



TWO KMS MEMBERS HONORED AT MIKVAH EMUNAH SOCIETY DINNER

by Lori Tolchin and Liz Diamant

Fish and chips and shepherd's pie? Union jacks and tea roses? A string quartet? We are not in Yorkshire, England, anymore! But the Mikvah Emunah Society (MES) attempted to bring some British flavors (what they are best known for!) and atmosphere to their English-themed dinner to honor community member Caroline Namrow.

Caroline moved from Leeds, England, to the Maryland area more than 22 years ago, but while you can take the Yorkshire lass out of Yorkshire, you can't take Yorkshire out of the English lass, or so the saying goes. Caroline was honored (please note correct spelling) for her outstanding work as a community leader and as a doctor. She has been



Rabbis Halpern and Breitowitz

an active member of the Mikvah Emunah Society for many years, chairing dinners and other fundraising events. Many people know Caroline as a calm and brilliant emergency pediatrician who has generously helped many members of our community. Laura Goldman and Jessica Eizenstat, community members and good friends of Caroline's, spoke glowingly about her accomplishments and presented her with a beautiful paper cut. The five Namrow children created a special video to honor their mother.

The community education award was given to long-time MES board member Rabbi Jacob Halpern, who spearheaded many educational initiatives on behalf of the mikvah, including inviting inspirational speakers on taharat hamishpacha, and making sure that this important topic was more prominently discussed in our community. Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz, former Woodside Rav who now lives and teaches in Israel, presented the award, a shtender, to his good friend Rabbi Halpern. Rabbi Breitowitz spoke fondly of Rabbi Halpern's dedication to Torah and mitzvot. In Rabbi Halpern's remarks he told a story about how his parents had broken the ice in

their community in order to obtain a supply of rain water for the mikvah. Such mesirat nefesh and dedication have clearly guided him in his efforts to highlight the importance of taharat hamishpacha.

KMS members and MES board members Liz Diamant, Debby Levitt and Michelle Schneck, chaired this year's dinner. Lori Tolchin created the journal, Rhonda Lehman and Hildi Fishman created the fabulous room decor,



Caroline Namrow

Karen Schulman tracked the reservations and ads, Marc Engelhart graciously took photos, and Givaldi Music Ensemble (White Oak community members Barry Graham, Ken Sragg, Dr. Menachem Miller and Dr. Hirsh Komarow)

played beautifully to create the background sound. Over 175 people attended the event.

The MES dinner helps raise funds to keep the mikvaot under its care running smoothly. Liz commented, "MES is often overlooked because we do such a good job that people forget we're around. But it's more than shampoo and towels! We have two buildings that have intricate systems that constantly need care and upkeep. All that we do is to enhance the mitzvah of taharat hamishpacha, a cornerstone of our traditions." The dinner and the yearly membership campaign

are MES's two main fundraising projects, necessary because user fees do not cover all the expenses.

The evening ended with a delicious dessert reception.

Trifle, anyone?



photos by Marc Engelhart

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FROM THE RABBI

The Harmony of Our Voices and the Genuine Experience of Seder Night

by Rabbi Brahm Weinberg

Nisan 5777



At the seminal moment of Jewish history, in the very midst of the transition from slavery to freedom and from exile to redemption, Hashem chose to begin the chain of the mesorah (the tradition) and the transmission of His mitzvot to the Jewish people. Just prior to the Exodus from Egypt, to the plague of the firstborn, and to the formal giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, Hashem gives the Jewish people the mitzvot of Kiddush Hachodesh (sanctification of the new months) and Korban Pesach (the lamb sacrificed on Erev Pesach and eaten on Pesach night). These were more than just two mitzvot that needed to be performed at that moment; they were the mitzvot that defined that moment and introduced the infant nation to its essential principles. These two mitzvot and the way they were taught illustrate what our approach to freedom and Jewish learning should be.

The Torah says:

שמות יב

א-ויאמר יקוק אל משה ואל אהרן בארץ מצרים
לאמר:

ב-החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים ראשון הוא לכם
לחדשי השנה:

ג-דברו אל כל עדת ישראל לאמר בעשר לחדש הזה
ויקחו להם איש שה לבית אבת שה לבית:

Exodus Chapter 12

1 And the LORD spoke unto Moshe and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: 2“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household.”

The Korban Pesach, the sacrifice of an Egyptian god in plain sight, was meant to teach the nascent Jewish nation to break with the idolatrous ways of Egypt and accept that their God was the supreme God above all others. The mitzvah to sacrifice the Korban Pesach was designed as an initial declaration of faith that would both solidify the bond between the people and their God and be the key to their post-Exodus experience.

