

MINYAN MONTHLY

Vol. 11 No. 3

August 1998

Tammuz/Av 5758

TRIENNIAL VS. FULL TORAH READING

by Avi Havivi

Recently, some members of the Library Minyan have asked the congregation to consider the possibility of reading the full weekly Torah portion instead of our current practice of doing the triennial reading. In the early fall, there will be an open Minyan meeting to discuss the issue, followed by a decision by mail vote on whether or not to institute the full weekly k'riya for some as-yet-unspecified trial period.

It has been the Minyan's general practice to devote some time and effort to studying the available Jewish sources when a question of religious practice is raised. Unfortunately, there is little to be found in the traditional Jewish codes and texts regarding the issue at hand. However, this unfortunate situation now has been rectified. While engaged in research for a biography of R. Solomon Schechter, one of the seminal Jewish scholars of our century, I was privileged to have his heirs grant me access to some private materials. While searching through Schechter's sock drawer, I came across a hitherto unpublished document, which seems to have been a Cairo Genizah fragment, copied onto the back of a golf score card in Schechter's own hand. This fragment contains a talmudic-style passage concerning the Torah reading cycle, not found in any other manuscript of the Babylonian or Jerusalem Talmud. This text is remarkable because it both mentions amoraic authorities unknown from the traditional Talmuds, including a number of female sages, and quotes from extra-biblical books not found in either the Jewish or Christian canon, raising the possibility that this passage emerged from an early proto-egalitarian sect, flourishing, as did the Essenes and Gnostics, independent of the mainstream tradition, and whose writings were later suppressed by the rigid and legalistic dead white male rabbis whose views came to dominate our halachic mainstream. As a public service, I am publishing this text for the first time ever in our Minyan Monthly.

MISHNAH: We read the full Torah portion weekly, because this is authentic and traditional, and underscores the importance and centrality of the Torah. But others say, We read the triennial portion, because the full reading is too long, and we do not have enough Torah readers. R. Meir says, Both positions are valid and acceptable.

GEMARA: We read the full Torah portion. Rav said, Why does the Mishnah bring this up now? Did we not debate this issue in the past, and decide that we read the triennial cycle? But Samuel said, That was a long time ago. The population of our community has both grown and changed, and it is timely for this issue to be re-visited. Said R. Abraham, I have been coming to shul here for seven years, and it has not been brought up in my day. Some sages say it was last discussed at least eight years ago, while others say, at least ten years. R. Josephine recollected: In olden times, when we read the full Torah reading, things were different—there were more Torah readers, and more people understood Hebrew and had the patience for it, and people could wake up earlier and make it to shul before 10:30. And some say she added, And the service was shorter. And could the service have been shorter?! Have we not learned in a midrash, What does Scripture mean when it says, "We shall not be moved" (Seeger 7:3)? It means that the length of the service is fixed and does not change over time. But another midrash teaches, When Scripture says, "The times they are a-changin" (Dylan 14:23)—this refers to the length of the service, which progressively has gotten out of control. R. Brittany expounded: "Four times I call out to Thee, O Lord, yea, even five; hear my voice and feed me" (Sean 2:17)—"Four times"—this refers to the four sections of the Sabbath morning service: Pesukei D'zimra, Shaharit, the Torah service, and Musaf; "yea, even five"—this refers to the addition of a fifth section—the announcements. R. Evan said, The announcements are a crucial part of our Minyan's experience, for purposes of introductions, communication, and building a sense of community. R. Ashley said, Why does Scripture say, "Thus sayest the Lord: Yea, though thou cryest to Me, thy word is detestable" (Jake 13:5)—"thy word," and not "thy words"? This teaches that only one type of announcement is detestable before the Lord. R. Ashley's disciples differed as to which announcement she was referring to: Some said, Announcements about child care, while others said, Membership, while others said, Any monologue containing the phrase "Pay, come, and, serve," while still others said, Anything pertaining to a cantorial concert. Rabbah said, Telling people to vote is O.K., but telling them how to vote crosses the line. R. Yosef said,

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MINUTES FROM THE JUNE 7, 1998 MINYAN MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by chair Ronnie Cohen. Approximately 15 people attended.

REPORT ON PROPOSED BY-LAW CHANGE For years a member of the Library Minyan (henceforth LM) has sat on the executive committee of the TBA board. In order to increase the efficiency of the executive committee, several seats are being consolidated and/or eliminated. It is felt that the designated LM seat is no longer necessary since the LM is now fully integrated into TBA, and several members of the LM are board members. Anyone concerned about this change to the by-laws should attend the TBA meeting on June 29.

