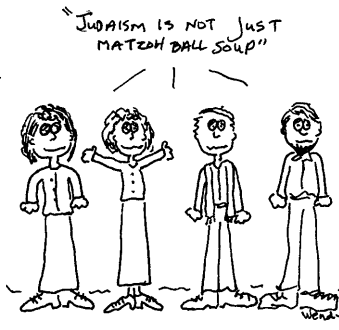


BERESHITH "IN THE BEGINNING"

A Newsletter
for Beginners,
by Beginners

Vol. XXXV No. 4
Sivan 5782/June 2022



בראשית

AN ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

Rabbi Sholom Mimran

One of the main themes that appears in the Book of Ruth, which we read on Shavuot, is '*chesed*'. Now, most Hebrew speakers generally translate the word *chesed* as kindness. In the Bible, though, that is not solely what it means. Indeed, in many instances, when the concept comes up, it is better understood as loyalty.

The Book of Ruth begins and ends with displays of loyalty. The Moabite women, Orpah and her sister, Ruth, show loyalty by journeying with their mother-in-law, Naomi back to the foreign land of Israel where they would be considered outsiders. In this case, their *chesed* is rejected by Naomi, who wants them to stay in the country of Moab. After Ruth will not turn back, Naomi does not talk to her for the remainder of the journey back to Israel.

Boaz, Naomi's nephew and the leader of Israel, is the epitome of loyalty. As soon as he heard that Ruth was related to Naomi, he immediately turned to Ruth and addressed her as he would anyone else. Ruth expected no recognition, and asked

(cont. on p. 3)

GRANDMOTHER WOULD BE HAPPY

Craig Prupis

I had the good fortune to grow up in a "kosher" home--by the somewhat traditional standards of the 1960s. However, we were not really Sabbath observant. We did go to our Conservative synagogue Friday night, but we drove there and back. My only exposure to Orthodox Jews was when I visited my aunt and uncle in Borough Park in Brooklyn, NY and my mom's parents in Newark, NJ. My mom kept kippot in the car so as not to embarrass them when we walked into their homes.

A few years after my grandfather passed away, Newark condemned my grandmother's house to build a highway, and she needed a place to stay. Since we kept kosher, my dad agreed to have my grandmother live with us, and she moved in. Since she was living with us and chose to spend Shabbat in our home, my mother reminded us to not openly transgress the Shabbat. However, my grandmother chose to stay with my aunt and uncle in Borough Park on the Jewish holidays.

What does any of this really have to do with me? I was 11 years old when my grandmother moved in with

(cont. on p. 3)

I AM A CRIMSON EDITOR AND I STAND WITH ISRAEL

Natalie L. Kahn

Given the importance of the topic discussed in the following piece, we have chosen to include Natalie's Kahn's Op-Ed piece that appeared on May 4, 2022 in The Harvard Crimson, in response to an editorial that appeared in The Harvard Crimson on April 29, 2022 (<https://bit.ly/InSupportofBDS>).

On April 29, I woke up to a flurry of messages from students, alumni, and journalists regarding a new piece published by The Crimson's Editorial Board declaring it was "proud to finally lend our support to both Palestinian liberation and [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions]" and now would "call on everyone to do the same."

As both president of Harvard Hillel and Associate News Editor for The Crimson, many of the questions I received pertained to my dual affiliation with these two organizations, now seemingly at odds with one another.

I have worked for The Crimson since freshman year, and it has been an integral part of my time at Harvard — some nights I am there until 2 or 3 a.m. as an executive, after four semesters of reporting.

(cont. on p. 2)

I AM A CRIMSON EDITOR AND I STAND WITH ISRAEL (cont. from p. 1)

But integral as The Crimson has been, I am first and foremost a Jew; and in light of the role Israel plays in my people's history as our homeland and haven from persecution, I am a Zionist, and I stand with Israel.

People have asked me whether I plan on quitting, whether I could have prevented this, and who is to blame. I have no intention of quitting; I understand this piece does not reflect the views of other boards, or even the views of some members of the Editorial Board who may not have been at the meeting. We live in a country where peaceful protest is strongly encouraged. But the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement — overwhelmingly condemned by Congress in a 2019 resolution passed 398-17 — is not just a boycott; BDS rejects Jewish self-determination altogether.

If you doubt me, ask its founders: “Definitely, most definitely, we oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine,” said co-founder Omar Barghouti, who also declared that Palestinians have a right to “resistance by any means, including armed resistance.”

