanan Part I* study). In addition, it appears that the sequence of commandments in the Decalogue was a factor in determining the sequence of individual laws in the law compendium, a matter we plan to discuss in later Deuteronomy studies.

קריאת התורה ליום שני של שבועות

<sup>15i</sup>-You will make Your steeds tread the sea, Stirring the mighty waters.  
<sup>16</sup>I heard and my bowels quaked, My lips quivered at the sound; Rot entered into my bone, I trembled where I stood. Yet I wait calmly for the day of distress, For a people to come to attack us. <sup>17</sup>Though the fig tree does not bud And no yield is on the vine, Though the olive crop has failed And the fields produce no grain, Though sheep have vanished from the fold And no cattle are in the pen,<sup>i</sup> <sup>18</sup>Yet will I rejoice in the LORD, Exult in the God who delivers me. <sup>19</sup>My Lord GOD is my strength: He makes my feet like the deer's And lets me stride upon the heights. <sup>j</sup>For the leader; with instrumental music. <sup>j</sup>

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<sup>i-i</sup> Or <sup>15</sup>You will make Your steeds tread the sea,/Stirring the mighty waters,/ <sup>16</sup>That I may have rest on a day of distress,/When a people come up to attack us./But this report made my bowels quake,/These tidings made my lips quiver;/Rot entered into my bone,/I trembled where I stood:/ <sup>17</sup>That the fig tree does not bud,/And no yield is on the vine;/The olive crop has failed,/And the fields produce no grain;/The sheep have vanished from the fold,/And no cattle are in the pen.

<sup>j-j</sup> Meaning of Heb. uncertain

קריאת התורה ליום שני של שבועות

טו דְּרַכְתָּ בָּיָם סוּסִיךָ חֹמֶר מַיִם רַבִּים: טז שָׁמַעְתִּי וַתִּרְגַּז בְּטוֹבִי  
לְקוֹלִי צָלְלוּ שַׁפְּתַי יָבֹוא רָקֵב בְּעֶצְמִי וַתַּחֲתִי אֶרְגַּז אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי  
לְיוֹם צָרָה לְעֵלֹת לְעַם יְגוּדְנוּ: יז כִּי־תֵאָנֶה לֹא־תִפְרָח וְאִין  
יָבוֹל בַּגִּפְנִים כַּחַשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה־זוֹת וּשְׂדֵמֹת לֹא־עָשָׂה אֶכֶל גִּזֵּר  
מִמְכָּלָה צֹאן וְאִין בְּקָר בְּרִפְתִּים: יח וְאִין בֵּיהֲנָה אֶעֱלוֹזָה אֲנִילָה  
בְּאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: יט יְהִנֶּה אֲדֹנָי חִילִי וַיִּשָּׂם רַגְלִי כְּאֵילֹת וְעַל  
בְּמוֹתַי יִדְרַכְנִי לְמִנְצַח בְּנִינֹתַי:

## Haftarah for the Second Day of Shabuot

Habbakuk 2:20-3:19

2<sup>20</sup>But the LORD in His holy Abode—Be silent before Him all the earth!

3 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk. In the mode of *Shigionoth*.<sup>a</sup> 2 O LORD! I have learned of Your renown; I am awed, O LORD, by Your deeds. Renew them in these years, Oh, make them known in these years! Though angry, may You remember compassion. 3 God is coming from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*.<sup>b</sup> His majesty covers the skies, His splendor fills the earth: 4<sup>c</sup>It is a brilliant light Which gives off rays on every side—And therein His glory is enveloped.<sup>c</sup> 5 Pestilence marches before Him, And plague comes forth at His heels. 6 When He stands, He makes the earth shake;<sup>d</sup> When He glances, He makes nations tremble. The age-old mountains are shattered, The primeval hills sink low. 7 His are the ancient routes: 7 As a scene of havoc I behold<sup>c</sup> The tents of Cushan; Shaken are the pavilions Of the land of Midian! 8 Are You wroth, O LORD, with Neharim? Is Your anger against Neharim, Your rage against Yam<sup>e</sup>—That You are driving Your steeds, Your victorious chariot? 9 All bared and ready is Your bow. 10 Sworn are the rods of the word.<sup>c</sup> *Selah*. You make the earth burst into streams, 10 The mountains rock at the sight of You, A torrent of rain comes down; Loud roars the deep, 11 The sky returns the echo.<sup>c</sup> 11 Sun [and] moon stand still on high As Your arrows fly in brightness, Your flashing spear in brilliance. 12 You tread the earth in rage, You trample nations in fury. 13 You have come forth to deliver Your people, To deliver Your anointed.<sup>f</sup> 14 You will smash the roof of the villain's house, Raze it from foundation to top. *Selah*. 14 You will crack [his] skull with Your<sup>h</sup> bludgeon; Blown away shall be his warriors, Whose delight is to crush me suddenly, To devour a poor man in an ambush.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Meaning uncertain; perhaps “psalms of supplication”; cf. Ps. 7.1.

<sup>b</sup> A musical direction of uncertain meaning.

<sup>c-c</sup> Meaning of Heb. uncertain

<sup>d</sup> Cf. Targum and Septuagint

<sup>e</sup> Neharim (lit. “Floods”) and Yam (lit. “Sea”) were marine monsters vanquished by the LORD in hoary antiquity. On Yam see Ps. 74.13; Job 7.12. A being called both Yam and Nahar figures in early Canaanite literature.

<sup>f</sup> I.e., the king of Judah.

<sup>g-g</sup> Emendation yields: You will strike the heads of men of evil,/Smash the pates of Your adversaries. *Selah*. /You will crack their skulls with Your bludgeon;/Dispersed, blown like chaff shall be they/Who lie in wait to swallow the innocent,/To devour the poor in an ambush.

<sup>h</sup> Heb. “His.”

קריאת התורה ליום שני של שבועות

## הפטרה ליום שני של שבועות

חבקוק ב:כ - ג:יט

כ ויהנה בהיכל קדשו תס מפניו כל־הארץ: א תפלה לחבקוק  
הנביא על שנינות: ב יהנה שמעתי שמעך גראתי יהנה פעלך  
בקרוב שנים חיהו בקרב שנים תודיע בקרוב רחם תזכור:  
ג אלוה מתימן יבוא וקדוש מהר־פארן סלה פסה שמים הודו  
ותהלתו מלאה הארץ: ד ונגה פאור תהיה קרנים מידו לו ושם  
חביון עזה: ה לפניו ילך דבר ויצא רשף לרגליו: ו עמד  
וימדד ארץ ראח ויחר גוים ויתפצצו הררי־עד שחו גבעות  
עולם הליכות עולם לו: ז תחת און ראיתי אהלי כושן ירגזון  
יריעות ארץ מרגן: ח הבנהרים חרה יהנה אם בנהרים אפה  
אם־בים עברתך פי תרכב על־סוסך מרכבתך ישועה:  
ט עריה תעור קשתך שבעות מטות אמר סלה נהרות  
תבקע־ארץ: י ראוך יחילו הרים זרם מים עבר נתן תהום  
קולו רום ידיהו נשא: יא שמש ירח עמד זבלה לאור חציך  
יתלכו לנגה ברק חניתך: יב בזעם תצעד־ארץ באף תדוש  
גוים: יג יצאת לישע עמך לישע את־משיחך מחצת האש  
מבית רשע ערות יסוד עד־צואר סלה: יד נקבת במטיו  
ראש פרזו יסערו להפיצני עליצתם כמו־לאכל עני במסתר:

## קריאת התורה ליום שני של שבועות

your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

<sup>16</sup>Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed, <sup>17</sup>but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you.

## Maftir for the Second Day of Shabuot

Numbers 28: 26-31

<sup>26</sup>On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the LORD, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>27</sup>You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs. <sup>28</sup>The meal offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in, three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, <sup>29</sup>and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. <sup>30</sup>And there shall be one goat for expiation in your behalf. <sup>31</sup>You shall present them—<sup>e</sup>see that they are<sup>e</sup> without blemish—with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its meal offering.

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<sup>e-e</sup> Lit. "they shall be to you."

קריאת התורה ליום שני של שבועות

תבואאתך ובכל מעשה ידיך ויהיית אף שמח: טו שלוש פעמים |  
בשנה יראה כל-זכורך את-פני | יהנה אלהיך במקום אשר  
יבחר בחד המצות ובחד השבעות ובחד הסכות ולא יראה  
את-פני יהנה ריכם: יז איש כמתנת ידו כברכת יהנה אלהיך  
אשר נתן-לך:

## מפטיר ליום שני של שבועות

במדבר כח: כו-לא

כו וביום הבפורים בהקריבכם מנחה חדשה ליהנה  
בשבעתיכם מקרא-קדש יהנה לכם כל-מלאכת עבודה לא  
תעשו: כז והקרבתם עולה לריח ניחח ליהנה פרים בני-בקר  
שנים איל אחד שבעה כבשים בני שנה: כח ומנחתם סלת  
בלילה בשמן שלשה עשרנים לפר האחד שני עשרנים לאיל  
האחד: כט עשרון עשרון לכבש האחד לשבעת הכבשים:  
ל שעיר עזים אחד לכפר עליכם: לא מלבד עלת התמיד  
ומנחתו תעשו תמימים יהיו-לכם ונסכיהם:

**16**Observe the month<sup>a</sup> of Abib and offer a passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, for it was in the month<sup>a</sup> of Abib, at night, that the LORD your God freed you from Egypt. <sup>2</sup>You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD will choose to establish His name. <sup>3</sup>You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter<sup>b</sup> you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress—for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly—so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live. <sup>4</sup>For seven days no leaven shall be found with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall be left until morning.