MINYAN LIST The minyan list has traditionally listed husbands and wives separately. In contrast, couples' names appear together in the TBA data base, from which the LM list is compiled. This discrepancy creates confusion and causes delays in getting out the minyan list. Following the discussion, the following changes to the minyan list were voted upon and passed: 1) Couples with the same last name will henceforth appear together (e.g., "Cohen, Ronnie and Hilda"); 2) Children's names will continue to be listed.; 3) Care will be taken to include work phone numbers for both spouses; 4) e-mail addresses will be included; 5) In cases where husbands and wives have different last names, the family's information will be printed together with the name that appears first alphabetically. The other spouse's name will be followed by "See + the first spouse's name." (Example: Full family information would appear with "Baker, Lida." "Nisenbaum, Paul" would be followed by "See Lida Baker.").

People wishing to be added to the TBA mailing list (as opposed to the LM list) should send e-mail to Sheryl Goldman at: sgoldman@tbala.org

DRASH CONTROVERSY The "controversy": *On days that services are longer because of yizkor or megillah reading, should there be a drash?* Following discussion, the following was approved after a vote of 14 in favor and 4 opposed: When megillah is read and/or when yizkor is said, the drash should be limited to 5 minutes (excluding Yom Kippur). The drash coordinator will inform darshanim of this limitation.

DRASH GUIDELINES There have been complaints about drashot that were too long or otherwise inappropriate. A need for drash guidelines was expressed. It was pointed out that such guidelines, written by Elliot Dorff, already existed. Following discussion, it was agreed that: 1) the drash guidelines would be reprinted in the next issue of the Minyan Monthly; 2) the drash coordinators would give copies of the guidelines to people giving drashot for the first time; 3) the drash coordinators would apprise new darshanim of resources available to them, e.g., rabbis, knowledgeable members of the minyan.

ANNOUNCEMENTS There have been complaints about the number, type, and length of announcements. All three of these subpoints were discussed at length. Finally, by unanimous vote, those attending agreed to the following: 1) Announcements already appearing in the TBA bulletin will not be repeated; 2) Announcements having a commercial intent or content (other than those announcing the availability of housing in the minyan neighborhood) are not permissible (e.g., announcements regarding items for sale, store promotions, or other money-making endeavors); 3) Announcements should not turn into mini-drashes; 4) Announcements should be made from the floor. Speakers should not take it upon themselves to go up to the bimah to make an announcement; 5) Announcements for events at TBA or in the Jewish community should be limited to time and place. There should be no editorializing, particularly of a political nature; 6) We should aim to conclude services by 12:15 p.m. After that, the gabbai has the discretion to limit announcements.

TREASURER'S REPORT The LM treasury currently has \$3050. There was discussion about what to do with this money. Ronnie Cohen was authorized to use \$600 to pay for a Library Minyan ad in the tribute book for Alan Bunnage. Other suggestions: Repair our Torah scrolls and other books; provide High Holiday seats for people in need; sponsor an occasional LM lunch. There was much support for the idea of having a communal meal. The sum of \$1000 was earmarked for the purpose of paying for a lunch and/or expanded kiddush. A committee was established to determine precisely how the money will be spent. Members of the committee are: Jerry Krautman, chair. Alan Broidy, Jennifer Graber and Abby Harris. The committee was given the further charge of organizing other food-related gatherings (e.g., seudah shlishit during the summer) to make the minyan more inviting. A motion that the LM turn over \$100 a month to the TBA treasury for kiddushim was voted down.

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MICROPHONES Discussion centered around the procedure for deciding whether and under what circumstances microphones will be permitted in the LM. The following procedures were approved: 1) There will be a vote by mail in time for implementation (if the measure passes) by the coming High Holidays; 2) Those authorized to vote will include adult members of the minyan as well as post-bar/bat mitzvahs living in their parents' homes; 3) Eligible voters will receive a packet containing a ballot and position papers for and against the use of a microphone. The position papers will be selected by a committee from those previously delivered as drashot and/or those previously printed in the Minyan Monthly. The committee will consist of Ruth Sohn, Joel Grossman, and Mayer Brenner.

The ballot will include three questions, to be worded as follows: 1. Shall microphones be used for High Holidays? 2. Shall microphones be used any other time the service extends to include Kopelove Hall? 3. Shall microphone use be at the discretion of the host family for a bar/bar mitzvah service, regardless of the size of the room?

