

Friday January 21, 2011 Candle Lighting 4:36 pm

This week's Torah reading: YITRO

Annual: Ex. 18:1 – 20:23 (Etz Hayim, p. 432)

Triennial: Ex. 18:1 – 18:27 (Etz Hayim, p. 432)

Haftarah: Isaiah 6:1 – 7:6; 9:5-6 (Etz Hayim, p. 452)

Shabbat Morning 9:30

Old Whaler's Church, Sag Harbor

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**Musings on Yitro -- Standing at Sinai *Atem Nitzavim Hayom Culchem***

Because it was the defining moment, we are bound to ask, did the Eternal One address everyone – or only the males? Just prior to Revelation the Eternal One declares to Moses: 'Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel' (Exodus 19:3). Interpreting what looks like repetition, we find this comment in *Mechilta*, a collection of rabbinic *midrash*: 'The house of Jacob refers to the women; the children of Israel to the men', indicating that both women and men were included. But then something curious happens. We read (19:10-11): 'The Eternal One said to Moses: "Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, / and be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Eternal One will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai"'. But then, when Moses is repeating this instruction, he only addresses the men (19:15): 'Then he said to the people; "be ready for the third day; do not come near a woman".'

So, did the women enter the covenant with the Eternal One, or were they simply onlookers? Did the Eternal One address **all** the people, or were they excluded? The comment in *Mechilta* suggests **inclusion** – but if we examine the comment more closely, we see that it also suggests **segregation** – again: 'The house of Jacob refers to the women; the children of Israel to the men'. Rabbinic teaching makes it clear that while men are responsible for the public realm of Jewish life, women are confined to the home, where, exempt from prayer and study, their main obligations centre on lighting the *Shabbat* and festival candles, dividing the *challah* dough, and maintaining the laws of family purity – *taharat ha-mishpachah*. Women are included, but their role within Jewish life, defined by men, is privatised and limited (see, for example, *Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin* 33b-35a).

<http://www.brightonandhoveprosynagogue.org.uk/articles/who-was-standing-at-sinai-a-commentary-on-yitro/>

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According to Judith S. Antonelli in her book, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995), there is another entirely different possibility, one that I like best of all. It goes as follows: There were actually two different meetings about the Revelation. While Moses was speaking to the men and telling them not to go near the women, Miriam was speaking to the women and telling them not to go near the men. And why was it necessary for men and women to be instructed separately? Says Antonelli, "Thus, like crossing the Red Sea, receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai was an extremely intense spiritual experience at which men and women were separate." Later on she adds, "Not only the experiences of the sexes differed, but each individual's encounter with God varied according to his or her personal capacity."

<http://www.bajcvermont.org/torah/yitro.pdf>

MIRIAM'S WAY by Carol Ochs

At Sinai, the Children of Israel received the Torah. That same time of revelation also saw the first explicit teaching of Miriam's Way. Mount Sinai towered above the Israelites, the shofar blared, the thunder roared, and some of the people, in terror, told Moses:

"You speak to us, . . . and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die. . . ." So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. (Exod. 20:16-19)

Moses went up the mountain, and the revelation intended for all the people became, instead, a personal one. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, Aaron was collecting gold out of which to fashion a molten calf. Where was Miriam? According to our new midrash, Miriam gave her first teaching at this decisive time. In Moses' prolonged absence, the people grew restive and frightened, and the men planned for war. But the children still had to be cared for and the meals prepared. Miriam visited the women one at a time, as they cooked and stirred, rocked their children and comforted them, and she pointed out, "Revelation is taking place right now as you cook and comfort, tend the fires, and nurse the young."

The men were left without anything when Moses ascended Sinai. They had been taken out of their former role as slaves, but now Moses, who had given them their vision of freedom, had disappeared in the cloud on the mountain, and they were left without guidance. The women, meanwhile, returned to their tents, and Miriam was telling them that in their tasks and chores they would experience revelation.