<sup>5</sup>You are not permitted to slaughter the passover sacrifice in any of the settlements that the LORD your God is giving you; <sup>6</sup>but at the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name, there alone shall you slaughter the passover sacrifice, in the evening, at sundown, the time of day when you departed from Egypt. <sup>7</sup>You shall cook and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose; and in the morning you may start back on your journey home. <sup>8</sup>After eating unleavened bread six days, you shall hold a solemn gathering<sup>c</sup> for the LORD your God on the seventh day: you shall do no work.

<sup>9</sup>You shall count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. <sup>10</sup>Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for the LORD your God, offering your freewill contribution according as the LORD your God has blessed you.

<sup>11</sup>You shall rejoice before the LORD your God with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite in your communities, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name.

<sup>12</sup>Bear in mind that you were slaves in Egypt, and take care to obey these laws.

<sup>13</sup>After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. <sup>14</sup>You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities.

<sup>15</sup>You shall hold a festival for the LORD your God seven days, in the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless all<sup>d</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Cf. *Exod. 13.4; 23.15; 34.18.*

<sup>b</sup> *Lit. "upon it."*

<sup>c</sup> *See note at Lev. 23.36.*

<sup>d</sup> *Lit. "you in all."*

**פרק טז** א שְׁמוֹר אֶת-חֹדֶשׁ הָאָזִיב וְעֲשִׂיתָ פֶסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
 כִּי בְחַדֵּשׁ הָאָזִיב הוֹצִיאָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה:  
 ב וּזְבַחַת פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר  
 יְהוָה לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שֵׁם: ג לֹא-תֹאכַל עָלָיו חֲמִץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים  
 תֹּאכַל-עָלָיו מִצּוֹת לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בַחֲפוּזִין יֵצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
 לִמְעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת-יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:  
 ד וְלֹא-יֵרָאֶה לָּךְ שָׂאֵר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלָּה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְלֹא-יֵלִין  
 מִן-הַבֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר תִּזְבַּח בְּעֶרֶב בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן לַבָּקָר: ה לֹא תֹכַל  
 לִזְבַּח אֶת-הַפֶּסַח בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר-יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לָּךְ:  
 ו כִּי אִם-אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שֵׁם  
 תִּזְבַּח אֶת-הַפֶּסַח בְּעֶרֶב כִּבּוֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מוֹעֵד צֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם:  
 ז וּבִשְׁלֵתָ וְאָכַלְתָּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ וּפְנִיתָ  
 בַּבָּקָר וְהִלַּכְתָּ לְאֵהָרָיִךְ: ח שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצּוֹת וּבַיּוֹם  
 הַשְּׁבִיעִי עֲצַרְתָּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה:  
 ט שִׁבְעָה שָׁבַעַת תִּסְפָּר-לָּךְ מִהַחֵל חֲרַמְשׁ בַּקָּמָה תִּחַל לְסַפֵּר  
 שִׁבְעָה שִׁבְעוֹת: י וְעֲשִׂיתָ חֹג שִׁבְעוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִסֵּת גְּדֻבַת  
 גִּדָּה אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: יא וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ לִפְנֵי  
 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְחֵלְוֵי אֲשֶׁר  
 בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֱלֻמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר  
 יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שֵׁם: יב וּזְכַרְתָּ כִּי-עַבְדָּ הָיִיתָ  
 בַּמִּצְרַיִם וְשִׁמַּרְתָּ וְעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה:  
 יג חֹג הַסֶּפֶת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּאֶסְפֵּךְ מִגֵּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ:  
 יד וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ בַחֲנֹךְ אֶתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְחֵלְוֵי וְהַגֵּר  
 וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֱלֻמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: טו שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּחַג לַיהוָה  
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל

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<sup>7</sup>If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. <sup>8</sup>Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup>Beware lest you harbor the base thought, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,” so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will incur guilt. <sup>10</sup>Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the LORD your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. <sup>11</sup>For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

<sup>12</sup>If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. <sup>13</sup>When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: <sup>14</sup>Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the LORD your God has blessed you. <sup>15</sup>Bear in mind that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I enjoin this commandment upon you today.

<sup>16</sup>But should he say to you, “I do not want to leave you”—for he loves you and your household and is happy with you—<sup>17</sup>you shall take an awl and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall become your slave in perpetuity. Do the same with your female slave. <sup>18</sup>When you do set him free, do not feel aggrieved; for in the six years he has given you double the service of a hired man. Moreover, the LORD your God will bless you in all you do.

## On Weekdays Begin Here

<sup>19</sup>You shall consecrate to the LORD your God all male firstlings that are born in your herd and in your flock: you must not work your firstling ox or shear your firstling sheep. <sup>20</sup>You and your household shall eat it annually before the LORD your God in the place that the LORD will choose. <sup>21</sup>But if it has a defect, lameness or blindness, any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. <sup>22</sup>Eat it in your settlements, the unclean among you no less than the clean, just like the gazelle and the deer. <sup>23</sup>Only you must not partake of its blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

ז כִּי־יִהְיֶה בָךְ אֲבִיוֹן מֵאַחַד אֲחֵיךָ בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצֶךָ  
 אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶה אֵלֶיךָ נִתָּן לָךְ לֹא תֹאמֵן אֶת־לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ  
 אֶת־יָדְךָ מֵאֲחֵיךָ הָאֲבִיוֹן: ח כִּי־פָתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֵעַבְטָה  
 תַּעֲבִיטְנוּ דֵי מַחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לוֹ: ט הִשְׁמַר לָךְ פֶּן־יִהְיֶה דָבָר  
 עִם־לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לֵאמֹר קָרְבָה שְׁנַת־הַשָּׁבַע שְׁנַת הַשְּׂמִטָּה  
 וְרַעַה עֵינֶךָ בְּאֲחֵיךָ הָאֲבִיוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ אֶל־יְהוָה  
 וְהָיָה בָךְ חַטָּא: י נִתּוֹן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא־יִרַע לִבְּךָ בַּתִּתֵּן לוֹ כִּי  
 בְּגִלְלוֹ תִדְבַר הַזֶּה וְיִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכָל  
 מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ: יא כִּי לֹא־יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקְרַב הָאָרֶץ עַל־פֶּן אֲנֹכִי  
 מִצְוֶיךָ לֵאמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת־יָדְךָ לְאֲחֵיךָ לְעֲנִיָּה וְלֹא־בִינָה  
 בְּאַרְצֶךָ: יב כִּי־יִמְכַר לָךְ אֲחֵיךָ הָעֵבְרִי אוֹ הָעֵבְרִיָּה וְעַבְדְּךָ שֵׁשׁ  
 שָׁנִים וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּשְׁלַחְנוּ חֲפָשִׁי מֵעֲמֹד: יג וְכִי־תִשְׁלַחְנוּ  
 חֲפָשִׁי מֵעֲמֹד לֹא תִשְׁלַחְנוּ רִיקָם: יד הַעֲנִיֵק תַּעֲנִיֵק לוֹ מִצְאֲנָה  
 וּמִגְרָנָה וּמִיִּקְבָה אֲשֶׁר בִּרְכָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִתֵּן־לוֹ: טו וְזָכַרְתָּ  
 כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְיִפְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל־פֶּן אֲנֹכִי  
 מִצְוֶיךָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם: טז וְהָיָה כִּי־יֹאמַר אֲלֶיךָ לֹא אֶצְאָ  
 מֵעֲמֹד כִּי אֲהַבְּךָ וְאֶת־בֵּיתְךָ כִּי־טוֹב לוֹ עֲמֹד: יז וְלִקְחַתָּ  
 אֶת־הַמְרֻצָּע וְנִתַּתָּה בְּאֲזָנוֹ וּבִדְלֵת וְהָיָה לָךְ עֶבֶד עוֹלָם וְאָף  
 לְאַמְתֶּךָ תַּעֲשֶׂה־כֵּן: יח לֹא־יִקְשֶׁה בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּשִׁלְחֶךָ אֶתֹו חֲפָשִׁי  
 מֵעֲמֹד כִּי מִשְׁנֵה שְׂכָר שְׂכִיר עַבְדְּךָ שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים וּבִרְכָה יְהוָה  
 אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה:

### בחול מתחילין פה

יט כָּל־הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יוֹלֵד בְּבִקְרָתְךָ וּבִצְאֲנָה תִזְכָּר תִּקְדִישׁ  
 לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲבֹד בְּבִכְר שׁוֹרְךָ וְלֹא תִגְזוּ בְכוֹר צֹאנֶךָ:  
 כ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תֹאכְלֶנּוּ שְׁנָה בְשָׁנָה בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר  
 יְהוָה אֶתָּה וּבֵיתְךָ: כא וְכִי־יִהְיֶה בּוֹ מוֹם פֶּסֶח אוֹ עוֹר כָּל מוֹם  
 רָע לֹא תִזְכְּנוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: כב בַּשְּׁעָרֶיךָ תֹאכְלֶנּוּ הַטָּמֵא  
 וְהַטְּהוֹר יִחַדּוּ כַּצִּבִי וְכַאֲלִל: כג רַק אֶת־דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכַל  
 עַל־הָאָרֶץ תִּשְׁפְּכֶנּוּ כַּמַּיִם:

## Reading of the Torah for the Second Day of Shabuot

Deuteronomy 14:22 – 16:17

### On Shabbat Begin Here

**14**<sup>22</sup>You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all the yield of your sowing that is brought from the field. <sup>23</sup>You shall consume the tithes of your new grain and wine and oil, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks, in the presence of the LORD your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God forever. <sup>24</sup>Should the distance be too great for you, should you be unable to transport them, because the place where the LORD your God has chosen to establish His name is far from you and because the LORD your God has blessed you,<sup>b</sup> <sup>25</sup>you may convert them into money. Wrap up the money and take it with you to the place that the LORD your God has chosen,<sup>26</sup> and spend the money on anything you want—cattle, sheep, wine, or other intoxicant, or anything you may desire. And you shall feast there, in the presence of the LORD your God, and rejoice with your household.

