

Temple Emanu-El Shavuot Study Session

Part I - Introduction on the history of Shavuot and the study session, why this one is different (interactive, reform-oriented, discuss theme of unity)

Shalosh Regalim: The Three Pilgrim Festivals - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

The Torah states, "Three times a year you shall keep a feast unto Me." (Exodus 23: 14) This injunction refers to the three joyful festivals of the Jewish Calendar, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. These holidays are known collectively as *Shalosh Regalim* - The Three Pilgrim Festivals, since the Jews were commanded to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem as part of their celebration.

Each of these festivals commemorates important stages in the history of the Israelites: Pesach - the Exodus from Egypt; Shavuot - the Giving of the Torah; and Sukkot - the Journey in the Desert en route to the Promised Land. These Pilgrim Festivals also had an agricultural significance: Pesach - Barley harvest; Shavuot - Wheat harvest; and Sukkot - Final ingathering of the produce.

What the heck is an Omer?

According to the Torah (Lev. 23:15), we are obligated to count the days from the second night of Passover to the day before Shavuot, seven full weeks. This period is known as the Counting of the Omer. An omer is a unit of measure. On the second day of Passover, in the days of the Temple, an omer of barley was cut down and brought to the Temple as an offering.

Every night, from the second night of Passover to the night before Shavuot, we recite a blessing and state the count of the omer in both weeks and days. So on the 16th day, you would say "Today is sixteen days, which is two weeks and two days of the Omer."

The counting is intended to remind us of the link between Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, and Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. It reminds us that the redemption from slavery was not complete until we received the Torah.

This period is a time of partial mourning, during which weddings, parties, and dinners with dancing are not conducted, in memory of a plague during the lifetime of Rabbi Akiba. Haircuts during this time are also forbidden. The 33rd day of the Omer (the eighteenth of Iyar) is a minor holiday commemorating a break in the plague. The holiday is known as Lag b'Omer. The mourning practices of the omer period are lifted on that date. The word "Lag" is not really a word; it is the number 33 in Hebrew, as if you were to call the Fourth of July "Iv July" (IV being 4 in Roman numerals).

There are six names for Shavuot!

Name	Meaning
Shavuot	This means "weeks". The feast of weeks occurs seven full weeks after the festival of Pesach, which commemorates the Exodus.
Zeman Matan Torateinu	This means "the time of the giving of the Torah" and refers to the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt the Israelites assembled at the foot on Mount Sinai, and the Torah, together with the Ten Commandments, was proclaimed by God.
Atzeret	This means "conclusion". Shavuot is regarded as the conclusion of one uninterrupted period, which begins with Pesach. The name "Atzeret" indicates that Shavuot, the time of giving the Torah, was the real purpose and goal of Pesach, as Pesach was the time of the Exodus of the Jewish People from Egypt and freedom from bondage. To have the Torah without freedom is pointless and vice versa.
Chag Ha'Katzir	This means "the festival of the wheat harvest". Shavuot is the climax of the harvest season.
Chag Ha'Bikurim	This means "The Feast of the first fruits" and refers to the first fruits of the seven species associated to the Land of Israel: (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates). These fruits were a gift to the priest who could not own land of their own. In Biblical times the first fruits were brought to the Temple on Shavuot.
Pentecost	This is the Greek name for Shavuot. The meaning of the word is "fifty" and the name originates from the fifty days between Pesach and Shavuot. (an inaccurate name since we actually count only 49 days)

Customs on Shavuot

Decorating homes and synagogues with flowers, shrubbery, and foliage (based on the idea of Shavuot celebrating the first fruits). The Vilna Gaon, a very important Lithuanian sage, banned this custom, for he thought it was of pagan origin. Most communities, however, follow this practice. The reasons for this tradition are varied. They all originate in the idea of Shavuot as an agricultural festival. At this time of first fruits, we desire to reconnect with the land, and to give thanks to God for the goods that the land gives to us. In many cultures, harvest festivals have traditionally been the opportunity to stand back from one's work and reflect on human beings' dependence on the land and environment.

