

**Le-Torah, le-Huppa, u'le-Kiddush Hashem:  
What the Tisha B'Av Kinnot Tell us about Medieval Children**

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**Kinnot for Tisha B'Av #25, מי יתן ראשי מים (Artscroll Translation pp. 270, 275)**

ואבכה עמי קרי ללב הנבוכים, על בתולות הנפוחות וילדים הנרפים בספרניהם נכרכים, ולשכח נמשכים

...I shall arouse the bitter of heart, the confounded one, to weep with me, over the beautiful maidens and the tender lads, wrapped in their scrolls and dragged to the slaughter...

שימו נא על לבבכם מספר מר לקשרה, כי שקולה הריגתם להחצול ולהתעפרה, בשרפת בית אלהינו האולם והבירה, וכי אין להוסיף מועד שבר ומבערה, ואין להקדים זילתי לאחרה, מחרת כן היום לזיתי אעוררה, ואספדה ואילילה ואבכה בנפש מרה, ואנסחי בבנה מפקר עד ערב. על בית ישראל ועל עם יי כי נפלו בחרב

Please take to your hearts to compose a bitter eulogy, because their massacre is deserving of mourning and rolling in dust as was the burning of the House of our God, its Hall, and its Palace. However, [we] cannot add a [new] day [of mourning] over ruin and conflagration, nor may [we] mourn any earlier—only later. Instead, today [on Tisha B'Av], I will arouse my sorrowful wailing, and I will eulogize and wail with a bitter soul, and my groans are heavy from morning until evening. Over the House of Israel and over the nation of *Hashem*, because they have fallen by the sword...

**Sefer Hasidim, Para. 1146 (Margalit Edition)**

זה ספר תולדות אדם מכאן רמז כשמימין הגער בערס וקורין לו שם משימים ספר של תורת כהנים מראשותיו וכשמגיע ללמוד שהוא בן חמש מתחילין לו בספר ויקרא אדם כי יקריב מכם כבם חלקתי ולא באומות קרבן שבהכל פיהם של תינוקות של בית רבן העולם מתקיים כמו בזכות הקרבנות אל תגעו במשיחי בשיחת התינוקות

'This is the book of generations [toldot] of man.' [In the use of the root y-l-d] lies an allusion to the custom of placing the Book of Leviticus at the head of the newborn boy when he is placed in his crib and given a name. When he is five years old, at which age he begins to study Torah, we start him [with the verse] from the Book of Leviticus 'When one of you brings an offering to God (Lev. 1:2)'...For by the breaths of schoolchildren the world endures, just as in the merit of the sacrifices...

## Sefer ha-Rokeah, Sefer ha-Asufot and Mahzor Vitry etc.

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). An example of the new tradition books for small children is Beverly Geller, *The Upshorn: Ephraim's First Haircut* (New York: CJS Publishers, 1991).

### 1. Sefer ha-Rokeah (Book of the Perfumer)

It is the custom of our ancestors to sit the children down to study [the Torah for the first time] on Shavuot because that is when the Torah was given. A [scriptural] indication that the boy should be covered so that he will not see a Gentile or a dog on the day he is instructed in the holy letters is "[No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen anywhere on the mountain;] neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain" [Exod. 34:3].

The boys are brought on Shavuot morning at sunrise, according to [the verse], "[On the third day,] as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning" [Exod. 19:16].

He is covered with a cloak on the way from [his] house to the synagogue or the teacher's house, according to [the verse], "and they took their places at the foot [or: nether part] of the mountain" [Exod. 19:17].

The child is placed on the lap [or: on the lap] of the teacher who sits them down to study, according to [the verse], "and Moses said to the Lord, ... Did I conceive this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom] as a nurse carries an infant'" [Num. 11:12]; [and according to the verse,] "I have pampered Ephraim, taking them in My arms" [Hos. 11:3].