<sup>27</sup>But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion as you have. <sup>28</sup><sup>c</sup>Every third year<sup>c</sup> you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. <sup>29</sup>Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.

**15**<sup>a</sup>Every seventh year<sup>a</sup> you shall practice remission of debts. <sup>2</sup>This shall be the nature of the remission: every creditor shall remit the due that he claims from his fellow; he shall not dun his fellow or kinsman, for the remission proclaimed is of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>You may dun the foreigner; but you must remit whatever is due you from your kinsmen.

<sup>4</sup>There shall be no needy among you—since the LORD your God will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion—<sup>5</sup>if only you heed the LORD your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. <sup>6</sup>For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you: you will extend loans to many nations, but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you.

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<sup>b</sup> *I.e., with abundant crops.*

<sup>c-c</sup> *Lit. "After a period of three years" ; cf. Deut. 26.12.*

<sup>a-a</sup> *Cf. 14.28.*

# קריאת התורה ליום שני של שבועות

דברים יד:כב- טז:יז

## בשבת מתחילין פה

כב עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֶׂר אֶת כָּל־תְּבוּאֹת זְרַעֲךָ הַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה שְׁנֵה שְׁנָה:  
כג וְאָכַלְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר לְשָׂכְנֵן שְׁמוֹ  
שֵׁם מַעֲשֵׂר הַיִּגְגֹּה תִירֶשֶׁן וְיִצְהַרְךָ וּבְכֹרֶת בְּקִרְךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ לְמַעַן  
תִּלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים: כד וְכִי־יִרְבֶּה מִמֶּךָ  
הַדָּרָךְ כִּי לֹא תוּכַל שְׂאֲתוֹ כִּי־יִרְתַּק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שֵׁם כִּי יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:  
כה וּגְתַתָּה בַּכֶּסֶף וְצִרְתָּ הַכֶּסֶף בְּנִדְךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר  
יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ: כו וּגְתַתָּה הַכֶּסֶף בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּאֵוֶה  
נַפְשֶׁךָ בַּבֶּקֶר וּבַצֹּאן וּבַיִּזָּן וּבַשֶּׂכֶר וּבְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁאֲלֶךָ נַפְשֶׁךָ  
וְאָכַלְתָּ שֵׁם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ אִתָּה וּבֵיתֶךָ: כז וְהִלְוִי  
אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲזֹבֵנוּ כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֶלֶק וּגְחֻלָּה עִמָּךְ:

כח מִקְצֵהוּ שְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים תּוֹצִיא אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂר תְּבוּאֹתֶיךָ בַּשָּׁנָה  
הַהִוא וְהִנַּחְתָּ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: כט וּבֹא הִלְוִי כִּי אֵין־לוֹ חֶלֶק וּגְחֻלָּה  
עִמָּךְ וְהִגֵּר וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֵלְמָנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבְעוּ  
לְמַעַן יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה:

פרק טו א מִקֵּץ שִׁבְע־שָׁנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה שְׂמֻטָּה: ב וְזֶה דְבַר הַשְּׂמֻטָּה  
שְׂמוֹט כָּל־בְּעַל מִשְׁהָ יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂה בְרַעְהוּ לֹא־יִגַּשׁ אֶת־רַעְהוּ  
וְאֶת־אָחִיו כִּי־קָרָא שְׂמֻטָּה לְיְהוָה: ג אֶת־הַנֶּכְרִי תִגַּשׁ וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה  
לָךְ אֶת־אָחִיךָ תִשְׂמַט יָדֶךָ: ד אִפְסֵ כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה־בְּךָ אֲבִיוֹן  
כִּי־בָרֶךְ יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה בְּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתְּנֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נַתַּן לָךְ גְּחֻלָּה  
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: ה רַק אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁמֵר  
לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוֹת הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם:  
ו כִּי־יִתְּנֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּרַכְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר־לָךְ וְהִעֲבַטְתָּ בְּגוֹיִם רַבִּים  
וְאִתָּה לֹא תַעֲבֹט וּמְשַׁלְתָּ בְּגוֹיִם רַבִּים וּבָךְ לֹא יִמְשְׁלוּ:

## קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של שבועות

each other. <sup>17</sup>And when they moved, each could move in the direction of any of its four quarters; they did not veer when they moved. <sup>18</sup>Their rims were tall and frightening, for the rims of all four were covered all over with eyes. <sup>19</sup>And when the creatures moved forward, the wheels moved at their sides; and when the creatures were borne above the earth, the wheels were borne too. <sup>20</sup>Wherever the spirit impelled them to go, they went—wherever the spirit impelled them—and the wheels were borne alongside them; for the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels. <sup>21</sup>When those moved, these moved; and when those stood still, these stood still; and when those were borne above the earth, the wheels were borne alongside them—for the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels.

<sup>22</sup>Above the heads of the creatures was a form: an expanse, with an awe-inspiring gleam as of crystal, was spread out above their heads. <sup>23</sup>Under the expanse, each had one pair of wings extended toward those of the others; and each had another pair covering its body. <sup>24</sup>When they moved, I could hear the sound of their wings like the sound of mighty waters, like the sound of Shaddai,<sup>e</sup> a tumult like the din of an army. When they stood still, they would let their wings droop. <sup>25d</sup>From above the expanse over their heads came a sound.<sup>d</sup> When they stood still, they would let their wings droop.

<sup>26</sup>Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form. <sup>27</sup>From what appeared as his loins up, I saw a gleam as of amber—<sup>e</sup>what looked like a fire encased in a frame;<sup>c</sup> and from what appeared as his loins down, I saw what looked like fire. There was a radiance all about him. <sup>28</sup>Like the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. That was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the Lord. When I beheld it, I flung myself down on my face. And I heard the voice of someone speaking.

3<sup>12</sup>Then a spirit carried me away, and behind me I heard a great roaring sound: <sup>a</sup>“Blessed is the Presence of the Lord, in His place,”<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>e</sup> Traditionally “the Almighty”; see Gen. 17.1.

<sup>d-d</sup> Meaning of Heb. uncertain

<sup>e-e</sup> Meaning of Heb. uncertain

<sup>a-a</sup> Emendation yields “as the Presence of the LORD rose from where it stood.”

קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של שבועות

יז על־אַרְבַּעַת רַבְעִיָּהּ בְּלַכְתֶּם יִלְכוּ לֹא יִסְבוּ בְּלַכְתֶּן:  
יח וְגִבִּיָּהֶן וְגִבְהָה לָהֶם וַיִּרְאֶה לָהֶם וּגְבֹתָם מִלֵּאת עֵינַיִם סָבִיב  
לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן: יט וּבְלַכְתֶּן הַחַיִּוֹת יִלְכוּ הָאוֹפָנִים אֶצְלָם וּבַהֲנֻשָּׂא  
הַחַיִּוֹת מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ יִנְשְׂאוּ הָאוֹפָנִים: כ עַל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־שָׁם הַרִיחַ  
לְלַכְתֶּן יִלְכוּ שָׁמָּה הַרִיחַ לְלַכְתֶּן וְהָאוֹפָנִים יִנְשְׂאוּ לְעַמְתָּם כִּי  
רִיחַ הַחַיָּה בְּאוֹפָנִים: כא בְּלַכְתֶּם יִלְכוּ וּבְעַמְדָם יַעֲמִדוּ  
וּבַהֲנֻשָּׂאִים מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ יִנְשְׂאוּ הָאוֹפָנִים לְעַמְתָּם כִּי רִיחַ הַחַיָּה  
בְּאוֹפָנִים: כב וּדְמוּת עַל־רֵאשֵׁי הַחַיָּה רְקִיעַ כְּעֵין הַקֶּרֶחַ הַנּוֹרָא  
נְטוּי עַל־רֵאשֵׁיהֶם מִלְמַעְלָה: כג וְתַחַת הַרְקִיעַ כְּנֹפֵיהֶם יִשְׂרוּת  
אִשָּׁה אֶל־אַחֻזָּתָה לְאִישׁ שְׂתִים מְכֻסּוֹת לְהִנָּה וּלְאִישׁ שְׂתִים  
מְכֻסּוֹת לְהִנָּה אֵת גּוּיֹתֵיהֶם: כד וְאַשְׁמַע אֶת־קוֹל כְּנֹפֵיהֶם כְּקוֹל  
מַיִם רַבִּים כְּקוֹל־שִׁדִּי בְּלַכְתֶּם קוֹל הַמַּלְאָה כְּקוֹל מַחְנֶנֶה בְּעַמְדָם  
תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנֹפֵיהֶן: כה וַיְהִי־קוֹל מֵעַל לְרַקִּיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֵאשָׁם  
בְּעַמְדָם תִּרְפִּינָה כְּנֹפֵיהֶן: כו וּמִמֵּעַל לְרַקִּיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֵאשָׁם  
כְּמִרְאֵה אֶבֶן־סַפִּיר דְּמוּת פֶּסֶא וְעַל דְּמוּת הַפֶּסֶא דְּמוּת כְּמִרְאֵה  
אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְמַעְלָה: כז וְאַרְאֵ | כְּעֵין חֲשַׁמֶל כְּמִרְאֵה־אֵשׁ  
בֵּית־לָה סָבִיב מְמִרְאֵה מְתַנּוּי וּלְמַעְלָה וּמִמִּרְאֵה מְתַנּוּי וּלְמַטָּה  
רְאִיתִי כְּמִרְאֵה־אֵשׁ וְנִגְהָ לּוֹ סָבִיב: כח כְּמִרְאֵה הַקֶּשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר  
יְהִיָּה בְּעֵנָן בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּשֶׁם כֵּן מִרְאֵה הַנִּגְהָ סָבִיב הוּא מִרְאֵה דְּמוּת  
כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה וְאַרְאֵה וְאַפְּל עַל־פְּנֵי וְאַשְׁמַע קוֹל מְדַבֵּר:  
פֶּרֶק ג יב וַתִּשְׁאַנֵּי רִיחַ וְאַשְׁמַע אַחֲרָי קוֹל רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל כְּרוּד  
כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה מִמְּקוֹמוֹ:

## Haftarah for the First Day of Shabuot

Ezekiel 1:1-28; 3:12

**1**In the thirtieth year,<sup>a</sup> on the fifth day of the fourth month, when I was in the community of exiles by the Chebar Canal, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God.<sup>2</sup> On the fifth day of the month—it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—<sup>3</sup>the word of the LORD came to the priest Ezekiel son of Buzi, by the Chebar Canal, in the land of the Chaldeans. And the hand of the LORD came upon him there.<sup>4</sup> I looked, and lo, a stormy wind came sweeping out of the north—a huge cloud and flashing fire, surrounded by a radiance; and in the center of it, in the center of the fire, a gleam as of amber.<sup>5</sup> In the center of it were also the figures of four creatures. And this was their appearance:

They had the figures of human beings.<sup>6</sup> However, each had four faces, and each of them had four wings;<sup>7</sup> the legs of each were [fused into] a single rigid leg, and the feet of each were like a single calf's hoof;<sup>b</sup> and their sparkle<sup>c</sup> was like the luster of burnished bronze.<sup>8</sup> They had human hands below their wings. The four of them had their faces and their wings on their four sides.<sup>9</sup> Each one's wings touched those of the other. They did not turn when they moved; each could move in the direction of any of its faces.<sup>10</sup> Each of them had a human face [at the front]; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right; each of the four had the face of an ox on the left; and each of the four had the face of an eagle [at the back].<sup>11</sup> Such were their faces. As for their wings, they were separated: above, each had two touching those of the others, while the other two covered its body.<sup>12</sup> And each could move in the direction of any of its faces; they went wherever the spirit impelled them to go, without turning when they moved.

<sup>13</sup>Such then was the appearance of the creatures. With them was something that looked like burning coals of fire. This fire, suggestive of torches, kept moving about among the creatures; the fire had a radiance, and lightning issued from the fire.<sup>14d</sup> Dashing to and fro [among] the creatures was something that looked like flares.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>15</sup>As I gazed on the creatures, I saw one wheel on the ground next to each of the four-faced creatures.<sup>16</sup> As for the appearance and structure of the wheels, they gleamed like beryl. All four had the same form; the appearance and structure of each was as of two wheels cutting through

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<sup>a</sup> *We do not know the 30th of what.*

<sup>b</sup> *I.e., cleft in front.*

<sup>c</sup> *Or "plumage."*

<sup>d-d</sup> *Meaning of Heb. uncertain*

## הפטרה ליום ראשון של שבועות

יחזקאל א:א - כח: ל:יב

פרק א ויהי בשלשים שנה ברביעי בחמשה לחדש ואני בתוך הגולה על-נהר-כבר נפתחו השמים ואראה מראות אלהים: ב בחמשה לחדש היא השנה החמישית לגלות המלך יויקים: ג הנה הנה דבר-יהוה אלי-יחזקאל בן-בוזי הפתן בארץ פשדים על-נהר-כבר ותהי עליו שם יד-יהוה: ד וארא והנה רוח סערה באה מן-הצפון ענן גדול ואש מתלקחת ונגה לו סביב ומתוכה פעין החשמל מתוך האש: ה ומתוכה דמות ארבע חיות וזה מראיהן דמות אדם להנה: ו וארבעה פנים לאחת וארבע פנים לאחת להם: ז ורגליהם רגל ישרה וכף רגליהם ככף רגל עגל ונצצים פעין נחשת קלל: ח וידו (ויהי) אדם מתחת פניהם על ארבעת רבעיהם ופניהם וכנפיהם לארבעתם: ט חברת אשה אל-אחותה פניהם לא-יסבו בלכתן איש אל-עבר פניו ילכו: י ודמות פניהם פני אדם ופני ארנה אל-הימין לארבעתם ופני-שור מהשמאול לארבעתן ופני-נשר לארבעתן: יא ופניהם וכנפיהם פרוות מלמעלה לאיש שתיים חברות איש ושתיים מכסות את גויתיהנה: יב ואיש אל-עבר פניו ילכו אל אשר יהיה-שמה הרוח ללכת ילכו לא יסבו בלכתן: יג ודמות החיות מראיהם פגח-לי-אש בערות כמראה הלפדים היא מתהלכת בין החיות ונגה לאש ומן-האש יוצא ברק: יד והחיות רצוא ושוב כמראה הבזק: טו וארא החיות והנה אופן אחד בארץ אצל החיות לארבעת פניו: טז מראה האופנים ומעשיהם פעין תרשים ודמות אחד לארבעתן ומראיהם ומעשיהם כאשר יהיה האופן בתוך האופן:

## קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של שבועות

<sup>13</sup>You shall not murder

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>14</sup>You shall not covet your neighbor's house: you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female slave, or his ox or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.

<sup>15</sup>All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. <sup>16</sup>“You speak to us,” they said to Moses, “and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.” <sup>17</sup>Moses answered the people, “Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray.” <sup>18</sup>So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.

<sup>19</sup>The Lord said to Moses: Thus shall you say to the Israelites: You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens: <sup>20</sup>With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold. <sup>21</sup>Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being,<sup>c</sup> your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you. <sup>22</sup>And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them. <sup>23</sup>Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.

## Maftir for the First Day of Shabuot

Numbers 28: 26-31

<sup>26</sup>On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the LORD, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. <sup>27</sup>You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs. <sup>28</sup>The meal offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in, three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, <sup>29</sup>and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. <sup>30</sup>And there shall be one goat for expiation in your behalf. <sup>31</sup>You shall present them—<sup>e-e</sup>see that they are<sup>e</sup> without blemish—with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its meal offering.

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<sup>c</sup> Others “peace-offering.” Meaning of *shelamim* uncertain

<sup>e-e</sup> Lit. “they shall be to you.”

קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של שבועות

יג לא תרצח: לא תנאף: לא תגנב: לא תענה  
ברעה עד שקר: יד לא תחמד בית רעה  
אשת רעה ועבדו ונאמתו ושורו וחרמו וכל אשר לרעה:  
טו וכל העם ראים אתה הקולות ואת הלפידים ואת קול השפר  
ואת החר עשן וירא העם וינעו וינעמו וינעמו מרחק: טז ויאמרו  
אל משה דבר אתה עמנו ונשמעה ואל ידבר עמנו אלהים  
פון נמות: יז ויאמר משה אל העם אל תיראו כי לבעבור נסות  
אתכם בא האלהים ובעבור תהיה יראתו על פניכם לבלתי  
תחטאו: יח ויעמד העם מרחק ומשה נגש אל הערפל אשר שם  
האלהים:

יט ויאמר יהוה אל משה פה תאמר אל בני ישראל אתם  
ראיתם כי מן השמים דברתי עמכם: כ לא תעשון אתי אלהי  
כסף ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם: כא מזבח אדמה תעשה לי  
וזבחת עליו את עלותיך ואת שלמיך את צאנך ואת בקרך  
בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכתיך:  
כב ואם מזבח אבנים תעשה לי לא תבנה אתהן גזית כי חרבה  
הנפת עליה ותחללה: כג ולא תעלה במעלות על מזבחי אשר  
לא תגלה ערותך עליו:

## מפטיר ליום ראשון של שבועות

במדבר כח: כו-לא

כו וביום הבכורים בהקריבכם מנחה חדשה ליהוה  
בשבעתיכם מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבודה לא  
תעשו: כז והקרבתם עולה לריח ניחח ליהוה פרים בני בקר  
שנים איל אחד שבעה כבשים בני שנה: כח ומנחתם סלת  
בלולה בשמן שלשה עשרנים לפר האחד שני עשרנים לאיל  
האחד: כט עשרון עשרון לכבש האחד לשבעת הכבשים:  
ל שעיר עזים אחד לכפר עליכם: לא מלבד עלת התמיד  
ומנחתו תעשו תמימים יהיו לכם ונספיהם:

## קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של שבועות

was all in smoke, for the LORD had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain<sup>c</sup> trembled violently. <sup>19</sup>The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder. <sup>20</sup>The LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain, and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up. <sup>21</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Go down, warn the people not to break through to the LORD to gaze, lest many of them perish. <sup>22</sup>The priests also, who come near the LORD, must stay pure, lest the LORD break out against them.” <sup>23</sup>But Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and sanctify it.’” <sup>24</sup>So the LORD said to him, “Go down, and come back together with Aaron; but let not the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them.” <sup>25</sup>And Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

**20**God spoke all these words,<sup>a</sup> saying: <sup>2</sup>I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: <sup>3</sup>You shall have no other gods besides Me. <sup>4</sup>You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, <sup>6</sup>but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

<sup>7</sup>You shall not <sup>b</sup>swear falsely by<sup>b</sup> the name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not clear one who swears falsely by His name.