Tikkun l'el Shavuot, literally, the fixing, or improvement, of the night of Shavuot. This tradition consists of staying up the whole of the night of Shavuot and studying Jewish texts. Traditionally, this study includes Torah, Talmud, and Kabbalah, although any serious, intense study of Jewish texts is appropriate. The reason for this tradition is connected to the idea of Shavuot as the season of our receiving of the Torah. The tikkun, like the Passover Seder or the booths in which we live during Sukkot, is another example of Judaism's desire to relive, as opposed to simply commemorating events.

Since the event we are "reliving" on Shavuot is the giving of the Torah, we want to be prepared in order to be worthy of such an extraordinary event. By foregoing sleep for the sake of trying to perfect both our souls and our intellect in expectation of the giving of the Torah, we reenact, and, indeed, attempt to improve upon the state in which our ancestors were in prior to receiving the Torah at Sinai.

Reading of the Book of Ruth: On the morning of Shavuot, we read the Book of Ruth, one of the "five scrolls." The book is the story of Ruth, a Moabite who chose to convert to Judaism, and was the great-grandmother of King David. There are many reasons for this custom. One has to do with the main character of the book, Ruth. Ruth was a convert, meaning she took upon herself the yoke of Jewish law. So too on Shavuot, as we celebrate the giving of the Law, we take upon ourselves anew the yoke of the Torah.

The eating of dairy foods: It is an almost universal custom to eat dairy foods on this festival, unlike other holidays when we traditionally partake of meat or poultry. Again, there are many different reasons given for this practice. One reason is that, since we have, in a sense, not yet received the Torah, we do not yet have the laws and regulations for kosher slaughtering. This being the case, we refrain from meat. Another reason is that there is something "impure" about eating meat--we must kill an animal, drain the blood, etc. On Shavuot, as we stress the idea of purity, we avoid eating meat and instead eat milk. Milk can be seen as a representation of breast milk -representing the purity of childhood.

"Jewish communities in Arab countries," writes Rabbi Abraham Chill, "observed the custom of ascending to the roof of the synagogue on Shavuot and throwing apples down to the ground. The origin of this custom is traced to the similarity of the exclamation of the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai to the growth of an apple. The fruit of the apple begins to develop before the leaf. Similarly the Children of Israel proclaimed *na'aseh v'nishma*--we will do and we will listen, whereas the logical order would have been, "We will first listen and then act." They, however, announced their resolution to perform the [commandments] before they could listen and analyze them."

What's the deal with all the Dairy?

It is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. There are a number of reasons provided for this custom:

With the giving of the Torah, the Jews now became obligated to observe the laws of Kashruth. As the Torah was given on Shabbat, no cattle could be slaughtered nor could utensils be koshered, and thus on that day, they ate dairy.

Another reason is that the Torah is likened to milk. The Hebrew word for milk is *chalav*. When the numerical value of each of the letters in the word *chalav* are added together - 8; 30; 2 - the total is forty. Forty is the number of days Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Torah.

Part II - A Midrash and Reading of Relevant Portions of Exodus

NOT MEANT FOR ANGELS A Midrash for Shavuot

Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi told this Midrash.

When Moses went up to heaven, the angels said to God, "What is a human being doing here?"

God said to them, "He has come to receive the Torah."

The angels asked, "Is it the precious hidden treasure which you hid nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the world was created that you seek to give to flesh and blood now? Why give it to them?"

God then said to Moses, "Respond to them, Moses!"

Moses asked God, "Master of the universe, what is written in this Torah which you are about to give me?" "I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 29:2)

Moses said to the angels, "Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Then what is the Torah to you?" Moses continued by asking, "What else is written in it?" "Thou shalt have no other gods." (Ibid v.3) Moses said to the angels, "Are you surrounded by nations that worship other gods?"