While the connection between freedom and the sanctifica-

tion of the months might be slightly more ambiguous, it is a connection that was of tremendous import as well. In preparation for a life of freedom, which was a necessary prerequisite to accept the Torah at Mount Sinai with all of its freedom of choice, reward and punishment, and responsibility, the Jewish people had to be taught what freedom was like. The nation that had been steeped for generations in a life of slavery, a nation whose entire destiny had been determined for so long by their Egyptian taskmasters, needed to gain some form of control over their personal daily lives and over their future as well. Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno¹ in his commentary to the Torah points to this mitzvah as a manifestation of these necessary skills to live as a free people:

ספורנו שמות יב:ב

מכאן ואילך יהיו החדשים שלכם, לעשות בהם
כרצונכם, אבל בימי השעבוד לא היו ימיכם שלכם,
אבל היו לעבודת אחרים ורצונם, לפיכך ראשון הוא
לכם לחדשי השנה. כי בו התחיל מציאותכם הבחיר.

Seforno Shmot 12:2

Henceforth the months will be yours, to do with them as you wish but in the days of slavery your days were not your own. Your days were controlled by the enslavement to others and their will. Therefore, this is the “first month for you”; namely, it is the start of the reality of your freedom. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik beautifully elaborates upon this thought and says:

Time-awareness is the singular faculty of the free man who can use or abuse it. To a slave, it is a curse or a matter of indifference. It is not an instrument which he can harness to his purposes. The free man wants time to move slowly because, presumably, it is being employed for his purposes.²

The mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh was meant to convey freedom and control over time, but also the notion that along with freedom comes the responsibility for the outcome of a person’s life. That responsibility would be manifest not only in these initial mitzvot that were given in Egypt or those given later in Marah, but in the entirety of the Torah and the covenant that was entered into at Mount Sinai.

Hashem used these two mitzvot to prepare the Jewish people

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*We are deeply grateful
for the compassion and support of
the KMS community
on the recent passing of our dear mother, Leah Adler, z"l.*

*We hope we will have many happy occasions
to share together in the future.*

Sue and Jerry Pasternak



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Going Far

by Alec Stone



Maybe it's no longer politically advisable to say it takes a village, but there is a similar African proverb that states, "If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together." Conceptually, this is the basis of a synagogue, bringing the kehilla together, as a single unit, for the greater good.

For 27 years, KMS has accomplished this very feat, and by any standard has grown to become a large congregation. In fact, I am prone to saying these days, "This ain't your parents' schteibel." With full-time employees, close to a \$1 million budget, multiple levels of international programming, and weekly smachot, there is much of which we should be proud.

And yet, we are on the precipice of another growth spurt. A quarter-century into our journey, we continue to have wonderful milestones: a new rabbi, growing membership, and an expanding footprint on the campus. Perhaps KMS is entering its young adult phase, and that comes with new responsibilities.

Though people don't pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, there is something to be said for self-reliance. It is incumbent upon us all to carry our own weight and contribute to the communal center as best we can. Morning minyanim, weeknight lectures, charitable opportunities. Everyone has his or her interest, but together these individual programs make a stronger shul.

As the Jews wandered the desert for forty years, learning to be a nation and entering a new period as a people, so too KMS is experiencing a similar rejuvenation. The shift in internal demographics indicates that there are fewer birth announcements, but many more b'nai mitzvah celebrations. It's the cycle of life.

If Pesach is our Independence Day, then Shavuot is our Thanksgiving—only with more cheesecake. The seven weeks in between are a time of introspection. Additionally, we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim, Yom haZikaron, Yom haAtzmaut, and Lag ba'Omer. The ups and downs of triumph and tragedy, all within 49 days.

This interval allows us to really reflect on our Judaism. What can I do to improve myself? How can I get closer to God? What does this mean to me? Possibly, internal answers can be found

by expressing external actions. Be the movement.

All shuls will say they are extraordinary places, and of course they are correct. The shul in which I grew up. The one that was there during my college years. The place we attended after we were first married. All special. All important. Most still in existence.

But KMS is different. As a bedroom community to our nation's capital, the area draws remarkable people with incredible expertise in a variety of areas. Add to that their commitment to a synagogue as the institutional focus of their religious life, and the result is an institution operating at a very high level. That translates into high-level shiurim, scholars in residence, political connections, and global authorities. It also means that there is greater demand set upon the KMS staff and facility than might be found in other areas.

