

Ge'ulla for Sefira: Sixth Shabbat After Pesah

Yona Nesatah, by Judah (Hallevi?)

Translated and introduced by Dr. Gabriel Wasserman

This is the sixth in our series of installments on *ge'ulla* piyyutim recited in the Eastern Ashkenazic Rite during the six Sabbaths between Pesah and Shavu'ot, before the conclusion of the blessing *Barukh atta hashem ga'al yisra'el*. The first four weeks of *ge'ullot*, were all signed Solomon, and apparently all by R. Solomon ibn Gabirol, and the fifth was by Isaac ibn Ghayyāth (“Ritz Giyat”). All of those were written decades before the First Crusade, as general prayers complaining about the long exile, but Eastern Ashkenazic communities later adopted them for Sefirat Ha'omer, the period when they commemorated the tragedies of the Crusades.

This piyyut, on the other hand, is signed Judah. While I have not been able to confirm this, it seems to be by Judah Hallevi, since it opens with the epithet *yona*, “dove”, for the Jewish People. Judah Hallevi was particularly fond of this epithet, because it allowed him to use this word to open his poems, and use the initial *yud* of the word as the first letter of the acrostic of his name, Yehuda, as here. He became so fond of the epithet *yona* that he used it also in poems where he did not need it for the acrostic, such as the famous Sabbath song *Yom Shabbaton*. The epithet is taken from Song of Songs 2:14. The masterful use of Hebrew language and puns is clearly a sign of a great poet, so this strengthens the likelihood that this is by Judah Hallevi, although, of course, this is hardly a definite sign.

Judah Hallevi (approx. 1075–1141) indeed lived most of his life after the First Crusade (1096), but in the Iberian Peninsula there does not seem to have been any tradition of commemorating the Crusades by reciting special piyyutim during the period of Sefirat Ha'omer. So, like all the previous weeks' *ge'ullot*, this one, too, would have been written as a general prayer complaining about the exile, and only later adopted by Eastern Ashkenazic communities for this period of the year. Even if it is not by Judah Hallevi, it does

seem to be by an Iberian poet, since it is found not only in Ashkenazic manuscripts, but also in the Cairo Geniza.

The poet cries bitterly against both Christendom (Edom) and Islam (Ishmael), always called by epithets relating to the Biblical nations or individuals of these names. In this period, close to 100% of the Jewish people lived under either Christian or Muslim dominion, and the Christians and Muslims were fighting each other for control both in the East, where Jerusalem is, and in the West, in the Iberian Peninsula.

In Eastern Ashkenazic manuscripts and printings, if this *ge'ulla* is designated for a particular Sabbath within Sefira, it is always the sixth, the last, Sabbath. This is almost certainly because of various links to Shavu'ot. The refrain is: “And I know that there is no one aside from you to redeem”, which is from the Book of Ruth (4:4), which is read on Shavu'ot. In the biblical context, these are Boaz's words to his relative, who is the closest relative to the dead Elimelech, and therefore must redeem his field, as per the Torah's rules, and, Boaz adds, take care of his widow and his son's widow. But here, just as we saw Isaac ibn Ghayyāt do last week, the poet takes these legal words from the human plane, and moves them to the divine plane: God is the only one to redeem us.

Second of all, while it is not prominent in the poem, the poet writes in the last stanza: “And reveal yourself before my eyes, just as when you came from Sinai!” Of course, Shavu'ot commemorates the revelation from Sinai, the time of the greatest closeness between God and the Jewish people. As Sefira draws to an end, and we come to the festive commemoration of that time, we await another time of such great closeness, a time of redemption. So, even though the poet surely wrote this *ge'ulla* for general use, the use of it on the Sabbath before Shavu'ot is deeply resonant with associations.