Then he again asked God, "What else is written in the Torah?" "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Ibid v.8)

Again Moses asked the angels a question, "Do you do any labor that you need to rest?" And of God he asked, "What else is written in it?" "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." (Ibid v.7) So Moses asked the angels, "Is there any commerce, any give and take among you?" "What else is written in it?" he asked God.

"Honor thy father and thy mother." (Ibid v.12) "Do you have fathers and mothers?" "What else is written in it?" "Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal." (Ibid v.13)

One last time Moses asked the angels a question: "Is there any jealousy among you? Is there any will to do evil among you?"

All the angels agreed, at once, that it is human beings who should have the Torah.

Before Torah Blessing:

בְּרַכּוּ אֶת יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ:
 בְּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְּבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
 אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים
 וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Exodus Chapter 19

- א** בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, לְצֵאת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם--בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה, בָּאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי.
- ב** וַיִּסְעוּ מִרֶפְדִּים, וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל מִדְּבַר סִינַי, וַיַּחֲנוּ, בַּמִּדְבָּר; וַיַּחֲנוּ-שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל, נֹגֵד הַהָר.
- י** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ אֶל-הָעָם, וְקִדְשָׁתָם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר; וְכִבְּסוּ, שְׂמֹלֹתָם.
- 1** In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.
- 2** And when they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mount.
- 10** And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their garments,

טז וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי
 בְּהֵיטֵב הַבֹּקֶר, וַיְהִי
 קוֹלֹת וּבָרָקִים וְעָנָן כָּבֵד
 עַל-הַהָר, וְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר,
 חֲזָק מְאֹד; וַיִּחַרַד כָּל-
 הָעָם, אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה.

16 And it came to pass on the third day,
 when it was morning, that there were
 thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud
 upon the mount, and the voice of a horn
 exceeding loud; and all the people that were
 in the camp trembled.

יח וְהָר סִינַי, עָשָׂן כֶּלֹו,
 מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו
 יְהוָה, בָּאֵשׁ; וַיַּעַל עֲשָׂנו
 כְּעֲשָׂן הַכִּבְּשָׁן, וַיִּחַרַד כָּל-
 הַהָר מְאֹד.

18 Now mount Sinai was altogether on
 smoke, because the LORD descended upon
 it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as
 the smoke of a furnace, and the whole
 mount quaked greatly.

יט וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשׁוֹפָר,
 הוֹלֵךְ וְחֲזָק מְאֹד; מִן־שָׁה
 יַדְבֵּר, וְהָאֵל הִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ
 בְּקוֹל.

19 And when the voice of the horn waxed
 louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God
 answered him by a voice.

כ וַיֵּרַד יְהוָה עַל-הָר
 סִינַי, אֶל-רֹאשׁ הַהָר;
 וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל-
 רֹאשׁ הַהָר, וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה.

20 And the LORD came down upon mount
 Sinai, to the top of the mount; and the
 LORD called Moses to the top of the
 mount; and Moses went up.

Exodus Chapter 24

ג וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה, וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֵת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה, וְאֵת, כָּל-הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים; וַיַּעַן כָּל-הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד, וַיֹּאמְרוּ, כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה, נַעֲשֶׂה.

3 And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said: 'All the words which the LORD hath spoken will we do.'

ד וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה, אֵת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה, וַיִּשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּקֶר, וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ תַּחַת הָהָר; וּשְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר מִצְבֵּה, לְשֵׁנִים עָשָׂר שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

4 And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.

ז וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית, וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע.

7 And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said: 'All that the LORD hath spoken will we do, and obey.'

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, עֲלֵה אֵלַי הַהָרָה--וְהִיָּה-שָׁם; וְאֶתְנָה לְךָ אֶת-לְחֹת הָאֲבָן, וְהִתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה, אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי, לְהוֹרֹתָם.