Perhaps the Editorial Board would agree, since its piece fails to condemn Palestinian terrorism or the charter of Hamas - the governing regime elected to power in Gaza in 2006 - that explicitly calls for the annihilation of the Jewish people. On top of that, a 2019 New York Times article reported that the BDS National Committee lists among its members the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine, which in turn includes both Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

How many members of the Editorial Board can tell me the story of Israel's history - numerous peace treaties the Palestinians have rejected, human shields used by Hamas to gaslight Israel, and thousands of Israeli civilians murdered by terrorists? What about the millions of dollars used by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank for the “Pay to Slay” Program, rewarding terrorists for crimes against Israelis?

Israel is not perfect, nor is any other country. But this editorial is part of a larger trend of singling out Jews, conveniently neglecting our half of the story — and by extension our right to self-determination — while claiming to “oppose antisemitism.” Judaism is not just a religion; the Holocaust is only one of many examples of Jews targeted as a people. Exiled after centuries in the Land of Israel, the Jewish people have always been outsiders - they have been pushed out of Europe and the Middle East, and 2019 FBI data indicate American Jews were 2.6 times more likely than Black people and 2.2 times more likely than Muslims to be victims of hate crimes.

If this isn't proof of a Jewish need for self-determination, I don't know what is. And yet this editorial does not even affirm support for Jewish self-determination. Does the Editorial Board believe Israel even has a right to exist? Because, if so, that line is coincidentally missing.

When the Editorial Board discusses “Palestinian liberation,” does it think that, after decades of rejected peace ...treaties and

"BUT INTEGRAL AS THE CRIMSON HAS BEEN, I AM FIRST AND FOREMOST A JEW... AND I STAND WITH ISRAEL!"



terror, Hamas and the PA would simply acquiesce and live in harmony with their Jewish neighbors? What does the Editorial Board think “from the river to the sea” means?

The Editorial Board believes it is advocating for the underdog in the name of social justice, but the “overwhelming power imbalance” has always been against the Jewish homeland, surrounded on all sides by those who wish to destroy it - the same wish that has led Israel's neighbors to declare war on it again and again. The leaders of Iran, now in the process of acquiring nuclear weapons, have also made clear that their aim is “the annihilation of Israel.”

I do my best to keep my personal views out of my work at The Crimson. My job is to report facts, and I welcome dialogue. But dialogue is not the goal of BDS or student anti-Israel groups, who have refused conversation and rely instead on substanceless platitudes like “Zionism is racism settler colonialism white supremacy apartheid” — their goal is demonizing Israel and delegitimizing its right to exist.

And so when my people and our homeland come under attack, I will not stay silent. I am still a Crimson editor, but this editorial does not represent me; I do and always will stand with Israel.

© 2022 The Harvard Crimson, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Natalie L. Kahn '23, an Associate News Editor, is president of Harvard Hillel and an Economics concentrator in Pforzheimer House. She is the daughter of Janegail Orringer (a former LSS Beginner) and James Kahn.

...us. At the time, I thought of her as a bit strange since she always seemed to be mumbling; early in the morning, during the evening, and after she ate. I knew she was observant, but she never went to synagogue with us. At the time, none of this made sense to me.

Growing up, I was an active member of our local USY (United Synagogue Youth) chapter, as was my sister, Sheri. Sponsored by our uncle, Sheri was given the opportunity to go to the Jewish Educational Center, a Modern Orthodox high school, since she was a good Hebrew school student (I wasn't). I was very comfortable in my Jewishness during my teen years. After high school, I was invited to a Shabbaton on the Lower East Side in New York in early September. It was the last Shabbat before Rosh Hashana. I figured that since I was going to observe Shabbat that weekend and during Rosh Hashana, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret, which also fell on Shabbat that year, I challenged myself to see how many weeks in a row I would be able to keep Shabbat.

Well, it's been many years since that Shabbaton in 1972, and I haven't turned back.

When she was a freshman at Rutgers University, Sheri invited me to spend a Shabbat with her new friends. It was such an enjoyable experience that I decided to spend every Shabbat that year at Rutgers and I decided to transfer to Rutgers the following year. Sheri and I would also host our own Shabbatons in our parents' home during our years at Rutgers. At the Shabbat meals, my grandmother sat at the head of the table, the proud matriarch of the family. She would close her eyes and sway from side to side while we all sang *Zemirot*, Shabbat songs, at the table. By this time, I had already figured out that my grandmother's "mumbling" during my formative years was her davening, praying and bentching, reciting Grace After Meals, by heart.