Through these tasks and chores they had created worlds -- of feeding their families, of caring for their children -- and these worlds sustained them. They did not understand the meaning of either the men's panic or their own steadiness; least of all did they grasp how their daily work was related to revelation. Only as Miriam spoke with them, one by one, did they begin to see that the very future of the Israelites was at stake. When Moses returned and smashed the Tablets of the Law, and three thousand were put to the sword that day, the women comforted the living, tended the orphans, and mourned, while nursing those who suffered from plague. All the while, Miriam reminded the women that this was revelation: birth and family, dailiness and death.

<http://www.crosscurrents.org/Miriamsway.htm>

The Words of the Women at Sinai by Rabbi Steven Nathan

Dedicated to Judith Plaskow, Merle Feld, R. Jill Hammer, R. Ruth Sohn, R. Elyse Goldstein, R. Sue Levi Elwell and so many others who have given voice to the women of the Torah. May we all, men and women alike, continue to discover the voices of those who have been forgotten, oppressed and marginalized within our tradition - as well as other traditions - throughout history and until this day. Only then can we truly say that God will be One and God's name One for us all.

I am Zipporah
I am my beloved's
My beloved is mine
No

I was my father's
I am now my husband's
No one is mine
I do not exist
Alone
Joyous reunion
I am not there
The men embrace
Father-in-law to Son-in-law
Ignoring the essential ingredient
Catalyst
Of their relationship
Without daughterwife
They are nothing
But two strangers
They do not care
Alone
Together
With each other
I am indispensable dispensable
I am only the mother of boys
Who will grow
To be
Like them
Perhaps

I am Miriam
I am a prophetess
A visionary
It says so in the Torah
Yet
You must not come near
I am impure
I am polluting
I am powerful
Do not come near
Do not touch me
Do not touch my fruit
Lest your spirit die
Leaving you
Unable to receive
Revelation
Redemption
Divinity

We are women
Fit
For giving birth
Raising sons
Saving brothers from death
Able
To lead the women in song
Not
To lead us all to freedom

We remain behind
With the children
The others
Standing
in the margins
Watching
the men
Waiting
To clean up

We are sisters
Standing
At Sinai
Hearing
God's voice
Together
Separate

We call to you
The men
We challenge you
To come near
To embrace us

Then
We can
Listen
Hear
The Divine voice
Together

Prepare for the third day
Do not go near a woman

Those words
Not from God
From Moses
We do not
Hear them
We do not
Recognize them
They have
No power
Unless we will it

Listen
to us
Listen
to God
Pay Attention
We cry out
To them
In vain

They do not hear
Us
They only hear
Him
and him

Again
We join together
As One
As sisters
As always

Far from the noise
The thunder
The lightning
Clear of all
The smoke
The men

Yet
We can hear
The small voice
The True Voice
From behind the clouds
Within us
The voice
They will never hear
Unless they listen
With their hearts
Not their ears
With Love
Not fear
Embracing
Not trembling

So much we can teach them
If they would only listen
Let us in
Perhaps some day
Then
We will all receive
Redemption
As
One
Forever standing
Together
At Sinai

<http://mindfultorah.blogspot.com/2010/02/parshat-yitro-voices-of-women-at-sinai.html>

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**Did You Know...** All forms of the Tanakh used today are forms of what is known as the Masoretic Text, abbreviated "MT," named after the medieval scholars (the Masoretes) who

labored for several centuries to produce the most accurate text they could. The MT in use today is based on Masoretic manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries C.E., themselves based on older manuscripts. It has been largely unchanged since late Second Temple times (ca. the third century B.C.E., as reflected in the earliest of the Dead Sea scrolls from Qumran). But although the text has been largely unchanged, there is a large number of variant readings, most of which do not materially change the meaning of the text, but drastically affect the number of letters it contains. In fact, in the oldest complete manuscript of the entire Bible, Leningrad Codex B19A which was finished in 1009 C.E., the Torah has some 45 letters more than the 304,805 of the Koren edition .

<http://rabbionanarrowbridge.blogspot.com/search/label/revelation>

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Mazel Tov and Yasher Koach –

Lenore Weitzman on being honored as the keynote speaker at the United Nations this Thursday, January 27, 2011, for their Holocaust Remembrance Day.

End Quote --

"We are commanded to love our neighbor: this must mean that we can."

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Shabbat shalom.

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