

Sayings & Sayers of the Sidrah

Rabbi Abahu

by Rabbi Samuel Landau, Kingston, Surbiton & District United Synagogue

Chumash: "And you shall make two gold cherubs, you shall make them of hammered work, from the two ends of the Ark cover". (Shemot 25:18)

Talmud: "What is the meaning of 'cherub' (*ke -rub*)? Rabbi Abahu said: 'Like a child (*Ke = like, Rub = child*), for in Babylonia a child is called *Rabia*'.

Rabbi Abahu lived towards the end of 3rd century CE. He was the rector of the Academy in Caesarea and studied in Tiberias. Rabbi Abahu was a handsome and charismatic figure, making him not only popular with the Jewish inhabitants but also the Roman proconsular government. He spoke and studied Greek to allow him to interact easily with the ruling class. Indeed, the quotation above demonstrates his command of language.

Rabbi Abahu formalised the structure of shofar blasts that we follow in the Rosh Hashanah machzor (festival prayer book). He not only taught the connection between the ram's horn and the binding of Yitzchak

(Isaac) which we recall on Rosh Hashanah but also created the note arrangements used. This arose from a question as to whether the crying sound of the shofar is formed from nine sharp shrieks (*teruah*) or three mournful wails (*shevarim*). The two were combined by Rabbi Abahu into one (*shevarim-teruah*).

His imposing presence endowed him with the skills to debate and challenge neo-Christian polemic and missionary activity. He sometimes did this in a dismissive manner, sometimes in a more sophisticated one. For example, he often cited Biblical verses alluding to mistakes within developing Christian theology.

Despite the power that he commanded, he was a man of intense modesty. On one occasion, he delivered a lecture and drew such an audience that it resulted in a competing lecturer only gathering a paltry few listeners. Rabbi Abahu was so concerned that he may have slighted his colleague that he pursued him for the rest of the day in order to beg for forgiveness.



The Three Pillars

by Rabbi Dr Moshe Freedman

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In his epic Biblical poem *Shir HaShirim* (Song of Songs), King Shlomo (Solomon) uses the analogy of a bride and groom to describe the relationship between the Jewish people and G-d (respectively). The story of the Exodus can be viewed with the same analogy.

Exiled in Egypt, the Jewish people had no real connection to G-d. In fact, in the beginning, when the Israelites were suffering from the harsh decrees of the wicked Pharaoh, the Torah does not say that the Israelites pleaded to G-d, but that they merely "cried out" (Shemot 2:23).

Furthermore, the purpose of the plagues was not only to break the exile, but to make G-d known to Pharaoh, the Egyptians and the fledgling Israelite nation. Subsequently, the Jewish people are redeemed and brought to the foot of Mount Sinai.



To continue King Shlomo's analogy, this is akin to two individuals who as yet have no connection with one another, but start to become acquainted. As the couple's relationship builds, it reaches a point where a proposal is made and the wedding ceremony takes place. Similarly, G-d proposes an everlasting covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. G-d proposes to Israel, offering the covenant and the people respond with '*Na'aseh Venishmah*' and Divine Revelation takes place.

The next stage is that the couple must set up home together. This is represented by the primary command given in this week's portion. The Tabernacle (*Mishkan*) is the portable sanctuary which the Jewish people will take with them on their journey through the desert on their way to the Land of Israel (Shemot 25:8).

One of the details of the *Mishkan* was that there was a middle bar inside the planks of the walls which extended from end to end (Shemot 26:28).

The Aramaic translation (attributed to Yonatan ben Uzziel, 1st century CE) notes that this middle bar was made from the wood of a tree planted by Avraham in Be'er Sheva (see Bereishit 21:33). This is in line with one interpretation of the

Talmud (Sotah 10a), that the tree was from an orchard that bore the fruits which Avraham served to his guests. The other explanation of the Talmud is that the Torah is referring to the inn where the guests stayed. Either way, the middle bar represented Avraham's trait of *gemilut chasadim* – acts of loving-kindness towards others.

The Mishnah states that the world stands on three things;

Torah, *avodah* (the service of G-d) and *gemilut chasadim* (Pirkei Avot, Ethics of Our Fathers 1:2, see green siddur p.524). The Mishkan was the first house which brought G-d and the Jewish people together with the Torah, housed in the Ark of the Covenant. It also contained the service of G-d through the offerings brought. Yet it was the wood from Avraham's tree, representing acts of kindness towards others that held the entire structure together.

Similarly, a Jewish home must be based on the principles of Torah, as expressed through Jewish law and customs. Secondly, it must be a place where relationships are built and nurtured. The building of a Jewish home as a bastion of Judaism is *avodah*. But thirdly, it must be a place which reaches out to others in order to bolster the wider community (*gemilut chasidim*). With these three pillars, we help to weave the fabric for better homes and in turn a better society for all.