<sup>8</sup>Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

<sup>12</sup>Honor your father and your mother, that you may long endure on the land that the Lord your God is assigning to you.

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<sup>c</sup> Some Hebrew manuscripts and the Greek read “all the people”; cf. v. 16.

<sup>a</sup> Tradition varies as to the division of the Commandments in vv. 2–14, and as to the numbering of the verses from 13 on.

<sup>b-b</sup> Others “take in vain.”

עֲשֵׂן כְּלוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יִרְדַּע עָלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עֲשֵׂנוּ כְּעֲשֵׂן  
הַכִּבְשָׁן וַיַּחֲרֵד כָּל־הָהָר מְאֹד: יט וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וַחֲזַק  
מְאֹד מוֹשֶׁה יַדְבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְקוֹל: כ וַיִּרְדַּע יְהוָה עַל־הָר  
סִינַי אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה לְמוֹשֶׁה אֶל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל  
מוֹשֶׁה: כא וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מוֹשֶׁה רֵד הָעֵד בְּעַם פֶּן־יִהְיֶה־סוּ  
אֶל־יְהוָה לְרְאוֹת וְנִפְלַל מִמֶּנּוּ רַב: כב וְגַם הַכֹּהֲנִים הַנֹּגְשִׁים  
אֶל־יְהוָה יִתְקַדְּשׁוּ פֶן־יִפְרֹץ בָּהֶם יְהוָה: כג וַיֹּאמֶר מוֹשֶׁה  
אֶל־יְהוָה לֹא־יִכָּבַל הָעָם לַעֲלֹת אֶל־הָר סִינַי כִּי־אַתָּה הַעֲדַתָּהּ  
בְּנוֹ לֵאמֹר הַגִּבֵּל אֶת־הָהָר וְקִדְּשָׁתוּ: כד וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיו יְהוָה  
לֵךְ־יֵרֵד וְעֲלִיתָ אִתָּהּ וְאַחֲרָיו עִמָּךְ וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם אֶל־יְהוָה־סוּ  
לַעֲלֹת אֶל־יְהוָה פֶּן־יִפְרֹץ־בָּם: כה וַיִּרְדַּע מוֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֲלֵהֶם: פֶּרֶק כ א וַיַּדְבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה  
לְאֹמֶר: ב אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
מִבְּיַת עֲבָדִים לֹא יְהוָה לָךְ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פְּנֵי לֹא  
תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶּסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּמִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר  
בָּאֶרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם וּמִתַּחַת לָאֶרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם  
וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֶקֶד עֹון אָבֹת  
עַל־בְּנֵים עַל־שְׂלִישִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים לְשֹׂאֵי וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֵלֻפַּיִם  
לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מצוֹתַי: ז לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנְקָה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא:  
ח זְכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ  
כָּל־מְלָאכְתֶּךָ וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה  
כָּל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ־וּבִתֶּךָ עֲבָדֶיךָ וְאִמָּתֶךָ וּבַהֲמוֹתֶךָ וּגְרֶיךָ  
אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
עַל־כֵּן בִּרְכָה יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ: יב כִּבְד  
אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמֶּךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרְכּוֹן יְמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

## Reading of the Torah for the First Day of Shabuot

Exodus 19:1-20:23

**19**On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>2</sup>Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, <sup>3</sup>and Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: <sup>4</sup>‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. <sup>5</sup>Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, <sup>6</sup>but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

<sup>7</sup>Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8</sup>All the people answered as one, saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the people’s words to the Lord. <sup>9</sup>And the Lord said to Moses, “I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.” Then Moses reported the people’s words to the Lord, <sup>10</sup>and the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and warn them to stay pure<sup>a</sup> today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. <sup>11</sup>Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai. <sup>12</sup>You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, ‘Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death: <sup>13</sup>no hand shall touch him, but he shall be either stoned or shot; beast or man, he shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn <sup>b</sup>sounds a long blast,<sup>b</sup> they may go up on the mountain.”

<sup>14</sup>Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. <sup>15</sup>And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman.”

<sup>16</sup>On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn; and all the people who were in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup>Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup>Now Mount Sinai

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<sup>a</sup> Cf. v. 15

<sup>b-b</sup> Meaning of Heb. uncertain.

# קריאת התורה ליום ראשון של שבועות

שמות יט: א - כ: כג

א בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני: ב ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחנו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד ה'הר: ג ומשה עלה אל האלהים ויקרא אליו יהוה מן ההר לאמר פה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל: ד אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי: ה ועתה אם שמעו תשמעו בקלי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ: ו ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת קהנים וגוי קדוש אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל: ז ויבא משה ויקרא לזקני העם וישם לפניהם את כל הדברים האלה אשר צוהו יהוה: ח ויענו כל העם יחדו ויאמרו כל אשר דבר יהוה נעשה וישב משה את דברי העם אל יהוה: ט ויאמר יהוה אל משה הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם בך יאמינו לעולם ונגד משה את דברי העם אל יהוה: י ויאמר יהוה אל משה לך אל העם וקדשתם היום ומחר וכבסו שמלתם: יא והיו נכנים ליום השלישי כי א ביום השלישי ירד יהוה לעיני כל העם על הר סיני: יב והגבלת את העם סביב לאמר השמרו לכם עלות בהר ונגע בקצהו כל הנגע בהר מות יומת: יג לא תגע בו יד כייסקול יסקל או ירה יירה אם בהמה אם איש לא יחיה במשך היבל המה יעלו בהר: יד וירד משה מן ההר אל העם ויקדש את העם וכבסו שמלתם: טו ויאמר אל העם היו נכנים לשלישת ימים אל תגשו אל אשה: טז ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקר ויהי קלת וברקים וענן כבד על ההר וקל שפר חזק מאד ויחרד כל העם אשר במחנה: יז ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלהים מן המחנה ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר: יח והר סיני

in Ephrathah<sup>e</sup> and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! <sup>12</sup>And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

<sup>13</sup>So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The LORD let her conceive, and she bore a son. <sup>14</sup>And the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! <sup>15</sup>He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons.”

<sup>16</sup>Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, <sup>17</sup>and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A son is born to Naomi!” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.

<sup>18</sup>This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hezron, <sup>19</sup>Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Amminadab, <sup>20</sup>Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon,<sup>f</sup> <sup>21</sup>Salmon begot Boaz, Boaz begot Obed, <sup>22</sup>Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

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<sup>e</sup> *Ephrathah is another name applied to Bethlehem; cf. 1.2; Gen. 35.16, 19; 48.7; Mic. 5.1.*

<sup>f</sup> *Heb. “Salmah.”*

בְּאֶפְרָתָה וּקְרָא שֵׁם בְּבֵית לָחֶם: יב וַיְהִי בֵּיתָךְ כְּבֵית פָּרֶץ  
 אֲשֶׁר־יִלְדָה תִּמְרָה לַיהוּדָה מִן־הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לְךָ  
 מִן־הַנְּעֻמָּה הַזֹּאת: יג וַיִּקַּח בְּעֵז אֶת־רוּת וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֵא  
 אֵלֶיהָ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָהּ הַרְבֵּי וַתֵּלֶד בָּנִים: יד וַתֹּאמְרָנָה הַנָּשִׁים  
 אֶל־נְעֻמֵי בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא  
 שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: טו וַתֵּיךְ לָךְ לְמַשִּׁיב נְפֶשׁ וּלְכֹלֵל אֶת־שִׁבְתְּךָ  
 כִּי כָלְתָךְ אֲשֶׁר־אֶהְבֶּתְךָ יִלְדְתוּ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשְׁבַּעַה  
 בָּנִים: טז וַתִּקַּח נְעֻמֵי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשְׁתָּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וַתְּהִי־לוֹ  
 לְאִמָּנָת: יז וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ לוֹ הַשְּׂכֵנֹת שֵׁם לְאִמֹר יֶלֶד־בֶּן לְנְעֻמֵי  
 וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אָבִי־יִשִׁי אָבִי דָּוִד:

יח וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פָּרֶץ בְּרֶץ הוֹלִיד אֶת־חַצְרוֹן: יט וַחַצְרוֹן  
 הוֹלִיד אֶת־רֶם וְרֶם הוֹלִיד אֶת־עַמְיָנָדָב: כ וְעַמְיָנָדָב הוֹלִיד  
 אֶת־נַחֲשֹׁן וְנַחֲשֹׁן הוֹלִיד אֶת־שֶׁלְמָה: כא וְשֶׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד  
 אֶת־בְּעֹז וּבְעֹז הוֹלִיד אֶת־עוֹבֵד: כב וְעוֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשִׁי וַיִּשִׁי  
 הוֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד:

you learn how the matter turns out. For the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.”