FULL KRI'AH The issue is whether the LM should read the full Torah portion (as opposed to one-third, our current practice) each week. After some discussion, it was agreed that this issue requires more publicity and discussion before we can vote on it. The following procedure was approved: A "nonpartisan" discussion of the issue will be published in the Minyan Monthly by the end of the July. The discussion will be written by Avi Havivi and Joel Grossman and edited by Henry Morgan and Stan Goldstein. Following the publication of the discussion, a general minyan meeting will be called in early September for the specific purpose of discussing this issue. A vote will take place before Rosh Hashanah. If the measure passes, it will be implemented following the High Holidays.

Minutes were recorded by Lida Baker 🐣

TRIENNIAL VS. FULL TORAH READING *continued from page 1*

Announcing that you're new in the community and that you need a place to rent is O.K., but announcing that you have a place to rent out crosses the line. Others say, There is no line, except when people start shouting at you, or start to sing Adon Olam. Authentic and traditional. Why does the Mishnah claim greater authenticity for the full k'riya? Did we not read the triennial cycle in Eretz Yisrael even until the 12th century, with the full k'riya being the Babylonian practice? Surely the Sages of the Mishnah do not mean to imply that the ertz yisraeli practice was inauthentic? Answered R. Stephanie, Surely it was not; however, their triennial cycle actually made sense—they read the entire Torah consecutively and finished it once every three years, rather than the Conservative practice of chopping every parsha into three, and reading an isolated fragment of narrative weekly, unconnected to last week's or next week's parsha—this way of dividing makes no sense. Also, we end up saying hazak hazak v'nithazek five times in the last year of the cycle, but no times in the first two years—this, too, seems silly. R. Mathis asked, Did they then celebrate Simhat Torah only once every three years? Answered R. Donna, In fact, Simhat Torah as a holiday seems to have been unknown in talmudic times, and first is mentioned only in geonic times—that is, in the early Middle Ages. Gufa (to return to the heart of the matter)—"This way of dividing makes no sense". Said R. Joseph, How about the triennial way of reading the Joseph story—boy, is that a butchery! But said R. Josephine, Well, how would you like to sit through the mind-numbing details of Tabernacle architecture for Tetzaveh-Terumah, then again two weeks later for Vayakhel-Pekudey, in a year when both are double portions? Responded R. Joseph, I want to hear the whole Torah in toto—the whole creation story, Cain and Abel, Balaam's talking donkey, the Sh'ma—every year. Countered R. Josephine, Well, then, you'll get Tabernacle architecture and details of sacrificial entrails and boring censuses in toto, too. Added R. Susie, As the prophet proclaimed, "The wheel is spinnin" and you can't slow it down, you can't let go and you can't hold on" (2 Garcia 15:9)—"The wheel is spinnin"—this refers to the annual Torah reading cycle, which goes around every year; "you can't let go"—if a story is gripping, like Joseph and his Brothers or the Ten Plagues; "and you can't hold on"—this refers to the difficulty one has sitting through a parsha with a census. Importance and centrality. Said R. Meira, The Torah reading is the most important part of the Shabbat morning service, and we should make the time to read it in its entirety. But R. Meir said, This will put pressure on the time available for the d'var Torah, and teaching the meaning of God's message in a language that people can understand is at least as important a part of the service as is reading the message in a tongue many people in shul don't comprehend. Some say that R. Meira retorted, The length of a d'rasha has no correlation with its quality! But others say she said, The

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TREASURERS REPORT

On behalf of the Library Minyan, I thank the following for their contributions to the Library Minyan treasury.
Dale Bodenstein, Minyan Treasurer

Linda Amit: in honor of Renalee Pflug and Abby Harris for a great Women's Havurah weekend

Fredda and Avrum Lowenstein: Library Minyan kiddush fund

Jeff Marder and Cathy Engel-Marder: in honor of Norm and Rachel Green for their Pesach hospitality

Batya, David and Rebecca Ordin: in memory of James Jonas, father of Val Goldstein

Darlene and Abe Schlossberg: condolences to Rachel Siegel on the loss of her father Mayer Novak

Arthur and Susan Mishler: in memory of Rabbi Chaim Grossman, father of Joel Grossman

Danila Oder: contribution to the Library Minyan

Shana Fisk: contribution to the Library Minyan

Trudy Roth and Nomi Roth Elbert: in memory of Harold Roth & gratitude for all of your nurturing and support