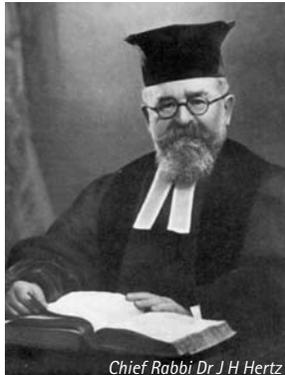
There was an undercurrent of mixed emotions on Shabbat 25 April 1936. It was the last Shabbat of the Hambro Synagogue, Adler Street. With the closure of the Hambro, its members were to rejoin the Great Synagogue, a community that Hambro had broken away from in 1707:

Marcus Hamburger, who was married to Freudiche, daughter of Glueckel of Hameln (the German-Jewish Pepys) founded this community after being excommunicated for criticising a conditional divorce arranged by Aaron Hart, Rabbi of the Great Synagogue. There was no love lost between him and Reb Aberle, President of the Great - they had both courted Freudiche and Hamburger had won.

The *cherem* (excommunication) started just before Rosh Hashanah. Wherever Hamburger appeared, he was labelled a 'heretic'. His business at a standstill, he was even denied the privilege of giving charity, as paupers would not visit him. He was not called to the Torah over the High Holidays, nor was he allowed to name his newly born daughter. The only way forward was to start a minyan in his home in Fenchurch Street. It was named Hambro in acknowledgement of its strict adherence to the Hamburg prayer ritual. This served as the synagogue until 1725 when a beautiful building was constructed in Hamburger's garden. In 1706 Rabbi Aaron Hart recorded these events in *Urim ve Tumim*, the first book in England to be published entirely in Hebrew. The *cherem* was rescinded by 1750; for a time Hambro and 'the Great' shared a Rabbi, Hart Lyon. Argument broke out again in 1765 over should be the next joint Rabbi, a position contested by Rabbi Israel Meshullam

Zalman and Rabbi David Tevele Schiff.

Hambro, the most traditional of the City congregations, always appointed scholarly chazanim. Rev Herman Hoelzel (1845-52) wrote a German and English translation of all four volumes of the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law. He mastered English and gave lectures to the congregation. However, he was not allowed to do so in front of the Ark, this being reserved for the Chief Rabbi. He eventually moved to Australia to become Presiding Rabbi for the Colonies.



Chief Rabbi Dr J H Hertz

Rev Samuel Marcus Gollancz (1854-1899) succeeded him. He studied under the renowned Rabbi Akiva Eiger and Rabbi Israel Lipshitz (the *Tiferet Yisrael*). His autobiography 'Biographical Sketches' was translated and published by his distinguished son Rabbi Sir Hermann Gollancz. It offers a fascinating insight into 19th century Jewish life in Europe.

The Hambro was an original constituent member of the United Synagogue in 1870. However, influential members left the City, causing financial difficulties. The building was closed down in 1892. Yet after seven years of struggle and argument, the New Hambro opened. 1925 saw the Bicentenary celebrations at which Chief Rabbi Dr J H Hertz remarked that whilst some had said that the Hambro's glory had departed, "the great men of Anglo-Jewry wished to give it a new sphere of labour and make it a power for spiritual good".

The mahogany doors taken from the old Hambro Synagogue finally closed in 1936. Hambro had come full circle as it rejoined the Great Synagogue once again.

How Time Flies

by Rabbi Daniel Fine, Living & Learning Israel Educator

Many notable events took place during this week in history. On 27 January Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756) and Lewis Carroll (1832) were born. On 28 January 1807 London's Pall Mall became the first gaslight-lit street. On 29 January Thomas Paine was born (1736), the petrol-driven car was patented (1886) and Thomas Edison (who invented the light bulb) was recognised for his contributions.

It is amazing to think how quickly society has changed. Just 250 years old, America is now the world superpower. Within 300 years, technology has seen us move from 5 mph cars and cherishing the light-bulb to Formula One and to compact, sophisticated ways of wirelessly connecting to people. And one dreads to think what Mozart would have thought of today's digitally-created music!

Technology is a wonderful gift. For parents to speak to their children and grandchildren, or for a teacher to learn with a student thousands of miles away on a screen is something previous generations did not imagine.

Yet technology comes with dangers. Just over a decade ago, employees on holiday were un-contactable. Nowadays, increased stress can result from instant emails and constant beeping from smartphones and pagers.



We are also threatened by diminishing privacy. A private argument at home can quickly become public knowledge via social networking. Personal, memorable moments can be lost in the rush to post pictures online.

We also face an underlying move towards disjointed artificiality. Until half a century ago, only the finest authors with the most thought-out theories would have their works published (the first book of its kind published in the lifetime of its author was the landmark *Beit Yosef* by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the 1550s). Book-publishing later became widespread. Today books are becoming obsolete. No prior level of knowledge or expertise is needed to write a blog. There is a fear that rapid-speed artificiality may spill over to the way that we communicate. We are in danger of face-to-face conversations being replaced with witty one-liners and *hashtags*.

Rosh Chodesh Adar beckons in the theme of joy. This means an internal sense of joy and security we all have lying inside ourselves. Shabbat teaches us that one need not depend on the buzz and noise of technology for true happiness. Relationships with others, a sense of community and a connection to our heritage is more profound than the latest technological innovations.

United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue, together with US Living & Learning

Editor: Rabbi Chaim Gross Editor in Chief: Rabbi Baruch Davis

Available also via email US website www.theus.org.uk ©United Synagogue

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