**4**Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now the redeemer whom Boaz had mentioned passed by. He called, “Come over and sit down here, So-and-so!” And he came over and sat down. <sup>2</sup>Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, “Be seated here”; and they sat down.

<sup>3</sup>He said to the redeemer, “Naomi, now returned from the country of Moab, must sell the piece of land which belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: Acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you<sup>a</sup> will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you.” “I am willing to redeem it,” he replied. <sup>5</sup>Boaz continued, “When you acquire the property from Naomi<sup>b</sup> and from Ruth the Moabite, you must also acquire the wife of the deceased,<sup>b</sup> so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate.” <sup>6</sup>The redeemer replied, “Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own estate.<sup>c</sup> You take over my right of redemption, for I am unable to exercise it.”

<sup>7</sup>Now this was formerly done in Israel in cases of redemption or exchange: to validate any transaction, one man would take off his sandal and hand it to the other. Such was the practice<sup>d</sup> in Israel. <sup>8</sup>So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Acquire for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. <sup>9</sup>And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, “You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup>I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses today.”

<sup>11</sup>All the people at the gate and the elders answered, “We are. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper

<sup>a</sup> *So many Heb. mss., Septuagint and Targum most mss. read “he.”*

<sup>b-b</sup> *Emendation yields “you must also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the deceased”; cf. v. 10.*

<sup>c</sup> *I.e., by expending capital for property which will go to the son legally regarded as Mahlon’s; see Deut. 25.5–6.*

<sup>d</sup> *Understanding Heb. te’uda in the sense of the Arabic ‘ādah and Syriac ‘yādā. Cf. Ibn Ezra.*

אֲשֶׁר תִּדְעִין אִיךָ יִפְּל דְבַר כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ כִּי־אִם־כָּלָה  
הַדְּבַר הַיּוֹם:

## רות פרק ד

א וּבָעִז עָלָה הַשַּׁעַר וַיָּשֶׁב שָׁם וַהֲנִיחַ הַגָּאֵל עִבֵּר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־בְּעִז  
וַיֹּאמֶר סוּרָה שְׂבֵה־פָּה פְּלֹנִי אֶל־מְנִי וַיִּסַּר וַיָּשֶׁב: ב וַיִּקָּח עֲשָׂרָה  
אֲנָשִׁים מִזִּקְנֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂבִי־פָּה וַיָּשֶׁבוּ: ג וַיֹּאמֶר לַגָּאֵל  
חֲלַקְתָּ הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר לְאַחֵינוּ לְאֵלֵימְלֶךְ מִכֶּרֶה נַעֲמִי הַשְּׂבֵה  
מִשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב: ד וְאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִלָּה אֲזַנְךָ לֵאמֹר קָנָה נֶגְד  
הַיְשָׁבִים וְנֶגְד זִקְנֵי עַמִּי אִם־תִּגָּאֵל גָּאֵל וְאִם־לֹא יִגָּאֵל תִּנְיָדָה לִּי  
וְאָדַע (וְאָדַעַת) כִּי אֵין זִוְלָתְךָ לַגָּאֹל וְאֲנֹכִי אַחֲרֶיךָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי  
אֲנָאֵל: ה וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעִז בְּיוֹם־קְנוֹתְךָ הַשָּׂדֶה מִיָּד נַעֲמִי וּמֵאֵת רֹת  
הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת־הַמֵּת קִנִּיתִי (קָנִיתִי) לְהַקִּים שֵׁם־הַמֵּת  
עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ: ו וַיֹּאמֶר הַגָּאֵל לֹא אוֹכַל לַגָּאֹל־ (לַגָּאֵל־) לִי  
פֶן־אֲשַׁחֲתִי אֶת־נַחֲלָתִי גָאֵל־לְךָ אֶתְּהָ אֶת־גָּאֵלְתִּי כִּי לֹא־אוֹכַל  
לַגָּאֵל: ז וְזֹאת לְפָנִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־הַגָּאֵלָה וְעַל־הַתְּמוּרָה לְקַיֵּם  
כָּל־דְּבַר שְׁלֹף אִישׁ גַּעֲלוּ וְנָתַן לְרַעְהוּ וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:  
ח וַיֹּאמֶר הַגָּאֵל לְבָעִז קָנָה־לְךָ וַיִּשְׁלַף גַּעֲלוּ: ט וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעִז  
לְזִקְנִים וְכָל־הָעָם עֲדִים אִתָּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קִנִּיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר  
לְאֵלֵימְלֶךְ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכַלְיוֹן וּמַחֲלוֹן מִיָּד נַעֲמִי:  
י וְגַם אֶת־רֹת הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת מַחֲלוֹן קִנִּיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהַקִּים  
שֵׁם־הַמֵּת עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת מֵעַם אָחִיו וּמִשַּׁעַר  
מִקוֹמוֹ עֲדִים אִתָּם הַיּוֹם: יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּשַּׁעַר  
וַהֲזַקְנִים עֲדִים יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה תְּבָאָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ  
כְּרַחֵל וְכַלְאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׂתִיהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַעֲשֵׂה־חֵיל

3 Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. 2 Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. 3 So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do.” 5 She replied, “I will do everything you tell me.”

6 She went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7 Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back—there was a woman lying at his feet!

9 “Who are you?” he asked. And she replied, “I am your handmaid Ruth. 10 Spread your robe over your handmaid,<sup>a</sup> for you are a redeeming kinsman.”

10 He exclaimed, “Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich.<sup>b</sup> 11 And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the <sup>c</sup>elders of my town<sup>c</sup> know what a fine woman you are. 12 But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I. 13 Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as the Lord lives! Lie down until morning.”

14 So she lay at his feet until dawn. She rose before one person could distinguish another, for he thought, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” 15 And he said, “Hold out the shawl you are wearing.” She held it while he measured out six measures of barley, and he put it on her back.

When she<sup>d</sup> got back to the town, 16 she came to her mother-in-law, who asked, “How is it with you, daughter?” She told her all that the man had done for her; 17 and she added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying to me, ‘Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” 18 And Naomi said, “Stay here, daughter, till

<sup>a-a</sup> A formal act of espousal; cf. Ezek. 16.8.

<sup>b</sup> I.e., she sought out a kinsman of her dead husband; see note at 2.20 above. Her first act of loyalty had been to return with Naomi.

<sup>c-c</sup> Lit. “gate of my people.”

<sup>d</sup> So in many Heb. mss.; most mss. read “he.”

## רות פרק ג

א ותאמר לה נעמי חמותה בתי הלא אבקש־לך מנוח אשר  
 ייטב־לך: ב ועתה הלא בעז מדעתנו אשר היית את־נערותי  
 והנה הוא זרה את־גֵרְוֹן השְׁעָרִים הלְיִלָה: ג ורתצתָ וסכתָ  
 ושמתָ שמתך (שמלת־ך) על־ך וירדתי (ויבדתָ) הגֵרְוֹן  
 אל־תודעי לאיש עד פלתו לאכל ולשתות: ד ויהי בשכבו  
 וידעתָ את־המקום אשר ישכב־שם ובאת ונלית מרגלותיו  
 ושכבתי (ושכבתָ) והוא יניד לך את אשר תעשין: ה ותאמר  
 אליה כל אשר־תאמרי (אלי) אעשה: ו ותרד הגֵרְוֹן ותעש ככל  
 אשר־צותה חמותה: ז ויאכל בעז וישת וייטב לבו ויבא לשכב  
 בקצה הערמה ותבא בלט ותגל מרגלותיו ותשכב: ח ויהי  
 בחצי הלילה ויחרד האיש ויגלפת והנה אשה שכבת מרגלותיו:  
 ט ויאמר מי־אתָ ותאמר אנכי רות אמתך ופרשתָ כנפך  
 על־אמתך כי גאל אותה: י ויאמר ברוכה אתָ ליהוה בתי  
 היטבת חסדך האחרון מן־הראשון לבלתי־לכת אחרי  
 הבחורים אס־דל ואם־עשיר: יא ועתה בתי אל־תיראי כל  
 אשר־תאמרי אעשה־לך כי יודע כל־שער עמי כי אשת חיל  
 אתָ: יב ועתה כי אמנם כי אם ( ) גאל אנכי וגם יש גאל קרוב  
 ממני: יג ליניו הלילה והנה בבקר אס־יגאלך טוב יגאל  
 ואם־לא יחפץ לגאלך ויגאלתיך אנכי חיי־הנה שכבי  
 עד־הבקר: יד ותשכב מרגלותו עד־הבקר ותקם בטרם  
 (בטרם) יכיר איש את־רעהו ויאמר אל־יודע כי־באה האשה  
 הגֵרְוֹן: טו ויאמר הבי המטפחת אשר־עליך ואחזי־בה ותאחזי  
 בה וימד שש־שערים וישת עליה ויבא העיר: טז ותבוא  
 אל־חמותה ותאמר מי־אתָ בתי ותגד־לה את כל־אשר  
 עשה־לה האיש: יז ותאמר שש־השערים האלה נתן לי כי אמר  
 (אלי) אל־תבואי ריקם אל־חמותך: יח ותאמר שבי בתי עד

<sup>10</sup>She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?”