12 And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Come up to Me into the mount and be there; and I will give thee the tables of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written, that thou mayest teach them.'

After Torah Blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
 אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת,
 וַחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נִטַּע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ:
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Part III: The Mystical Aspect of Shavuot

Every year, beginning with Passover and culminating on Shavuot, Jews relive the ancestral journey of healing that began with the exodus from Egypt and culminated in the revelation at Mt. Sinai fifty days later. According to the rabbis, the transformation from slavery to freedom was not complete until the Israelites stood at the foot of the mountain and heard the voice of the One.

Embedded in the legends and mystical teachings about the Sinai revelation are a plethora of metaphors for the spiritual journey. These legends, which contain all the symbolic death-rebirth motifs of classic shamanistic initiation rites, provide a unique model of spiritual awakening that is community-based. Unlike spiritual traditions oriented toward individual enlightenment, Judaism begins with the collective epiphany we call mattan Torah (the giving of the Torah).

What enabled the Israelites to hear the word of God at Mt. Sinai? According to the Midrash (legend), the revelation occurred at a moment when the Israelites perceived their essential unity and interconnectedness with each other. Quoting the Midrash, Rashi (the famous medieval biblical commentator) says that Israel stood at Sinai “as one person, with one heart.” He sees this mystical state of oneness and connectedness reflected in the Torah’s unusual use of the singular verb *vayichan* (encamp) to describes Israel’s encampment at the foot of the mountain: “And Israel encamped facing the mountain” (Exod. 19:2). (The Torah more commonly uses the plural verb *vayachanu* to describe Israel’s desert encampments.)

So, the revelation at Sinai begins with a moment of unity among the people. Standing “as one person, with one heart,” the people entered into a state of deep silence in which they experienced unitive consciousness. This mystical state, according to the Torah, was characterized by synesthesia - the merging of all the senses. In reference to the passage “and all the people saw the voices and flaming torches and the voice of the Shofar and the mountain smoking” (Exod. 20:15), the Midrash says: “They saw what usually is heard, and heard what is usually seen.”

Being unprepared for the intensity of their experience, the Israelites fear that they will die from this ego-annihilating experience and they say to Moses: “Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Exod. 20:16). According to legend, the Israelites actually do die from the power of the revelation, only to be resurrected by a host of angels who heal them and bestow them with celestial crowns. According to Hassidic thought, the Israelites heard only the silent Hebrew letter aleph of the first word of the revelation—“Anochi” (I AM) —before their souls left their bodies (parsha nishmatam). Aleph, which is equivalent to “One” in Jewish numerology, symbolizes the essential oneness of all being that the Israelites perceived at Sinai.

In Judaism and many other religious traditions, spiritual awakening is often described as a death or mortal blow to the individual ego, for as one perceives the divine unity, one dies to a sense of oneself as separate. It is a death, however, that also brings life, for as one enters into proper alignment with the divine whole, healing occurs. At moments of spiritual awakening we realize we are not only who we thought we were - not just an individual consciousness or separate self who lives within the boundaries we call “I”—but also part of an ineffable unity. For the Israelites, this new spiritual awareness translated itself into a new social vision. Realizing the inter-connecteness of all life, the Israelites took upon themselves responsibility for one another’s welfare: “Kol Yisrael arevim zeh la’zeh” (Every Israelite is responsible/interconnected with one another). In other words, they translated their mystical awareness of “oneness” into a new way of living and being in the world based on mutual caring, social responsibility, justice, and mercy.

When we study the biblical account of mattan Torah we find that the revelation at Sinai has no exact date. In fact, all reference to the temporal seems to be intentionally vague. Likewise, the true location of Mt. Sinai is unknown. Hassidic commentaries suggest that the revelation at Sinai has no precise date or place because Torah is continually revealed in every place at every moment. The divine voice that issued forth from Sinai is a voice that echoes through time and space. It is a voice that never ceases. To hear it we must simply be silent and empty like the desert (midbar). In the place of “no-thingness” we can begin to hear the divine call of the One.