We continue to meet those expectations and hope to reach the lofty goals we set for ourselves in the near future. The quick, and (not so) funny, retort to this is "There's a committee for that," but in truth a great deal of the vision and implementation is driven by the membership. That mission was woven into the mission of KMS and is one reason that we are a different kind of shul. It does make it challenging at times, but that philosophy sets KMS apart and allows members to have a strong role in the direction of our community.

Frogs and locusts. Unleavened bread. A bonfire. Dairy deserts. We have some odd icons and specific customs in our religion. Perhaps though, the attention to detail and the connection to our past are among the strengths of our fortitude. Perseverance. Is there a parallel to this time of year and KMS's arc? Can we see the promised land over the horizon? Are our best days still ahead of us?

We can only posit that like B'nai Yisrael, b'ezrat Hashem, we too will soldier on and continue to elevate ourselves leshem Shamayim. As the disheveled, frightened slaves left Egypt they were uncertain about their future. But they had faith and worked in a community to bolster the tribes, as a single force.

It took time, however. As the adage suggests, they succeeded because they went "together." We have gone far and there is still more to accomplish. We too can build our holy city with many hands, using several tools, and different materials.

Lisa and I wish the entire community a chag kasher v'sameach, and look forward to celebrating only good times together.

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for their future life of freedom and for a life of Torah that they were about to embark upon. In addition to the informative nature of the *content* of these mitzvot, I believe that the *manner* in which they were conveyed may also provide us with a crucial insight into the nature of our heritage.

The Midrash³ notes that the teaching of these two mitzvot occurred in an unexpected fashion.

The Torah introduces these mitzvot with the words “**דברו אל**” “speak (in the plural) to the entire congregation of Israel,”⁴ which implies that *multiple* people, Moshe and Aharon, were meant to convey the mitzvot to the Jewish people.

Ordinarily, Hashem would teach Moshe what the Jewish people would be responsible to do, and Moshe would be responsible to teach that to the people through whatever channels he desired.⁵ Aharon was not involved in receiving the teachings from Hashem or in being the prime teacher of the people. The Midrash points to one very sharp and, perhaps, paradigmatic example when Hashem indicates explicitly that Moshe must be the teacher of mitzvot. In Parshat Ki Tisa the Torah says:

שמות לא : יב-יג

ויאמר יקוק אל משה לאמר: ואתה דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר אך את שבתתי תשמרו כי אות הוא ביני וביניכם לדרתיכם לדעת כי אני יקוק מקדשכם:

Shmot 31:12-13

12 And the LORD spoke unto *Moshe*, saying: 13 ‘Speak *thou* also unto the children of Israel, saying: Verily ye shall keep My sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that ye may know that I am the LORD who sanctify you.

In these pesukim where Hashem instructed the Jewish people to keep Shabbat, He was speaking to Moshe, specifically, and not only follows it up with “speak to the Jewish people” but with “*and you*, speak to the Jewish people” as if to emphasize his unique role in the transmission of the Torah.⁶

Moshe was the teacher of Torah par excellence and the one relied upon in all circumstances to be the conveyor of the mesorah. Yet, at this *most* important moment as the mesorah process was just beginning, Hashem seemed to diverge from that practice.

Was Aharon truly involved in this teaching when Moshe is singled out, generally, as *the* teacher of Torah? If so, why would Hashem have designed the teaching in this way? What value was added by Aharon’s being involved at this stage of the communication of Torah? Secondarily, one must wonder what it actually might have looked like for both of them to teach. Was Hashem asking them to speak at the same time? Was He asking them to split the task of teaching? Were they

each meant to convey the entirety of the teaching one after the other?

The Midrash wonders about this and asks:

וכי שניהם מדברים היו?

And were they both truly talking?

The midrash presents three impactful answers that contain valuable insight into Jewish learning and Jewish community for the generation of the Exodus and for us as well.

The first answer is given by **Rabbi Yishmael**:

רבי ישמעאל אומר... כשהיה משה מדבר היה אהרן מרכין אזנו לשמוע באימה ומעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו שומע מפי הקב"ה.

Rabbi Yishmael says: When Moshe was speaking, Aharon would incline his ear to hear with trepidation. The Torah considers it as if he [Aharon] was hearing directly from the Holy One Blessed be He.

Rabbi Yishmael is saying that the presence of Hashem was so strong within Moshe’s words and Aharon listened so carefully (מרכין אזנו) with great insight to Moshe, that he felt as if he were hearing the words directly from Hashem: Not as a secondary relay but as a prime recipient. According to Rabbi Yishmael, what the pasuk was conveying in using the plural (דברו) was that although Moshe was the one responsible for the teaching, Aharon had come so close to hearing the words of Hashem that it was as if he were speaking alongside Moshe as an equal on behalf of Hashem.