יוֹנָה נִשְׂאָתָהּ / עַל-כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים
 וְקִנְנָהּ בְּחֶקֶד / בְּחֻדְרֵי חֻדְרִים
 לָמָּה נִטְשָׁתָהּ / נְדוּדָה בַּיַּעֲרִים
 וּמְכַל-עֵבְרִים / פּוֹרְשֵׁי מְכֻמּוֹרִים
 יִסִּיתוּהָ זָרִים / לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
 וְהִיא בְּמִסְתָּרִים / תִּבְכֶּה לְבַעַל נְעוּרִים
 וּתְשֵׂא אִישׁוֹן / לְבַעְלָהּ הָרִאשׁוֹן
 וּבֵין אֶצֶר וְדִישׁוֹן / תִּחְלִיק לוֹ לְשׁוֹן
 לָמָּה תַעֲזוֹב / נַפְשִׁי לְשֵׂאוֹל
 וְאֲדַעָה כִּי אֵין / זוֹלָתְךָ לְגֵאוֹל

הַלְנִצַּח תִּמְהָ / תְּהִי גְלוּיַת צִמָּה
 מִזָּה וְשָׁמָּה / לְבִזָּה וְשָׁמָּה
 וּבֶן הָאִמָּה / בַּעֲתָנִי אִמָּה
 כִּי בִיד רָמָה / קִשְׁת רָמָה
 וְאֶהְלִי בָמָה / לְאֶהְלִיבָמָה
 וְאֶהְלִיבָה מָה / תִּיחַל עוֹד, וְכִמָּה?
 אֵין מוֹפֵת וְאֵין אוֹת / וְאֵין חֲזוֹת וּמִרְאוֹת
 וְאִם אֲשַׁאל לְרְאוֹת / מִתִּי קִץ הַפְּלְאוֹת
 יַעֲנוּ נְבוֹאוֹת / הַקְּשִׁית לְשֵׂאוֹל
 וְאֲדַעָה כִּי אֵין / זוֹלָתְךָ לְגֵאוֹל

The dove — you carried her upon eagles' wings,
 And she nested in your bosom, deep within.
 Why have you abandoned her to wander in the forests?
 From all sides, (there are) spreaders of nests,
 Foreigners, who tempt her to other deities.
 And she, in private, cries to her husband from her youth,
 And she lifts up her pupil, (her eye), to her first husband
 And amidst Etzer and Dishon (Edomite tribes, here Christian nations),
 she speaks to him with a smooth (here: soft) tongue:
 Why should you abandon my life to the grave?
And I know that there is no one aside from you to redeem (me).

Will it be forever that the perfect one is (shamed by having) her (head
 uncovered, without her) head-scarf,
 And Mizza and Shamma, (Edomite tribes, treat her as an object of) scorn
 (*bizza*) and scoffing (*shamma*),
 And (Ishmael, the Muslims), son of the slavewoman, frightens me with
 dread,
 For with upraised hand, (his) bow is high (biblical Ishmael was an archer).
 And my lofty Temples (*aholé bama*) are (given over to) Aholibamah
 (Esau's wife, Christendom),
 And Aholibah (Jerusalem, "My tent is in her?"), how much longer can
 she wait, how much?
 There's no portent, no sign, no vision, no apparitions.
 If I ask to see when the wondrous end-time will be,
 The prophecies respond: "Your question is too hard."
And I know that there is no one aside from you to redeem (me).

וּבְנוֹת עֲדִינּוֹת / הִגְלוּ מִמְּדִינּוֹת
וּמִמְטוֹת רַעְנָנוֹת / וּמִנוּחוֹת שְׁאֲנָנוֹת
וּנְפִזְרוּ בֵּינּוֹת / עִם לֹא בֵּינּוֹת
בְּלַעְגֵי שְׂפָה / וּלְשׁוֹנוֹת שׁוֹנוֹת
אִיךָ שׁוֹמְרֵי אֱמוּנוֹת / בָּם הָיוּ טְמוּנוֹת
וְלֹאֲלִילֵי תְמוּנוֹת / אֵין חִפְצָם לְעִנּוֹת
לְמָה בְּמִרְחָק / תַּעֲמִד, דֶּר שְׁחָק?
דוֹדֵי רַחֵק / וְרוֹדֵי דְחָק
וּלְקִץ הַיָּמִין / נִשְׂאָל נִשְׂאָל
וְאֲדַעָה כִּי אֵין / זוֹלָתְךָ לְגֹאֹל