“Said Rabbi Abahu....in the name of Rabbi Yochanan...When the Holy Blessed One gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl fluttered, no ox lowed, the angels did not fly, the Seraphim did not utter the Kedusha, the sea did not roar, the creatures did not speak; the universe was silent and mute. And the voice came forth “Anochi Adonai Elohecha” (I am the Infinite, your God).—Shmot Rabba 29-7

Part IV - Discussion of the Torah's relevance to everyday life and the importance of Consensus

<p style="text-align: center;">נ ט ע"ב</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CHAPTER FOUR</p> <p style="text-align: center;">59B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY</p> <p>The Gemara interrupts the Baraita and asks for a clarification: What did Rabbi Yehoshua mean when he quoted the Scriptural verse that "the Torah is not in heaven"?</p> <p>Rabbi Yirmeyah said in reply: Since God already gave the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai, we no longer pay attention to heavenly voices that attempt to intervene in matters of Halakhah. For You, God, already wrote in the Torah at Mount Sinai (Exodus 23:2), "After the majority to incline." From this verse we learn that Halakhic disputes must be resolved by majority vote of the Rabbis. God could not contradict His own decision to allow Torah questions to be decided by free debate and majority vote.</p> <p>אשכחיה רבי נתן לאליהו</p> <p>³The Gemara relates that generations later Rabbi Natan met the Prophet Elijah. (Several of the Talmudic Sages had visions of Elijah the Prophet, and discussed Halakhic questions with him.) Rabbi Natan asked Elijah about the debate between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua. He said to him: "What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do at that time when Rabbi Yehoshua refused to heed the heavenly voice?"⁴ In reply, Elijah said to Rabbi Natan: "God smiled and said: 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me!'" God's sons "defeated Him" with their arguments. Rabbi Yehoshua was correct in his contention that a view confirmed by majority vote must be accepted, even where God Himself holds the opposite view.</p> <p>⁵The Rabbis who related this story in the Baraita continued and said: "That day, Rabbi Eliezer would not accept the Sages' decision. They, therefore, decided to make a public demonstration of their decision. They brought all the foodstuffs that had been prepared in an Akhnai oven and which Rabbi Eliezer had declared ritually pure, and burned them in a fire, to show that Rabbi Eliezer's position was rejected by the Halakhah. Afterwards they met and took a vote and excommunicated Rabbi Eliezer ('blessed' here is a euphemism for 'excommunicated') for refusing to accept the majority view." The Baraita continues to describe the consequences of this momentous act. Even though the Sages thought they were justified, they could expect Rabbi Eliezer to be sorely offended. They wished to mitigate the anguish he would feel as much as possible, in view of the gravity of hurting the feelings of another person. (It is because of this section of the Baraita that this story is related here.)⁶ "The Sages said: 'Who will go and inform Rabbi Eliezer that he has been excommunicated?'⁷ Rabbi Akiva said to them: 'I will go, since I am his student and I will inform him in the most tactful</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">LITERAL TRANSLATION</p> <p>¹What does "it is not in heaven" [mean]?</p> <p>²Rabbi Yirmeyah said: That the Torah was already given on Mount Sinai, [and] we do not pay attention to a [heavenly] voice, for You already wrote in the Torah at Mount Sinai: "After the majority to incline."