Rosanne Keynan and Jonathan Flier: in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Eitan Weinstock, in honor of the birth of Yonina Beth Havivi, in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Shmuel Cohan-Link, in honor of Rabbi Karen Fox and her new position at Wilshire Blvd. Temple, and in memory of Harold Roth, father of Nomi Roth Elbert

Bessie Bass, Jerry Bass, and Alan Bass: in memory of Rabbi Chaim Grossman, father of Joel Grossman

Cathie, Jules, Stuart and Jeff Kamin Lippman: in memory of the father of Rabbi Joel Rembaum, in honor of the Bar Mitzvah of Eitan Weinstock, in memory of Harry Breverman, father of Freddi Rembaum, in memory of Mayer Novak, father of Rachel Siegel, and in honor of new baby Yonina Beth Havivi, in honor of new baby Arielle Yonah Sunshine, daughter of M/M Elon Sunshine

For Torah Aliyot: Brad and Sharon Grob and Dr. Baruch Link

Simchat Torah Pledges: Eric Chaim Kline Joseph, Marizon Nimoy, Avi Havivi, and Deborah Schmidt

**Thank you to everyone for your most generous donations. Mail future donations to
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*Please be of service to
 your Library Minyan
 The following service positions are vacant:
 Torah and Haftorah Reading
 Shabbat and Holiday Gabai'im
 To enquire, call current volunteers.*

Guidelines for Giving a D'var Torah in the Libray Minyan

≈by Elliot Dorff

One of the things that makes this minyan special is that from week to week a whole variety of people bring their own unique life experiences and perspectives to bear in interpreting the Torah. Your D'var Torah, we are sure, will add significantly to the richness of the Library Minyan experience for us all.

The very fact that we ask as many people as possible volunteer to give a D'var Torah inevitably means that many people who do so have little or no experience in doing this. No one form or approach is recommended; on the contrary, part of the interest in each D'var Torah comes not only from its content, but from the particular way in which the person frames his/her thoughts. Still, several guidelines have emerged over the years which you should be aware of:

- **DO NOT** summarize the entire Torah reading.

Bring to people's attention only the specific part of the Torah reading on which you will be focusing.

- **DO NOT** toss out a long list of ideas which occurred to you as you read the Torah reading. As interesting as they all may be, people will lose you after the second one you mention and will wonder what would happen if you explored the first one you mentioned.

- **DO** focus on ONE issue in the Torah reading. You may bring in all kinds of materials on that issues, from general as well as Jewish Literature, but help your listeners by making the topic of your D'var Torah clear throughout your presentation by indicating how the material you are mentioning relates to your topic.

- Some of the best Divrei Torah last ten minutes. In no case (except the High Holy Days) should a D'var Torah last more than fifteen minutes. If you are reading your D'var Torah, that means a maximum of five, double-spaced pages. There will be plenty of opportunities to talk about other ideas on other occasions or even develop this one further. Remember what they say in show business: Leave them wanting more!

- If you are not used to speaking, you probably will want to type out your talk the first time. As you gain experience,

though, think of speaking from an outline so that you can have more eye contact with your audience. As you gain even more experience, think of engaging the group in a discussion of your topic. You will need to frame that discussion by identifying the topic, providing a source or two to get people thinking about it, and then asking a leading question. Be prepared to hear perspectives you never thought of! If you do this, note that you need not comment on what each participant contributes, but you may comment on those remarks which evoke some specific reaction in you based on what you have read in preparation for this discussion. Also be prepared to STOP the discussion by the fifteen-minute limit!

- Many first-time speakers ask for resources to get them thinking. The most popular Jewish resources are the Hertz commentary we use at Beth Am (which is generally good, but sometimes much too apologetic), the Gunther Plaut one-volume commentary published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the new, five-volume commentary (one of each book of the Torah) published by the Jewish Publication Society. In each case, consult not only the comments on the page of Torah text but also the essays at the end of the section or book of the Torah. The Anchor Bible series, the Westminster Bible series, and the Interpreters' bible, while not generally by Jewish authors, may also provide some interesting insights into the Torah reading. Feel free to disagree with any or all of both the non-Jewish and Jewish sources: that is what developing Jewish commentary is all about!

For classical Rabbinic commentaries translated into English on Genesis and the first half of Exodus, you can use the Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation which is available in the Beth Am Library. Nechama Leibovitz' comments on the Torah, which use many classical materials, have also been translated into English as Studies in Genesis, Studies in Exodus, etc. Some people also use the Artscroll series, but beware of superstition and gullibility in its comments! (The Rabbinical Assembly and Jewish Publication Society are in the process of creating a one-volume commentary with traditional and modern midrash and legal, literary,

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theological comments. That should be ready in 1998 or 1999, and it will eventually replace Hertz in most Conservative synagogues.) Sometimes different translations of the Bible provide fresh perspectives on specific passages. See, for example, the new translation by Everett Fox.