They bring over the tablet [la'ah] on which is written [the alphabet forward, beginning] alef, bet, gimel, dale; [the alphabet written backward, beginning] tav, shin, resh, qof; [and the verse, "When Moses] charged us with the Torah as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob" [Deut. 33:4]; [the phrase] "May the Torah be my occupation" [see Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 16b]; [and the first verse of Leviticus, beginning], "The Lord called to Moses ..." [Lev. 1:1].

The teacher recites aloud each letter of the alef bet [forward], and the child [recites them] after him; [then the teacher recites] each word of tav, shin, resh, qof and the child does so too; similarly, [they both recite the verse beginning, "When Moses] charged [us] with the Torah ..."] [Deut. 33:4]; and [the phrase beginning], "May the Torah be ...", and likewise [the verse beginning], "The Lord called [to Moses ...]" [Lev. 1:1].

And [the teacher] puts a little honey on the tablet, and with his tongue, the child licks the honey which is on the letters.

After this, they bring over the cake kneaded with honey on which is written, "The Lord God gave me a skilled tongue, to know how to speak timely words to the weary. Morning by morning, He rouses, He rouses my ear to give heed like disciples. The Lord God opened my ears, and I did not disobey, I did not run away" [Isa. 50:4-5]. The teacher recites aloud each word of these verses, and the boy [does so] after him.

After this, they bring over a cooked egg that has been peeled and on which is written, "as He said to me, 'Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you.' I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey to me" [Ezek. 3:3]. The teacher recites aloud each word and the boy [does so] after him.

They feed the boy the cake and the egg because it is good for the opening of the heart [h-petihat ha-lev].

Let no one deviate from [following] this custom, as we say in [tractate] Pesahim, in [the] ch[apter] beginning Maqom she-nahagu ["Where they were accustomed"] [Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 50b]; and [we read] in Midrash Bereishit Rabbah, section Va-yera elav ["And He appeared to him"] [Gen. 18:11]; [ed. Theodor-Albeck, 2:491]: "When you come to a [new] place, follow its custom"; and [we read] in Ch[apter] 1 of Jerusalem [Talmud, tractate] Ta'anit [1:6, 64c] and in the ch[apter] beginning Maqom she-nahagu [Jerusalem Talmud, Pesahim 1:1, 30c] and in Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim [ed. Solomon Schechter]: "Custom is valid."

### 2. Sefer ha-Asufot (Book of Collections)

It is the custom of our ancestors to sit the children down to study [Torah for the first time] on Shavuot because that is when the Torah was given. The boys are brought at sunrise [of Shavuot morning] to the synagogue to the teacher [according to the verse, "And it came to pass on the third day,] as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning" [Exod. 19:16].

They bring over the tablet on which is written [the alphabet forward, beginning] alef, bet, gimel, dale; and [the alphabet written backward, beginning] tav, shin, resh, qof; [and the verse, "When Moses] charged us with the Torah [as a heritage of the congregation of Jacob]" [Deut. 33:4]; [the phrase] "May the Torah be my occupation", and the first verse of Leviticus.

And the teacher recites aloud each letter, and the child recites [them] after him.

And he puts a little honey on the tablet, and with his tongue, the child licks the honey that is on the letters.

These verses are written on a cake kneaded with honey: "as He said to me, 'Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you.' I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey to me" [Ezek. 3:3]; "The Lord God gave me a skilled tongue, to know how to speak timely words to the weary. Morning by morning, He rouses, He rouses my ear to give heed like disciples. The Lord God opened my ears, and I did not disobey, I did not run away" [Isa. 50:4-5]; "How can a young man keep his way pure?—by holding to Your word" [Ps. 119:9]; "In my heart I treasure Your promise; therefore I do not sin against You" [v. 11]; "Blessed are You, O Lord; train me in Your laws" [v. 12]; "Open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your teaching" [v. 18]; "Give me understanding, that I may observe Your teaching and keep it wholeheartedly"

## Leipzig Mahzor, Germany (14th c), appearing near Shavuot prayer "The Lord who has taught me."



## Yehezkel 3:1-3



Ezekiel eating the Book. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, lat. 16744, Bible, f. 81a.