<sup>11</sup>Boaz said in reply, “I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!”

<sup>13</sup>She answered, “You are most kind, my lord, to comfort me and to speak gently to your maidservant—though I am not so much as one of your maidservants.”

<sup>14</sup>At mealtime, Boaz said to her, “Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar.” So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over.

<sup>15</sup>When she got up again to glean, Boaz gave orders to his workers, “You are not only to let her glean among the sheaves, without interference, <sup>16</sup>but you must also pull some [stalks] out of the heaps and leave them for her to glean, and not scold her.”

<sup>17</sup>She gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned—it was about an *ephah* of barley—<sup>18</sup>and carried it back with her to the town. When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and when she also took out and gave her what she had left over after eating her fill, <sup>19</sup>her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be he who took such generous notice of you!” So she told her mother-in-law whom she had worked with, saying, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.”

<sup>20</sup>Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead! For,” Naomi explained to her daughter-in-law, “the man is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen.”<sup>c</sup> <sup>21</sup>Ruth the Moabite said, “He even told me, ‘stay close by my workers until all my harvest is finished.’” <sup>22</sup>And Naomi answered her daughter-in-law Ruth, “It is best, daughter, that you go out with his girls, and not be annoyed in some other field.” <sup>23</sup>So she stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, and gleaned until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. Then she stayed at home with her mother-in-law.

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<sup>c</sup> Cf. Lev. 25.25 and note and Deut. 25.5–6. The fact that Boaz was a kinsman of Ruth’s dead husband opened up the possibility of providing an heir for the latter.

י ותפל על־פנייה ותשתחו ארצה ותאמר אליו מדוע מצאתי חן  
 בעיניך להכירני ואנכי נכריה: יא וינען בעז ויאמר ליה הגד הגד  
 לי כל אשר עשית את־חמותך אחרי מות אישך ותעזבי אביך  
 ואמך וארץ מולדתך ותלכי אל־עם אשר לא־ידעת תמול  
 שלשום: יב ישלם יהוה פעלך ותהי משכרתך שלמה מעם  
 יהוה אלהי ישראל אשר־באת לחסות תחת־כנפיו: יג ותאמר  
 אמצא־חן בעיניך אדני כי נחמתני וכי דברת על־לב שפחתך  
 ואנכי לא אהיה כאחת שפחתך: יד ויאמר ליה בעז לעת האכל  
 גשי הלם ואכלת מן־הלחם וטבלת פתך בחמץ ותשב מצד  
 הקצרים ויצבט־לך קלי ותאכל ותשבע ותתר: טו ותקם ללקט  
 ויצו בעז את־נעריו לאמר גם בין העמרים תלקט ולא  
 תכלימוה: טז וגם של־תשלו ליה מן־הצבתיים ועזבתם ולקטה  
 ולא תנערו־בה: יז ותלקט בשדה עד־הערב ותחבט את  
 אשר־לקטה ויהי כאיפה שערים: יח ותשאל ותבוא העיר ותרא  
 חמותה את אשר־לקטה ותוצא ותתן־לָהּ את אשר־הותרה  
 משבעה: יט ותאמר ליה חמותה איפה לקטת היום ואנה עשית  
 יהי מפירך ברוך ותגד לחמותה את אשר־עשתה עמו ותאמר  
 שם האיש אשר עשיתי עמו היום בעז: כ ותאמר נעמי לכלתה  
 ברוך הוא ליהוה אשר לא־עזב חסדו את־החיים ואת־המתים  
 ותאמר ליה נעמי קרוב לנו האיש מנאלנו הוא: כא ותאמר רות  
 המואביה גם כִּי־אמר אלי עם־הנערים אשר־לי תדבקין עד  
 אם־כלו את כל־הקציר אשר־לי: כב ותאמר נעמי אל־רות  
 כלתה טוב בתי כי תצאי עם־נערותיו ולא יפגעו־בך בשדה  
 אחר: כג ותדבק בנערות בעז ללקט עד־כלות קציר־השערים  
 וקציר החטים ותשב את־חמותה:

<sup>b</sup>Thus and more may the LORD do to me<sup>b</sup> if anything but death parts me from you.”<sup>18</sup> When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her;<sup>19</sup> and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, “Can this be Naomi?”<sup>20</sup> “Do not call me Naomi,”<sup>c</sup> she replied. “Call me Mara,<sup>d</sup> for Shaddai<sup>e</sup> has made my lot very bitter. <sup>21</sup>I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi, when the LORD has <sup>f</sup>dealt harshly with<sup>f</sup> me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me!”

<sup>22</sup>Thus Naomi returned from the country of Moab; she returned with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

**2** Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband’s side, a man of substance, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness.” “Yes, daughter, go,” she replied;<sup>3</sup> and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers; and, as luck would have it, it was the piece of land belonging to Boaz, who was of Elimelech’s family.

<sup>4</sup>Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they responded, “The Lord bless you!”<sup>5</sup> Boaz said to the servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose girl is that?”<sup>6</sup> The servant in charge of the reapers replied, “She is a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. <sup>7</sup>She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.’ She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning. <sup>a</sup>She has rested but little in the hut.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Boaz said to Ruth, <sup>b</sup>“Listen to me, daughter.<sup>b</sup> Don’t go to glean in another field. Don’t go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. <sup>9</sup>Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn.”

<sup>b-b</sup> A formula of imprecation.

<sup>c</sup> I.e., “Pleasantness.”

<sup>d</sup> I.e., “Bitterness.”

<sup>e</sup> Usually rendered “the Almighty.”

<sup>f-f</sup> Others “testified against.”

<sup>a-a</sup> Meaning of Heb. uncertain

<sup>b-b</sup> Lit. “Have you not heard, daughter?”

כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יוֹסִיף כִּי הַפְּלוֹת יַפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:  
 יח וּתְרֵא כִּי־מִתְאַמְצֶת הִיא לְלֶכֶת אִתָּה וּתְחַדְלִי לְדַבֵּר אֵלַיָּה:  
 יט וּתְלַכְנָה שְׂתִיָּהֶם עַד־בּוֹאֲנָה בֵּית לֶחֶם וַיְהִי כְּבוֹאֲנָה בֵּית  
 לֶחֶם וּתְהִים כָּל־הָעִיר עֲלֵיהֶן וּתְאמְרָנָה הַזֹּאת נַעֲמִי: כ וּתְאֹמֶר  
 אֵלַיֶּהן אֶל־תִּקְרְאוּנִי לִי נַעֲמִי קְרְאוּ לִי מָרָא כִּי־הֵמָּר שָׂדֵי לִי  
 מָאֵד: כא אֲנִי מְלֹאָה הִלְכְּתִי וּרְיָקָם הִשִּׁיבֵנִי יְהוָה לָמָּה תִּקְרְאוּנִי  
 לִי נַעֲמִי וַיְהוּהָ עָנָה בִּי וְשָׂדֵי תִרְעֶ לִּי: כב וּתְשֻׁב נַעֲמִי וְרוּת  
 הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה כִלְתָהּ עִמָּה הַשָּׂבָה מִשָּׂדֵי מוֹאָב וְהָמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לֶחֶם  
 בְּתַחֲלַת קֶצֶר שְׁעָרִים:

## רות פרק ב

א וּלְנַעֲמִי מִידַע (מוֹדַע) לְאִשָּׁה אִישׁ גְּבוּר חָיִל מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת  
 אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשָׁמוֹ בְּעוֹז: ב וּתְאֹמֶר רֹוּת הַמּוֹאָבִיָּה אֶל־נַעֲמִי  
 אֶלְכֶּה־נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֶלְקַטְתִּי בַשִּׁבְלִים אַחֲרַי אֲשֶׁר אֲמַצֵּא־חֵן  
 בְּעֵינָיו וּתְאֹמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בְּתִי: ג וּתְלַךְ וּתְבוֹא וּתְלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה  
 אַחֲרַי הַקְּצָרִים וַיִּגַּר מִקְרָת חִלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבָעוֹ אֲשֶׁר  
 מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ: ד וְהִנֵּה־בָּעוֹז בָּא מִבֵּית לֶחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר  
 לְקוֹצְרִים יְהוּהָ עִמָּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה: ה וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעוֹז  
 לְנַעֲרוֹ הַנֹּצֵב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים לְמִי הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת: ו וַיַּעַן  
 הַנַּעַר הַנֹּצֵב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיֹּאמֶר נַעֲרָה מוֹאָבִיָּה הִיא הַשָּׂבָה  
 עִם־נַעֲמִי מִשָּׂדֵי מוֹאָב: ז וּתְאֹמֶר אֶלְקַטְתִּי־נָּא וְאֶסְפְּתִי בְּעֵמְרִים  
 אַחֲרַי הַקּוֹצְרִים וּתְבוֹא וּתַעֲמֹד מֵאֹז הַבִּקְרָ וְעַד־עֵתָה זֶה  
 שְׁבֹתָהּ תִּבֹּת מְעוֹט: ח וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעוֹז אֶל־רוּת הַלֹּא שָׁמַעַתְּ  
 בְּתִי אֶל־תְּלַכִּי לְלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרַי וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוּרִי מִזֶּה  
 וְכֹה תְדַבְּקִין עִם־נַעֲרָתִי: ט עֵינֶיךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־יִקְצְרוּן  
 וְהִלְכְּתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן הַלֹּא צְוִיתִי אֶת־הַנַּעֲרִים לְבִלְתִּי נִנְעֶךָ  
 וְצִמַּת וְהִלְכְּתְּ אֶל־הַכְּלָיִם וְשִׁתִּית מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָבוּן הַנַּעֲרִים:

## The Book of Ruth

**1** In the days when the chieftains<sup>a</sup> ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. <sup>2</sup>The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there.