</p> <p>³Rabbi Natan met Elijah [and] said to him: "What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do at that time?"⁴ He said to him: "He smiled and said: 'My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated Me.'"</p> <p>⁵They said: "That day they brought all the objects that Rabbi Eliezer had declared ritually pure and burned them in a fire, and they voted (lit., 'were counted') about him and they excommunicated (lit., 'blessed') him."⁶ And they said: 'Who will go and inform him?'⁷ Rabbi Akiva said to them: 'I will go, lest</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RASHI</p> <p>כל טהרות שטיהר רבי אליעזר על ידי מעשה שארע נשאלה הלכה זו נבית המדקט, שנפלה טומאה לאורי מזור זה, וחזרו ועשאו על גזיו טהרו, וטיהרם רבי אליעזר. והביאום ושרפום לפניו.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BACKGROUND</p> <p>A heavenly voice. The Hebrew expression employed here (בת קול) has two different meanings: (1) An echo (literally, בת קול means "daughter of a voice"), and (2) a heavenly voice, i.e., a quasi-prophetic voice which a person hears within himself, although he perceives it as coming from outside himself. Hearing such a "heavenly voice" was regarded as a type of revelation, albeit of lesser clarity and force than actual prophecy. Hence the expression בת קול, because such a voice is an "echo" of true prophecy.</p> <p>It is not in heaven. Even though it is explicitly forbidden to deviate from Torah law (and indeed, a prophet who advocates the abrogation of Torah law is punishable by death), the Torah itself recognized the outstanding Torah scholars of each generation as the authoritative interpreters of the law, and hence the Gemara's statement that the Torah is "not in heaven."</p>
<p>¹מאי "לא בשמים היא"?</p> <p>²אמר רבי ירמיה: שקבר נתנה תורה מהר סיני, אין אנו משגיחין בבת קול, שקבר בתבת ביהר סיני בתורה: "אחרי רבים להטות."</p> <p>³אשכחיה רבי נתן לאליהו, אמר ליה: "מאי עבדי קודשא בריך הוא בהיא שעתא?"</p> <p>⁴אמר ליה: "קא חייך ואמר: 'נצחוני בני, נצחוני בני'."</p> <p>⁵אמרו: "אותו היום הביאו כל טהרות שטיהר רבי אליעזר ושרפום באש, ונמנו עליו וברכוהו."⁶ ואמרו: "מי ילך וידיעו?"⁷ אמר להם רבי עקיבא: "אני אלך, שמא</p>	<p>¹מאי "לא בשמים היא"?</p> <p>²אמר רבי ירמיה: שקבר נתנה תורה מהר סיני, אין אנו משגיחין בבת קול, שקבר בתבת ביהר סיני בתורה: "אחרי רבים להטות."</p> <p>³אשכחיה רבי נתן לאליהו, אמר ליה: "מאי עבדי קודשא בריך הוא בהיא שעתא?"</p> <p>⁴אמר ליה: "קא חייך ואמר: 'נצחוני בני, נצחוני בני'."</p> <p>⁵אמרו: "אותו היום הביאו כל טהרות שטיהר רבי אליעזר ושרפום באש, ונמנו עליו וברכוהו."⁶ ואמרו: "מי ילך וידיעו?"⁷ אמר להם רבי עקיבא: "אני אלך, שמא</p>	<p>¹מאי "לא בשמים היא"?</p> <p>²אמר רבי ירמיה: שקבר נתנה תורה מהר סיני, אין אנו משגיחין בבת קול, שקבר בתבת ביהר סיני בתורה: "אחרי רבים להטות."</p> <p>³אשכחיה רבי נתן לאליהו, אמר ליה: "מאי עבדי קודשא בריך הוא בהיא שעתא?"</p> <p>⁴אמר ליה: "קא חייך ואמר: 'נצחוני בני, נצחוני בני'."</p> <p>⁵אמרו: "אותו היום הביאו כל טהרות שטיהר רבי אליעזר ושרפום באש, ונמנו עליו וברכוהו."⁶ ואמרו: "מי ילך וידיעו?"⁷ אמר להם רבי עקיבא: "אני אלך, שמא</p>
<p>NOTES</p> <p>Rabbi Eliezer, such ostracism being the standard penalty for people who treated other scholars disrespectfully. A person ostracized in this manner was not permitted to wear leather shoes or cut his hair, and other people were required to keep at least four cubits away from him.</p> <p>Ramban and other commentators, however, explain that a more severe type of ban, <i>herem</i> — "excommunication" — was pronounced against Rabbi Eliezer. Unlike <i>niddui</i>, <i>herem</i> entails a prohibition against doing business with the</p>		
<p>237</p>		

Part V - Discussion of Ruth, the importance of women to this Holiday

Megillat Ruth

On Shavuot, after the Shaharit [morning] service, we read Megillat Ruth, the Book of Ruth.