- א וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי—בֶּן-אָדָם, אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּמְצָא אֲכֹל: אֲכֹל  
אֶת-הַמַּגִּלָּה הַזֹּאת, וְלֵךְ דַּבֵּר אֶל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.  
ב וַאֲפַתַּח, אֶת-פִּי; וַנֹּאכִילֶנִּי, אֶת הַמַּגִּלָּה הַזֹּאת.  
ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי, בֶּן-אָדָם בְּטָעָה תֹאכַל וּמַעֲיָה תִמְלֹא, אֶת  
הַמַּגִּלָּה הַזֹּאת, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹמֵן אֲלֶיךָ; וְאָכַלְהָ, וַתְּהִי בְּפִי  
כְדֶבֶשׁ לְמֶחֹק.
- 1 And He said unto me: 'Son of man, eat that which thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel.'  
2 So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that roll.  
3 And He said unto me: 'Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee.' Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

## Tehillim 119:103, 19:11

- 103 מה-נִמְלָצוּ לִחְפִּי, אֶמְתִּיקָה-  
מִדְּבַשׁ לִפִּי. - to my mouth!

## Yalkut Shimoni, Va-Era 182



Szyk Haggadah, Grace After Meals

באותה שעה אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למלאכי השרת רדו מלפני וראו בני חביבי אברהם יצחק ויעקב שמשליכים אותם בנהר וירדו מלפניו כשהיו מבוהלים ועמדו במים עד ארכובותיהן והיו מקבלים בניהן של ישראל ומניחים אותם על גבי הסלעים והקב"ה מביא להם דדין מן הסלעים ומניקם לקיים מה שנאמר ויניקו דבש מסלע

At that moment, the Holy One Blessed Be He said to the ministering angels, "Go down from before me and see the children of my beloved Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are being thrown into the river!" They went down with great urgency, and stood in the water up to their ankles, and would catch the Israelite boys, place them upon the stones, and the Holy One Blessed Be He would bring forth breasts from the stones and nurse them, to fulfill the verse that says, "And He made him to suck honey out of the stone, and oil out of the flinty rock (Deut. 32:13)."

## Yalkut Shimoni, Ha-Azinu 544

ד"א ירכיבתו על במתי ארץ [לב, יג] זו תורה שנאמר ה' קנני ראשית דרכו, ויאכל תנובות שדי זו מקרא, ויניקו דבש מסלע זו משנה, ושמן מחלמיש צור זה תלמוד

Another interpretation: "He made him ride on the high places of the earth" this refers to Torah... "and he did eat the fruit of the field" this refers to [the other books of] Scripture... "and He made him to suck honey out of the stone" this refers to Mishna... "and oil out of the flinty rock" this refers to Talmud.

### Midrash Tehillim 8:3

כשבקש הקדוש ברוך הוא ליתן תורה לישראל, אמר להם תנו לי ערבים שאתם מקיימין את התורה, אמרו לו הרי אבות העולם ערבים בנו, אמר להם חייכם הן חייבין לי, הלואי שיעמדו הם בעצמם, משל למי שהיה צריך ללוות, אמרו לו הבא ערב וטול כמה שאתה מבקש, הלך והביא מי שחייב אצלו, אמר לו הבאת מי שחייב לי, הלואי שיעמוד בעצמו, לך והבא שאינו חייב לי וטול, כך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל, אבות העולם הבאתם לי, ערבים שיש לי עליהם כמה חובות, אלא תנו לי ערבים שאינם חייבים לי, מנין שכן כתוב לא את אבותינו כרת ה' את הברית הזאת [כי אתנו אנחנו אלה פה היום כלנו חיים] (דברים ה ג), אמרו לו ומי אלה שאינם חייבים לך, אמר להם התינוקות, [מיד הביאו התינוקות] שבמעיי אמן, ומשרי אמן, ועמדו כריסן כזוכית, וראו להקב"ה מתוך כריסן, ומדברים עמו, אמר להן הקדוש ברוך הוא ערבים אתם את אבותיכם, שאם אתן להם את התורה שהן מקיימין אותה, ואם לאו אתם נתפסין עליהם, אמרו לו הן, אמר להם אנכי ה' אלהיך (שמות כ ב), אמרו לו הן, אמר להן לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים (שם שם / שמות כ' ג), אמרו לו הן, ועל כל דבור ודבור היו משיבין עליהן על הן הן, ועל לאו לאו, אמר להן מפיכם אני נותן את התורה, שנאמר מפי עוללים (וינקים יסדת עז (תהלים ת ג), ואין עוז אלא תורה, שנאמר ה' עז לעמו יתן (תהלים כט יא