<sup>3</sup>Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup>Then those two—Mahlon and Chilion—also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband.

<sup>6</sup>She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that the LORD had taken note of His people and given them food. <sup>7</sup>Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

<sup>8</sup>But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Turn back, each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! <sup>9</sup>May the LORD grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!" And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping <sup>10</sup>and said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

<sup>11</sup>But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? <sup>12</sup>Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, <sup>13</sup>should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the LORD has struck out against me."

<sup>14</sup>They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup>So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup>But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.

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<sup>a</sup> *I.e., the leaders who arose in the period before the monarchy; others "judges."*

## רות פרק א

א ויהי בימי שפט השפטים ויהי רעב בארץ וילך איש מבית  
 לחם יהודה לגור בשדני מואב הוא ואשתו ושני בניו: ב ושם  
 האיש אלימלך ושם אשתו נעמי ושם שני בניו: ג מחלון וכליון  
 אפרתים מבית לחם יהודה ויבאו שדני מואב ויהיו שם: ד וימת  
 אלימלך איש נעמי ותשאר היא ושני בניה: ה וישאו להם נשים  
 מאביזות שם האחת ערפה ושם השנית רות וישבו שם כעשר  
 שנים: ו וימתו גם שניהם מחלון וכליון ותשאר האשה משני  
 ילדיה ומאשה: ז ותקם היא וכלתיה ותשב משדני מואב כי  
 שמעה בשדה מואב כיפקד יהוה את עמו לתת להם לחם:  
 ח ותצא מן המקום אשר היתה שמה ושתי כלותיה עמה  
 ותלכנה בדרך לשוב אל ארץ יהודה: ט ותאמר נעמי לשתי  
 כלתיה לכנה שכנה אשה לבית אמה יעשה (יעש) יהוה עמכם  
 חסד כאשר עשיתם עם המתים ועמדי: י ותן יהוה לכם  
 ומצאן מנוחה אשה בית אישה ותשק להן ותשאנה קולן  
 ותבכינה: יא ותאמרנה לה כי אתה נשוב לעמד: יב ותאמר  
 נעמי שכנה בנתי למה תלכנה עמי העוד לי בנים במעי והיו  
 לכם לאנשים: יג שכנה בנתי לכן כי זקנתי מהיות לאיש כי  
 אמרתי יש לי תקנה גם הייתי הלילה לאיש וגם ילדתי בנים:  
 יד הלהן תשכרנה עד אשר יגדלו הלהן תענגנה לבלתי היות  
 לאיש אל בנתי כי מר לי מאד מכם כי יצאה בי ידיהוה:  
 יו ותשנה קולן ותבכינה עוד ותשק ערפה לחמותה ורות  
 דבקה בה: יז ותאמר הנה שבה יבמתך אל עמה ואל אלתיה  
 שובי אחרי יבמתך: יח ותאמר רות אל תפנעי בי לעזבך  
 לשוב מאחריך כי אל אשר תלכי אלך ובאשר תליני אלין  
 עמד עמי ואל תיך אלי: יט באשר תמותי אמות ושם אקבר

## מזמור לשבועות

the princes of Zebulun and Naphtali. <sup>29</sup>Your God has ordained strength for you, the strength, O God, which You displayed for us <sup>30</sup>from Your temple above Jerusalem. The kings bring You tribute. <sup>31</sup>Blast the beast of the marsh, the herd of bulls among the peoples, the calves, till they come cringing with pieces of silver. Scatter the peoples who delight in wars! <sup>32</sup>Tribute-bearers shall come from Egypt; Cush shall hasten its gifts to God. <sup>33</sup>O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; chant hymns to the Lord, *Selah*. <sup>34</sup>to Him who rides the ancient highest heavens, who thunders forth with His mighty voice. <sup>35</sup>Ascribe might to God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose might is in the skies. <sup>36</sup>You are awesome, O God, in Your holy places; it is the God of Israel who gives might and power to the people. Blessed is God.

מזמור לשבועות

שְׁרֵי זְבֻלוֹן שְׁרֵי נַפְתָּלִי: כֹּס צְנֹה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲיֹה עוֹזֵה אֱלֹהִים זֹו  
פָּעֵלֶת לָנוּ: לֹ מְהִיכֶלֶךָ עַל-יְרוּשָׁלַם לְךָ יוֹבִילוֹ מְלָכִים שִׁי:  
לֹ גָעַר חֲנִית קִנְהָ עֲדַת אֲבִירִים | בְּעֹגְלֵי עַמִּים מִתְרַבֵּס  
בְּרִצֵּי-כֶסֶף בְּזַר עַמִּים קְרָבוֹת יַחֲפָצוּ: לֹב יֵאָתִיו חֲשֻׁמְנִים מִנִּי  
מִצְרָיִם כּוֹשׁ תִּרְיֹץ יָדָיו לְאֱלֹהִים: לֹג מִמְלְכוֹת הָאָרֶץ שִׁירוּ  
לְאֱלֹהִים זְמִירוֹ אֲדָנִי סִלְהָ: לֹד לְרֹכֵב בְּשָׁמַי שָׁמַי-קָדָם הֵן יִתֵּן  
בְּקוֹלוֹ קוֹל עֹז: לֹה תִנּוּ עֹז לְאֱלֹהִים עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל גְּאֻתוֹ וְעֹזוֹ  
בְּשִׁחָקִים: לֹו נִזְרָא אֱלֹהִים מִמְקַדְשִׁיךָ אֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא גִתָן | עֹז  
וְתַעֲצֹמוֹת לְעַם בְּרוּךְ אֱלֹהִים:

68<sup>a</sup>For the leader. Of David. A psalm. A song. <sup>2</sup>God will arise, His enemies shall be scattered, His foes shall flee before Him. <sup>3</sup>Disperse them as smoke is dispersed; as wax melts at fire, so the wicked shall perish before God. <sup>4</sup>But the righteous shall rejoice; they shall exult in the presence of God; they shall be exceedingly joyful. <sup>5</sup>Sing to God, chant hymns to His name; extol Him who rides the clouds; the LORD is His name. Exult in His presence—<sup>6</sup>the father of orphans, the champion of widows, God, in His holy habitation. <sup>7</sup>God restores the lonely to their homes, sets free the imprisoned, safe and sound, while the rebellious must live in a parched land. <sup>8</sup>O God, when You went at the head of Your army, when You marched through the desert, **Selah.** <sup>9</sup>the earth trembled, the sky rained because of God, yon Sinai, because of God, the God of Israel. <sup>10</sup>You released a bountiful rain, O God; when Your own land languished, You sustained it. <sup>11</sup>Your tribe dwells there; O God, in Your goodness You provide for the needy. <sup>12</sup>The LORD gives a command; the women who bring the news are a great host: <sup>13</sup>“The kings and their armies are in headlong flight; housewives are sharing in the spoils; <sup>14</sup>even for those of you who lie among the sheepfolds there are wings of a dove sheathed in silver, its pinions in fine gold.” <sup>15</sup>When Shaddai scattered the kings, it seemed like a snowstorm in Zalmon. <sup>16</sup>O majestic mountain, Mount Bashan; O jagged mountain, Mount Bashan; <sup>17</sup>why so hostile, O jagged mountains, toward the mountain God desired as His dwelling? The LORD shall abide there forever. <sup>18</sup>God’s chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai in holiness. <sup>19</sup>You went up to the heights, having taken captives, having received tribute of men, even of those who rebel against the LORD God’s abiding there. <sup>20</sup>Blessed is the LORD. Day by day He supports us, God, our deliverance. **Selah.** <sup>21</sup>God is for us a God of deliverance; GOD the Lord provides an escape from death. <sup>22</sup>God will smash the heads of His enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks about in his guilt. <sup>23</sup>The LORD said, “I will retrieve from Bashan, I will retrieve from the depths of the sea; <sup>24</sup>that your feet may wade through blood; that the tongue of your dogs may have its portion of your enemies.” <sup>25</sup>Men see Your processions, O God, the processions of my God, my king, into the sanctuary. <sup>26</sup>First come singers, then musicians, amidst maidens playing timbrels. <sup>27</sup>In assemblies bless God, the LORD, O you who are from the fountain of Israel. <sup>28</sup>There is little Benjamin who rules them, the princes of Judah who command them,

<sup>a</sup> *The coherence of this psalm and the meaning of many of its passages are uncertain.*

## תהלים ס"ח

א למנצח לדוד מזמור שיר: ב יקום אלהים יפוצו אויביו וינוסו  
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# קריאות לשבועות

## Shabuot Readings

עם קריאת התורה

מגלת רות ומזמור ס"ח

Scriptural Readings with  
NJPS English Translation,  
Halakhot and Commentaries

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