On a deeper level, what the pesukim teach us, according to Rabbi Yishmael, is the important idea that Jewish learning must occur within a divine context. Our learning and practice of the mitzvot are not academic and are not isolated tasks, but fit into a larger system primed to resonate with the voice of the Divine. At the end of the day, it is about exposure to Hashem. As teachers of Torah we must imbue our words with a sense of awe and Godliness just as Moshe did. As students of Torah we must incline our ears in the right way, as Aharon did, to listen carefully for the voice of Hashem within the words we study.

Rabbi Achai joins the conversation and presents a slightly different perspective on the interplay between Moshe and Aharon in teaching the first two mitzvot:

ר' אחי בר' יאשיה אומר... כיון שמשה מדבר היה אהרן מימינו ואלעזר משמאלו ואיתמר מימינו של אהרן והדבור יוצא מביניהם כאלו שניהם מדברים.

Rabbi Achai son of Rabbi Yoshia says: When Moshe would speak, Aharon was at his right, Elazar at his left, and Itamar to the right of Aharon. And the words would emanate from among them as if both of them were speaking.

Rabbi Achai is suggesting that there was a panel of speakers conveying these mitzvot to the Jewish people, which included

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Moshe, Aharon, Elazar and Itamar (sons of Aharon). However, this does not contradict the typical mode of dissemination of Torah whereby Moshe is the singular voice conveying the mitzvot, since all their voices merged into one harmony. It is almost as if all the voices blended into Moshe's voice, which conveyed these mitzvot like all others.

Perhaps the thought being expressed by Rabbi Achai is that one of our goals in learning must be to uncover the commonality behind all voices that we hear in the realm of Torah and appreciate that there is more that unites us than divides us. The experience of Torah must be a rich one filled with multiple voices and perspectives. As our sages say: "שבעים פנים בתורה" "seventy faces of the Torah."⁷ Moshe, Aharon, Elazar, and Itamar were likely very different from each other: They must have had different demeanors, dress, characters, personalities, likes and dislikes, talents and styles, and yet the differences were minute in the scheme of things. As much as we must search to find our individual voices within the world of Torah and mitzvot, we must also undertake to view ourselves as part of something larger that we all share in common. The Torah should not be what divides us, but what binds us together. The fine differences that emerge in style and approach to Torah can sometimes blind us to the great common

purpose and mission we have: To connect to Hashem in the past, present, and future.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai shares the third and final view in the Midrash:

ר"ש בן יוחאי אומר משה היה חולק כבוד לאהרן ואומר לו למדני והדבור יוצא מבניהם כאלו שניהם מדברים:

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: Moshe would give honor to Aharon and say, "Teach me." And Aharon would give honor to Moshe and say, "Teach me." And the word would go out from among them as if both were speaking.

Even though, ultimately, Moshe was the singular voice that conveyed the mitzvot to the Jewish people, because of the honor that Moshe accorded to his brother Aharon and his opinions, it was as if Aharon's view were incorporated into Moshe's words and both, therefore, were conveying the Torah to the Jewish people together.

While the first two approaches of Rabbis Yishmael and Achai are instructive, it is this third answer of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai that I think is the most intriguing and the most consequential to the celebration of Pesach and the journey towards the receiving of the Torah at Sinai.

What I see within Rabbi Shimon's words is a recognition



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that Torah is best learned and absorbed in conversation. With respect for the other, with true interest in learning, and with humility the Torah can be made stronger. Moshe was closer to Hashem but still he showed respect for Aharon's words. Aharon was older but still he showed respect for Moshe's words. They shared the view that they could learn from others and both were enriched by it.

At times, we need to overlook some of our differences to focus on what unites us, as Rabbi Achai said; however, there are times and ways in which those differences can be the richest and most fruitful part of our Torah experience. Moshe received direct revelation from Hashem, he was the greatest prophet of all time, he was the paragon of Torah knowledge and earned the unique title of *Rabeinu*, "our teacher." Yet, before teaching the Jewish people anything, he seems to have engaged in a dialogue with Aharon about the teachings.

This humble engagement in conversation surrounding the Torah undoubtedly led to a crystallization of his thoughts, to an understanding of how others might comprehend his words and their resonance among different personalities. Perhaps the conversations even helped Moshe to better understand his own perspective on what he learned from Hashem and the way in which he was meant to teach. All of what he gained from Aharon was subsumed within his own words to the extent

that the Torah refers to the words that emerge from Moshe's mouth as the words of Moshe and Aharon together.

