

## Jerusalem Bound: The Pilgrimage Festivals

The High Holy Days take up a lot of oxygen on the Jewish Calendar, but the 3 Festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot are critical to understanding Jewish Life and Heritage. How do we elevate Passover beyond a mere Seder? How can we reclaim the oft-overlooked Festival of Shavuot? And why can't there be more than a measly five day break between Yom Kippur and the amazing holiday of Sukkot?

I will strive to underscore some of the rituals that enable us to actualize memory and act on their essential ethical teachings. The festivals and their rituals equip and empower us to celebrate and be in the moment rather than commemorate.

שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים | בְּשָׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל־זְכוּרָךְ אֶת־פָּנָי | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחָר בְּחַג המִּצּוֹת וּבְחַג השַׁבְּעוֹת  
וּבְחַג הַסּוּכּוֹת וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה אֶת־פָּנָי יְהוָה רִיָּקָם:

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.

Devarim 17:17

### **What does it mean to “Show up”, to “Be Seen” *Yeraeh*?**

Further developing and playing on the concept of to see or be seen, this iconic texts that informs and instructs one the the if not the fundamental mandate of Passover, found in the Haggadah;

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לְרֹאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׁנֹאָמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בִּיצְאוֹתֵי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּלִבְדָּ גָּאֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֶלָּא אִף אוֹתֵנוּ גָּאֵל עִמָּהֶם, שְׁנֹאָמַר: וְאוֹתֵנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם, לְמַעַן הָבִיא אוֹתֵנוּ, לְתֵת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם.

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see her/himself as if s/he left Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 13:8); "And you shall explain to your child on that day: For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt." Not only our ancestors did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem, but rather also us [together] with them did He redeem, as it is stated (Deuteronomy 6:23); "And He took us out from there, in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers."

### **How is it conceivable or even possible to demand that we see ourselves as coming out of Egypt?**

This reliving and telling our story in the present is critical and fundamental. Not only must we hear what Heschel will term The Echoes of Eternity, we must act on them, ... do not oppress the stranger for we were strangers in the Land Egypt.

Shavuot involves acceptance, predominantly the acceptance of the Torah. Yet, paradoxically the “story” of Shavuoth is enigmatic, in fact as the celebration of Matan Torah the actual receiving of the Torah , there is no reference to it at all in the Torah! Instead we tell a story that perhaps becomes the story through

Ruth. In one of the most moving and profound narratives we discover striking insights both in respect to the qualities in a personal relationship and the connection one develops with one's people.

In urging her daughters in law to return home after the death of their husbands, Orpah with tears in her eyes reluctantly agrees and then turning to Ruth, Naomi beseeches her by declaring (in Verse 15)

וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבִמְתְּךָ אֶל-עַמֶּיהָ וְאֶל-אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבִי אַתְּרִי יְבִמְתְּךָ

And she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her god; return after your sister- in-law."

The sequence; "returning to her people and her God" is particularly noteworthy. Might it become the precursor for the astonishing, now iconic, response of Ruth to Naomi in the following verse?

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תַּפְּגַעֵי-בִי לְעִזְבוֹךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַתְּרִי: כִּי אֶל-אֱשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלָיו וּבְאֶשֶׁר תִּלְיִנִי אֵלָיו עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלֹהֵי

And Ruth said, "Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you, for wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; **your people shall be my people and your God my God.**

This in itself is breathtaking the continuation almost overwhelming;

בְּאֶשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשָׁם אֶקְבְּרָה כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יוֹסִיף כִּי הָמוּת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ

Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. So may the Lord do to me and so may He continue, if anything but death separate me and you."

Perhaps here lies the origin for the phrase "Till death do us part", a loving and lifelong commitment to one another.

Let's look closer at the expression

כִּי הָמוּת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ:

With some poetic license which the Megillah begs, I think we may translate as ONLY death can part us. No difference of views, background, people, despite all of these, we are able to accept one another, as so exquisitely stated in verse 14 וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ But Ruth clung to her.

We do not put aside our differences, we actually cling or embrace them and one another. This formidable concept read, more learned, on Shavuot, the time of receiving the Torah, is perhaps a gateway to the very essence of the Torah.

Returning to the phrase "Davek", how could we hear this and not be thrown back to Paradise Lost. The first time this phrase is used in Bereishit 2:24. At the conclusion of the enigmatic creation of woman where ; "God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman" we receive the directive;

עַל-כֵּן יַעֲזֹב-אִישׁ אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

Leaving aside the fact that Adam and Eve had no parents to leave so using this precedent is somewhat puzzling, the expectation to cling, hold, embrace is so poignant. Here too we are introduced to the very core of the purpose and potential of being in a relationship. Our relationship with one another and the way we receive her/him, is potentially a precursor or guide to how we receive the Torah. How apt that in the opening chapters of the final Book of the Torah, bookmarking, through the use of the very same phrase, the lessons in relationships exemplified through Adam and Eve, we are instructed or perhaps assured by Moshe, (Devarim 4:4)

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בֵּיתוּהָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תִּימָם כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם:

...While you, who cling to the LORD your God, are all alive today.... Till death do us part... In this...for life!

Turning to Sukkot, the directive reads;

בַּסֹּכֹת תֵּשְׁבוּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כָּל־הָאֶזְרָח בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשְׁבוּ בַסֹּכֹת:

You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths,

לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דֹרֹתֵיכֶם כִּי בַסֹּכֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the LORD your God.

Vayikra 23:42,43

Note *all* citizens of Israel, **Who are they?**

**What occurs when we dwell in the Sukkah?**

**Who is coming for Dinner? ! Who do we invite?**