



Shlomo's Drash



תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך

"IT IS A MATTER OF TORAH AND I NEED TO LEARN" BER 62A

Parshat Shavuot Special Edition 5764

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Well, I'm back from vacation.

This is my Shavuot piece for this year, a view of my experience of my Alaskan cruise. This year Shavuot came early for me on the 44th instead of the 50th day of the Omer. That day I came to a mountain and river, and the river was ice: the Hubbard glacier.

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself." (Ex 19:4)

The Bald eagle is not rare in Alaska. They are actually rather common, perched on rocks, trees, buoys and Buildings. As the salmon and hooligan begin their swim upstream, the eagles begin to hunt for food both for themselves, their mate and soon the hatchlings in the their immense nests. While the hooligan is a small fish, the King Salmon is not, and eagle must be careful to fish for such prey in shallow water. Eagles, once they lift a prey with their claws, cannot let go. If the salmon were to dive, it would take the eagle with it, drowning the bird.



On the fourth day, near Juneau, we are floating by a Humpback whale and its calf, excitedly taking pictures as the two surface 100 yards away from our whale-watch jetboat. An Eagle crosses overhead and dives towards the water. As he (or She) struggles with a fish in deep waters I wonder how much of a risk God took on us. One he lifted us up, God could not let us go. If we dove too deep, would we bring God down with us to drown?

"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightning, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the sound of a shofar exceedingly loud; so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. (Ex. 19:16)"

On the sixth day of the voyage, after several days of sunshine, we awoke to total fog. The snow-capped mountains we had become accustomed to surrounding us are now obscured in cloud. We could not even see the waves on the water from our 9th deck cabin balconies. The only sound that could be heard was the loud call of our ships foghorn near bow of the ship. So loud is the horn that even with the outside doors of our aft cabins closed, 1/8 of a mile behind the horn we cannot sleep. We go to breakfast, the ship and the land surrounded by fog. As we sit down to breakfast, a big dark outline begins to form out the window. As the outline become more

distinct, the fog becomes brighter. And starting low and moving higher the fog clears. When we finish breakfast the last wisps of fog disappear behind us. But behind us now is an immense wall of fog, but above is blue sky. Before us in crystal clarity are mountains and two seemingly thin ribbons of white: The bigger of the two ribbons is Hubbard glacier. We begin to see in the water icebergs, banded floating platforms of white, brown and sapphire blue. The blue is from Ice so compressed, only blue light can escape.



We begin to hear a crackle as these massive chunks of ice float by the MS Ryndam, melting as they head towards the warmer waters of the Pacific Ocean. Then we begin to hear the thunder. Unlike the thunder of a storm, it is not loud but it is deeper and more powerful. The foghorn has stopped, there is silence, only punctuated by the sound of this thunder. It is the sound of several tons of white-blue ice falling off a 300-foot wall of ice into the cold, deep water below. We are still too far away to see this: we can only hear the sound. We approach closer. With binoculars and telephoto lens we see it. Chunks of ice falling off the glacier into the water. At five miles away, and with no frame of reference such as a house or tree, it is impossible to comprehend what is happening in front of us, how big these pieces truly are.

We are told that the ribbon in front of us is six miles wide, 300 feet thick. It does not care about boundaries and nations: it runs through both Canada and the U.S. It slowly Grinds and these nations and mountains in them into dust, which it pushes into the turbid water below us. We get as close as is safe a mile and a half away. Even at that distance, it is still huge. We now see clearly the caving: the chunks of the wall of ice falling into the water below, creating splashes hundreds of feet high and wide. Some are like waterfalls of ice as smaller pieces fall off the glacier in the aftermath of the large chunks.



Then there is a sound of collective awe as a hundred foot wide, two hundred-foot long piece of wall falls off into the water. Seconds follow in silence, except for the sound of camera shutters recording the event in front of us. Then the thunder sounds. The bay below is filled with white-blue.

“And the Lord said to Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.” (Ex 19:21)

It is traditional to pass by the glacier closer and present both sides of the boat towards the glacier. But the Captain and Pilot must have decided differently. We present one side then turn for the sea. The icebergs are floating in our direction. Slowly we move away. As we do, a White and blue iceberg sixty feet across moves toward the bow. We slowly turn to avoid it, but it follows. Caught in the wake of the bow it does move past us, but rather close. AS we move away into



waters free of ice, we begin to increase speed. The wall of fog looms before us. First small wisps above us, eventually gray cloud surrounds us once again.

“And God spoke all these words, saying: I am the Lord your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for you any engraved image, or any likeness of any

thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy to thousand (generation) of those who love me, and keep my commandments.” (Ex. 20:1-6)

There is little to compare Alaska to Sinai except for wilderness, mountains and at least in ancient



times brown bears. But in Yakutat bay looking at Hubbard Glacier, I have had an experience so like Sinai I cannot ignore it. Yes at Sinai there was fire where here there is only ice. But the awesomeness of the event is analogous. And now that I am home again it causes me to reflect on my question of the eagle and the salmon. We are not the salmon, we too are eagles. Bald eagles mate for life. Both male and female share in almost every task, from home maintenance to guarding the young to providing food for the entire nestbound family. In the covenant with God, we are a mate, not food. The first few commandments are about

maintaining that relationship. Other empty or multiple relationships, known as Idolatry, are not to be tolerated.

A month ago, a teacher I truly respected crushed some the work I have been engaged in for many years. It was not intentional. His view of being Jewish is just different from mine. The point of contention is the Song of Songs. Like many very traditional Orthodox, though by no means all, he denies there is anything erotic in the Song of Songs. Instead what appears to be erotic is a symbol for historical events, or in some cases what will happen when the Messiah comes. This was the view of the Targum, and Rashi's commentary. It does however allow for the very un-eagle like behavior of male and female being different and unequal.

My view is different. I believe the Erotic imagery is there intentionally. It is vital to understand the message. I believe one very strong theme of the song concerns true love and monogamy. Such things can best be described in sexual terms, in the conversation between lovers. Not just two people having sex, but two people, equal but each with their own strengths, so intimately connected to each other, there is nothing but that other person. Towards the end, one voice, the male lover most likely, declares in the Song that the thousand of King Solomon, Solomon can keep. The male lover needs only one. Solomon's concubines and wives totaled a thousand. The male only needs his one wife not a thousand lovers. The male lover also declares twice to his

female partner that she has eyes like doves. Doves, like eagles, mate for life. If that partner dies or disappears they will not mate again. To have the eye of dove is to have eyes only for one's mate.

For Shavuot, we celebrate that at Sinai we entered into that monogamy, though we still are trying to completely fulfill our commitment. It is hard to be an eagle or a dove. The Torah may provide the rules, but the heart is there in the Song of Songs. I lost that in the world which only sees the rules and not the heart. I needed to go into the wilderness of Alaska to find that heart again, and arrive at another awesome mountain of cloud, thunder Ice and the sound of the horn to once again truly feel.

May you all have a great and joyous holiday.