Reasons

There are various reasons for reading this Scroll on Shavuot:

- Megillat Ruth tells the story of a tiller of the soil in Eretz Israel, a man who sows and gives "leket" (the poor man's share of the crop), who reaps and sleeps in barns.

Shavuot is the festival of the farmer.

- The story of Ruth occurred between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, namely during the reaping period. Thus it is fitting that the Megillah be read on the Festival of Reaping.

According to tradition, King David died on Shavuot, and the Megillah tells of the beginning of the Davidian dynasty (Ruth was the mother of King David's grandfather). Thus on Shavuot it is also customary to visit King David's tomb on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Our Sages explain that the Israelites received the Torah on Shavuot and Ruth converted and accepted the Jewish religion during the harvest period. 613 mitzvot were given to Israel, whereas only seven commandments were given to the gentile nations. When Ruth came to convert, she observed her seven commandments and accepted an additional 606 mitzvot (606 = Ruth in gematria). It is appropriate, therefore, to read the book of Ruth on this festival.

Story

Megillat Ruth relates the story of the family of Elimelech of the tribe of Judah, in the days of the Judges. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Machlon and Chilyon, left Beit Lechem [Bethlehem], where there was a famine, and settled in the fields of Moab. There, the two sons married Moabite women - Orpah and Ruth.

In time, the father and his two sons died there, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. When Naomi decided to return to her homeland, one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, refused to be separated from her, and accompanied her.

By chance, Ruth became acquainted with Boaz when she went to gather ears of corn in his field. The Torah obliges the Israelite farmer to allow the stranger, the orphan and the widow to gather from his crop, and Ruth was a stranger and a widow.

Boaz was attracted to Ruth and married her. The child born of this marriage, Oved, was King David's grandfather.

Themes

The Book of Ruth clearly depicts the lives of the estate owners and farmers in the land of Judah at the time of the Judges, depicting their way of life, the customs and the laws of the Israelites dwelling in their country.

Particularly noticeable elements are:

- the redemption of the land,
- the concern for the stranger and the widow;
- strong family ties and feelings of obligation towards relatives; marriage to foreign women and
- the usages of the reaping season.
- However, the common denominator for all these apparently unrelated themes is the attribute of loving-kindness.

Loving-kindness

The deeds of the main figures in the Megillah are depicted in detail, with frequent emphasis on the fact that they acted with loving-kindness, within the letter of the law.

Rabbi Zeira said:

"This Megillah contains neither matters of defilement or purification, nor laws of permission or prohibition. Why then was it written down? To teach the reward that is reserved for those who perform acts of loving-kindness" (Midrash Ruth Rabbah 2, 16).

"Loving-kindness" stands at the center of the Book of Ruth.

Naomi cares for her daughter-in-law Ruth, and Ruth cares for her mother-in-law Naomi.

In the relations between Boaz and Ruth it is also felt that both are performing acts of kindness to each other.

Even linguistically the importance of kindness is prominent. The word "hesed" (kindness) appears three times in the Megillah, and each time it is connected with a blessing from God.

The reward for those performing acts of kindness is the passage from exile to redemption, the direct link to the Kingdom of Israel and the feeling of personal satisfaction that accompanies the good and generous deed.

Part VI - Concluding Remarks, the Ritual Eating of the Dairy & the Essential Consumption of Caffeine

Study Session Prepared by Jonathan Hirshon jh@horizonpr.com

Facilitated by Jonathan Hirshon & Rabbi Dana Magat rabbimagat@templesanjose.org

Website at <http://www.templesanjose.org>