It is particularly meaningful that this teaching is brought forth by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Masechet Shabbat 33b says that as a result of his negative comments about the Roman Empire, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (along with his son Elazar) fled to hide in a cave for twelve years (and then one more year) to escape the fury of the Romans. Rabbi Shimon spent those thirteen years learning all day with his son and only companion, Rabbi Elazar. After those years in the cave, Rabbi Shimon certainly must have understood the value of learning Torah in conversation. He understood how much he relied upon his son and conversationalist to grow in his own learning.

At the very outset of their journey in Torah it was critical for the Jewish people to understand that the Torah being conveyed to them was one that was studied by their greatest teacher in conversation and that it should continue to be studied in that manner in an atmosphere completely permeated with genuine curiosity (למדני) and respect (היה חולק כבוד).

Already in their infancy, the Jewish people needed to begin training themselves in this core aspect of freedom and learning what it really meant to be a student of the Torah so that they

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would be fully prepared for the experience of Matan Torah. They needed to understand that the enterprise of Torah and that the mesorah itself would be one that is best learned and lived in conversation, in community, with a give-and-take that is respectful and for the sake of Heaven.

This kind of engagement in Torah was a true training in the nature of freedom and the manifestation of its essential doctrines for the generation of the Exodus. As free people, they could think for themselves, they could develop their own sense of self and not be defined by others. And, in an almost ironic way, the more they gained a sense of self the more they could actually look comfortably to others to help inform their perspective and learn things they never knew.

It is that kind of freedom and genuine experience of Torah that we express as we sit down at the seder and engage in conversations of learning, history, memory and experience. As we sit down at our seders with the arba'ah banim, the four archetypal personalities and viewpoints, we engage in a genuine experience of Talmud Torah⁸ (Jewish learning) at its best: Talmud Torah that occurs in conversation, Talmud Torah that occurs in the context of community, Talmud Torah that occurs with respect for others who may think differently from us and with the humility to realize that we can learn from others and be enriched by their perspectives. At the seder table we all join the historic conversation of Torah and become “*medabrim*” like Moshe and Aharon, harmonizing our voices into the one singular strand of the mesorah that dates back to those fateful days in Egypt where it all began.

NOTES:

¹Italian rabbi, Biblical commentator, philosopher and physician. 1475-1550.

²*Reflections of the Rav*, by Abraham R. Besdin pp.201-202.

³I was alerted to the existence of this Midrash both by Rashi (Shmot

12:2) who quotes part of the midrash and also by a shiur that I heard from Rabbi Moshe Taragin of Yeshivat Har Etzion. R. Taragin had his own interpretation of the three opinions in the Midrash which differ from the ones I present here.

⁴See above for full quote.

⁵As it famously says in the very first Mishna in Avot:

משה קיבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה.

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly.

The clear path of Torah teaching is from Hashem to Moshe to the people and not through Aharon. Aharon is responsible for ritual- and mishkan-related matters and Moshe is responsible for the teaching of the law.

⁶There are countless other examples of this in pesukim between Bo and Ki Tisa, such as the entire experience of Matan Torah when Moshe is the prime conduit for the teaching of Torah and Aharon is not even able to fully ascend the mountain. The Midrash seems to have chosen this pasuk as the contrast since it is similarly worded to the pasuk in Bo which begins with **ויאמר יקוק** and then follows with **דברו אל כל עדת ישראל לאמר**: only one is singular and the other plural.

⁷Bamidbar Rabba 13:15

מזרק אחד כסף כנגד התורה המשולה ביין שנאי (משלי ט) ושתו ביין מסכתי ולפי שדרך היין לשתות במזרק כמה דתימא (עמוס ו) השותים ובמזרקי יין לכך הביא מזרק, שבעים שקל בשקל הקדש למה כשם שיין חשבונו שבעים כך יש שבעים פנים בתורה

“One silver basin” was brought as a symbol of the Torah which has been likened to wine, as it says “And drink of the wine which I have mingled” (Mishlei 9:5). Now because it is customary to drink wine in a basin, you may gather from the text, “that drink wine in bowls” (Amos 6:6) – he on that account, brought a basin. “Of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary” (Bamidbar 7:19). Why? As the numerical value of yayin (wine) is seventy, so there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah.

⁸Rabbi Soloveitchik elaborated upon the connection of the mitzvah of Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim and the mitzvah of Talmud Torah in the formal sense. This is referenced in numerous works about Rabbi Soloveitchik. See, for example: “*Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim as a Special Form of Talmud Torah*” by Rabbi Menachem Genack, YU Pesach To Go 5772 p11-20.

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