By all means, feel free to bring in materials from general literature, politics, philosophy, etc. Often the most interesting Divrei Torah are those in which people bring in their own professional expertise or their own life experiences to illustrate the biblical text or argue with it. Remember that this D'var Torah is meant to be your perspective; the commentaries of the people who came before you may help you to do your own thinking, but they should not intimidate you. You too are a Jew who has a right—maybe even the duty—to hear the message of Sinai anew.

If you would like to volunteer to give a D'var Torah, please call Cathy Ann Lippman or Rachel Green. We look forward to learning from you. 🌸

TRIENNIAL VS. FULL TORAH READING *continued from page 3*

length of a d'rasha has an inverse correlation with its quality! R. Meira also said, Bring something to read, just in case. Elsewhere we learn that R. Meira expounded, What does Scripture mean when it says, "When thou arguest before Me thy voice is an abomination" (Max 27:21)?—this refers to a d'rasha about politics. But others say she said, This refers to a d'rasha about politics, but only if I disagree.

The full reading is too long. Said R. Ammi, Once I attended a trade show in R. Assi's town and davened at his synagogue on Shabbat morning; they read the full reading, and it was Vayakhel-Pekudey, and I heard R. Assi mutter to himself, Too long. But others report that R. Assi really said, Interminable, or even that he may have uttered, Cruel and unusual punishment. R. Ammi added, And this is even worse if a Torah reader is poorly prepared, as is sometimes the custom at the Library Minyan. R. Elazar ben Azariah said, Here I am seventy years old, and I never understood what too long was until Ben Zoma explained the verse, "That thou shalt read the Book of thy Lord all the days of thy life" (Samantha 41:19)—"The days of thy life"—this is the triennial reading; all the days of thy life"—this refers to Vayakhel-Pekudey, when read in their entirety in a year when they are combined, by a reader who has prepared poorly. R. Ammi also said, Our service already is too long—in former times, I might be eating cholent by noon, and now, I am lucky to make Hamotzi by one—you will lengthen the Torah reading, and I will not even have time to say Birkat Hamazon before Havdalah during the short winter months! Said R. Mani, There are ways to compensate for the increased length. We could start services 15 minutes earlier, or we could start at the regular time with Shochan Ad, and anyone who wanted to daven Pesukei D'zimra could come early and daven it to themselves, as some shuls already do—in fact, we could experiment with doing it different ways to see which seemed to work the best. We do not have enough Torah readers. Said R. Avi, I have commitments from six Torah readers to read up to the full k'riya on a rotating basis—this will be covered. But R. Stan said, These may be fair-weather liners, who promise now but fade later. R. Avi responded, If doing a full reading becomes difficult or impossible to sustain over time, we can always reevaluate and consider going back to the triennial. R. Stan questioned further, And who will get up to pinch-hit when someone no-shows? Answered R. Avi, We need not be rigid about this; if the assigned reader flakes out and forgets to come to shul, as is sometimes the custom in the Library Minyan, the Gabbai should have the right to make a common-sense decision that we will read only the triennial portion that Shabbat—this is, after all, a Minyan decision, not an edict from Sinai. R. Stan objected further, But with a full reading, aliyot will be longer, and there will be fewer short ones available to assign to less experienced readers, and we will end up hearing the same small group of readers do almost everything. Answered R. Avi, As far as I know, aliya divisions are not from Sinai either; we could plan in advance to do some aliya breaks differently than in the printed Chumash, to ensure that there will be aliyot available for readers of all sizes. R. Meir says, Both positions are valid and acceptable. Here R. Meir teaches that this is not an issue of halacha, but of custom, as R. Elliot Dorff already has written in his responsum on the triennial cycle. In fact, we could even consider adopting the full reading as the norm, but with allowable specified exceptions, e.g., Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, exceedingly long portions, weeks when we want to finish early to hear a special speaker in the main sanctuary, or weeks when enough Torah readers simply are unavailable. Despite the fact that this is the Library Minyan, no one should get bent out of shape about trying something out in a flexible way. R. Meir also said in reference to this, The debate about the Torah reading is a machloket l'shem shamayim, a dispute for the sake of Heaven. He also said, Elu v'elu divrei elohim hayyim—both positions are the words of the living God. 🌸