דָּגַל אֲהָבָה / מֵעָלֵי הוֹסֵר
וְרֵגֶל גָּאוֹה / עָלֵי עַל מָסֵר
וְאֲנִי מוֹסֵר / בְּאֲכֹזְרֵיּוֹת מִיֹּסֵר
גּוֹלָה וְנֶאֱסָר / וַיִּמַּר וַיִּזְעַף וְסָר
אֵין מַנְזֵר וְטַפְסָר / אֵין מְלֹךְ וְאֵין שָׂר
צָר אֵלַי סָר / וְצוֹר מִנֵּי סָר
הִחָרִיב בְּקִצְפוֹ / מִקּוֹם מְדֻרְךָ כְּפוֹ
וְהִצִּית בְּזַעֲפוֹ / מְזוֹזוֹתוֹ וְסָפוֹ
וְאֵשׁ קְדָחָה בְּאִפּוֹ / וַתִּיקַד עַד־שְׂאוֹל
וְאֲדַעָה כִּי אֵין / זוֹלָתְךָ לְגֹאֹל

And the luxurious girls (the Jewish people) have been exiled from their region,
From the luxuriant beds, and peaceful rest,
They have been scattered amidst (*benot*) a people of no understanding (*binot*),
Among barbarous languages, and various tongues.
How have the keepers of the faith been hidden amidst them?
To idols, images, they do not want to call out.
Why do you stand at a distance, you heaven dweller?
My beloved is far (*dodi rahak*), and my oppressor is pressing (*rodi dahak*),
And we ask, yes ask, about the end-time of days.
And I know that there is no one aside from you to redeem (me).

(God's) banner of love (*degel ahava*) has been removed from me,
And the haughty foot (*regel ga'ava*) has put a yoke upon me,
And I have afflicted, / cruelly oppressed,
Exiled and imprisoned, bitter and upset and disturbed,
We have no princes nor officials, no kings and no ministers,
The foe (*tzar*) has turned to me, and the Rock (*tzur*) has turned away.
He has destroyed, in his rage, wherever his foot has stepped,
He has furiously destroyed his doorpost and lintel.
Fire is kindled in his nostrils, and it burns all the way to Sheol,
And I know that there is no one aside from you to redeem (me).

הַלְעוֹלָמִים / יִזְנַח אֲלֵי לְנִי
הָאֵין קָצָה / לְמוֹפֶת חַזְיוֹנִי
קוּמָה יי / וְיִפּוּצוּ שׁוֹטְנֵי
וְשׁוּב אֶל־מְעוֹנֵי / אֶל־הַיִּכָּל לְפָנַי
וְהָשִׁב לְשֹׁכְנֵי / גְמוּלוֹת יְגוֹנֵי
וְתִגְלֶה לְעֵינַי / כְּבוֹאֶךָ מִסִּינַי
וּבִטַּל יִשַׁע רֵד / עַל יִרְא וְחָרַד
וּמִכְסֵּי הַדָּרַד / בֶּן הָאִמָּה מוֹרַד
עַד לֹא אֵרַד / בְּיָגוֹן אֶל שְׁאוֹל
וְאִדְעָה כִּי אֵין / זוֹלָתְךָ לְגֵאוֹל

Will the Lord reject (us) forever?

Is there no end-time, when the portents of my seers (will take place)?

Arise, O Lord, and may my enemies scatter!

Return to my lair, deep inside my Temple,

And repay my neighbors retribution for my anguish, (which they caused),

And reveal yourself before my eyes, just as when you came from Sinai,

And come down with rescuing dew, for all that have been reverential and quaked (in worship of you),

And bring down the rebellious (Ishmael), son of the slavewoman, from my throne,

Before I descend in anguish to Sheol,

And I know that there is no one aside from you to redeem (me).