



TEMPLE EMANUEL OF NORTH JERSEY

A welcoming, Conservative, egalitarian, spiritual community

Welcomes you to our Shabbat Services

Shabbat Eikev | August 11, 2017 | 20 Av 5777

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sundays with Sokol

Sunday, August 13, 2:00 p.m.

If you are interested in seeing the classic silent 1924 Harold Lloyd comedy film "Safety Last" on Sunday August 13, please notify the office.

Haftarah Commentary by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem

After the exile at the hands of the Babylonians, it was totally reasonable for the people of Judea to experience insecurity. It was totally understandable for some to feel that the nation would never be rebuilt and that the exile to Babylonia would never end. While the prophet Jeremiah's message of defeat and exile was also marked with elements of hope amidst the despair, his message was very much shaped by the idea of divine abandonment. This idea was perpetuated by one very forceful image. Jeremiah compared the relationship between the harried nation and God to that of a married couple whose marriage was deeply troubled, potentially warranting divorce: "I noted: Because rebel Israel had committed adultery, I cast her off (shilakhteha) and handed her a bill of divorce (sefer krituteha): yet her sister, faithless Judah, was not afraid – she too went and whored." (Jeremiah 3:8)

This message likely haunted the exiles who lacked any surety that their relationship with God could be mended. The prophet Isaiah attempted to answer this insecurity by using the very same language used by Jeremiah to answer those who might be wary of reestablishing the nation after exile and returning to it: "Thus said the Lord: 'Where is the bill of divorce (sefer kritut) of your mother that I dismissed (shilakhteha)? And to which of My creditors did I sell you off? You were only sold off for your sins, and your mother dismissed for your crimes.'" (Isaiah 50:1) God, here, informs the exiles that there was no divorce between them and God actually and consequently their exile was not permanent.

Now what was necessary was to convince the people to renew their faith in God. To this end, Isaiah offers words of encouragement to remind the people of God's ability to save them: "Why, when I (God) came was no one there? Why when I call would no one respond? Is My hand then too short to rescue? Have I not the power to save? With a mere rebuke I dry up the sea and turn rivers into desert..." (50:2)

The rhetorical force of this message was to convince the exilic community that the return home from Babylonia was realistic. God was not only reconciled with His people but also had the ability to restore them to their homeland. The conciliation offered in this message was not one of quiescence. It was a call to action whose fruition required them to know that God "had their back".

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Shabbat Eikev

Annual (Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25): Etz Hayim p. 1037-1054

Haftarah (Isaiah 49:14-51:3): Etz Hayim p. 1055-1060

**By: Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson,
VP, Abner & Roslyn Goldstine Dean's Chair, Ziegler School**

Walk into any synagogue and you'll see them in the sanctuary. Generally, they're above the Aron (the Ark), or on a wall. Walk into many churches and you'll be greeted by the same sight. The two tablets of the Ten Commandments have become the eloquent symbols of religion, good and decency throughout the western world. Those few words have shaped nations and stirred souls. The simple yet clear instructions of how to live in relation to God and with each other have never been fully attained, let alone surpassed. Each generation reads them anew, and each has found something fresh and abiding in them to transmit to posterity. In fact, the Ten Commandments are so common that we risk taking them for granted. They are so familiar that we presume an intimacy in which basic questions are simply assumed.

But let's pause and ask one easy question. Given that the Ten Commandments are so terse, why did God command the use of two tablets instead of one? After all, in the Torah's record of revelation at Sinai, God seem concerned not only with the message, but with the medium too: "Thereupon the Lord said to me, 'Carve out two tablets of stone...' Omniscient even with PR, God knew that the shape of those tablets would attain a significance equal to the words recorded there. So, again, we can ask, why two? "It takes two to make our dreams come true," a song on the radio regularly reminds us. An American proverb holds that, "Two heads are better than one." Why? Perhaps Jewish law can help here.

According to the 'halakhah' (rabbinic law), a criminal conviction requires the testimony of at least two concurring witnesses. So significant is this ruling that pages and pages of Talmudic debate focus on the requirements of who may (or may not) testify, what testimony is admissible, and what the penalties are for false testimony. Running throughout this requirement of two witnesses is the assumption that any one person is fallible. Each of us has our own passions, our own foibles and our own biases. We filter what we see and what we are willing to understand through our unique personality and preferences, which can result in unusual insights, and can also result in distortions of reality. The easiest way to correct that distortion is to

involve another human being, someone whose blind-spots differ from those of the first. Two is better than one because two can perceive reality better than one.

A second thought on twos: The classical Jewish mode of study is not that of a solitary scholar sitting alone, as we find in western academia. Instead, Jewish sages study in 'havruta,' in fellowship. Two or more Jews read the same text (out loud, of course!) and then discuss, probe, question and argue. As a result of their shared discourse and their voluble discussion, their knowledge of what they read is that much more solid, and their voices join in a debate and dialogue that is as ancient as Judaism itself. Perhaps for this reason, the sages of the Mishnah worked in zugot (pairs). Two is better than one because it allows for a dynamic of profundity and involvement.

Two is also the number of lovers. Love requires an exchange between two people. It multiplies in the give-and-take of two. And two is the number of twins. Midrash Devarim Rabbah records the same question. "Why two? The Rabbis say, "The Holy Blessing One said, 'Those [tablets] shall act as witnesses between Me and My children. They correspond to two witnesses, to two agents for groom and bride, to hattan (groom) and kallah (bride), to heaven and earth, to this world and the Coming World.' "

The two tablets of stone are like the two witnesses required by Jewish law. They can testify to our obedience to God's will or they can highlight our failure to rise to the level that Judaism demands. But they are also more than just legal watchdogs. Our sages are reminding us that good things come in pairs-like heaven and earth, like a boy and a girl. Two really is better than one.

Amen.

Shabbat Shalom!