My grandmother passed away on the first day of Shavuot in 1975. Before her funeral, Sheri and I sat with our mom around the kitchen table and wondered aloud what our future would be, whether we'd remain observant or not. Since my religious aunt



"GRANDMOTHER WOULD BE HAPPY KNOWING THAT THE VIBRANT PRACTICE OF JUDAISM WILL CONTINUE IN HER FAMILY AFTER SHE WAS GONE"

(cont. from p. 1)

...Boaz why he even paid attention to her in the first place. He responds by highlighting her loyalty to Naomi and to her family. And because of that connection, he goes above and beyond what Jewish law and social norms dictate is due to a gleaner, giving her extra grain and allowing her to join in the meals of his workers.

When Ruth wakes Boaz in the middle of the night at the threshing field, his first words to her are, "You are blessed to G-d my daughter, your subsequent loyalty is greater than your first, that you didn't go after the young men, whether rich or poor." From his perspective, Ruth is the one who is performing the kindness toward him.

As the end of the book emphasizes, the Davidic dynasty is descended from the child of Ruth and Boaz. King David showed this same quality of loyalty before and during his reign. He refuses to harm King Saul, his predecessor, out of a sense of loyalty that was due to the one whom G-d anointed.

In another example, after a successful raid on Amalek, while running away from King Saul, David insisted that the spoils be shared equally, rather than being split only among the men who fought in that battle. He realized his duty was to reward everyone, even the members of his group who stayed back to make sure nothing of theirs was stolen. He also took care of Mefiboshet, a descendant of King Saul, because his father, Yonatan, had been his dear friend who helped David.

There are many explanations given for the reading of Ruth on Shavuot. The most widely quoted reason is that Ruth's coming to Israel took place around the time of Shavuot, and her acceptance into the Jewish faith was analogous to the acceptance by the Jewish people of G-d's Torah.

However, using this message of kindness and loyalty, I think we can take this connection to Shavuot a step further. The Book of Ruth is a reminder to us just how fundamental these traits of kindness and loyalty are in Judaism. While we commemorate having received the Torah 3,334 years ago at Mount Sinai, we must not forget that Moses came down with two tablets, one containing the laws between man and G-d, and the other, equally as important, with the laws between man and his/her fellow man. As we navigate a world full of unease, we should look at the traits practiced by Ruth, Boaz and their descendants, and find our own ways to incorporate those values of *chesed*. Because, from the familial line of Ruth and Boaz and King David, our Messiah, the Mashiach, will come. By creating a world of people who look to connect, help, and do whatever they can for others out of a sense of loyalty, we prepare the world to accept the traits of King David's descendent, Mashiach ben David.

Originally from Gateshead, England, Rabbi Sholom Mimran studied in Yeshivot in Gateshead and Israel before joining the Kollel in Gibraltar where he assumed many rabbinic and community responsibilities. Rabbi Mimran currently serves as Rabbi of Congregation Dor Tikvah in Charleston, South Carolina.



1345 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, 2nd FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10105-0014
1-800-44-HEBRE(W)
www.njop.org

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
New York, NY
PERMIT #5047



In partnership with
Lincoln Square Synagogue

GRANDMOTHER WOULD BE HAPPY (cont. from p. 3)

and uncle had no children, mom was happy that our grandmother saw that a vibrant religious practice of Judaism would continue in her family after she was gone.

After graduating from Rutgers, I decided to stay in the nearby Jewish community. A friend of mine asked if I would volunteer at Rutgers Hillel to get mailers out for the incoming freshman class. It was that evening that I sat next to the young woman who would become my wife less than a year later. We both wanted to stay in the community and have been here ever since.

As we approach the upcoming holiday of Shavuot, I realize how fortunate we have been to incorporate many beautiful Jewish traditions and rituals into our daily lives that have impacted on not only the two of us, but on our entire family as well, in dramatic ways. No doubt, my grandmother would be so proud!

Craig Prupis has been a proud member of Congregation Ohav Emeth in Highland Park, NJ since 1973. He is a former IT professional at BNY Mellon and is now happily retired and helping out with his religious grandchildren.

Words of Torah for everyone! To receive Rabbi Buchwald's exciting and provocative weekly e-mail message, please send an e-mail to: ezbuchwald@njop.org

To receive a juicy bit of Judaism, daily, from Jewish Treats, please send an e-mail to: jewishtreats@njop.org



בראשית

Beresbith: "In the Beginning" is edited under the direction of Larry Greenman and Rivka Bornstein of NJOP. Special Beginners Services are conducted at synagogues throughout the United States to introduce those with limited backgrounds to the beauty of the traditional Hebrew service. For more information regarding the Beginners Service closest to your home, to establish a local Beginners Service, or to learn more about NJOP programs, please contact us: 1345 Avenue of the Americas, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10105-0014, 646-871-4444, e-mail info@njop.org or visit www.njop.org.

Readers: This is your newsletter and we'd like to hear from you. Article contributions are always welcome.

Illustrations by Wendy Dunn