When Israel stood to receive the Torah, the Holy One said to them: I am giving you My Torah. Bring Me good guarantors that you will guard it and I shall give it to you. And the people replied: Our ancestors are our guarantors. But the Holy One said to them: Your ancestors are unacceptable to Me, for they are already in my debt. Go bring me guarantors who are not already in my debt. They asked: Who are these guarantors? God responded: The small children. Immediately, they brought the children from their mothers' wombs and from their mothers' breasts, and the women's bellies became like glass so that they saw God from within and spoke with Him. God said: You are the guarantors that your parents will observe the Torah, and they answered: Yes. He said to them: I am the Lord your God, and they said: Yes. He said: You shall have no other Gods, and they said: Yes. And so it was with each commandment: They answered yes for the positive and no for the negative.

### Hebrew Crusade Chronicle of R. Solomon bar Samson

וגם ספר תורה היה שם בחדר, ויבואו החוצים במוך החדר ויסצאוה ויקרעוה קרעים קרעים. ויהי כאשר ראו הקדושות והטהורות, בנות מלכים, כי נקרעה התורה, ותקראנה בקול גדול לבעליהן: ראו ראו החדר הקדושה, כי האויבים קורעין אותה. ואכזרו הנשים כולן פה אחר: אי תורה הקדושה, כלילת יופי, סחמך עינינו, כשהיינו משתחווים בביח הכנסת ונשקו לה בנינו הקטנים וכיברנו אותה, ואיך נתה נפלה ביד אלו ערלים הטמאים. ויהי כאשר שמעו האנשים את דברי הקדושות, ויקנאו קנאה גדולה ליי אלהינו ולהודתו הקדושה והחמודה. ויקרא

There was a Torah scroll there in the chamber. The crusaders came into the chamber, found it, and tore it to shreds. When the saintly and pious women, the daughters of kings, saw the Torah had been torn, they called out loudly to their husbands: 'Behold, behold the holy Torah, for the enemy is tearing it.' The women said all together "Woe for the holy Torah, 'perfect in beauty,' 'the delight of our eyes.'" We would bow down to it in the synagogue and our little children kissed it. We honored it, yet how has it fallen into hands of these uncircumcised and impure. When the men heard the words of the saintly women, "they became exceedingly zealous" for the Lord our God and for His holy and beloved Torah.

**Kinot for Tisha B'Av # 22, התרישי מקני ואדברה (Artscroll Translation p. 257)**

ולא חסו גבר וגבירה על פנים צפירת תפארה אבל אנרו גבירה ומרה להלום ראש ולקרוץ שזרה ואלימו דברו באמירה לא נכינו  
לגנלכם לתורה נקריבכם בעולה וטקטרה

Neither a man nor a woman showed weakening pity for the [children whose] faces were like a splendid tiara. Instead they girded themselves with abnormal courage to smash the head and sever the spine. Then they addressed them with these words, 'We merited not to raise you in the Torah['s ways], let us bring you nearer [to god], like burnt-offering and incense.'

תורה תורה מקרי שק והתפלשי בברים אבל תידי עשי לך מספד ומרורים

"Torah, O Torah, gird yourself in sackcloth and roll yourself in ashes, make yourself mourn for your only son, a bitter lament..."