

Parashat Ki Tavo

Firsts in Liturgy

by Noach Dzmura on Friday September 19, 2008

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Deuteronomy 26:1 - 29:8

Parashat Ki Tavo contains “the first full-fledged liturgy in Torah.” ([The Five Books of Moses](#), Robert Alter, 2004, p.1004). The text spells out how each landholding Israelite who settles the land is required to make an offering from the first fruits of the harvest. He brings his produce to “the place that the Lord your God chooses to make His name dwell there,” (Chapter 26:3), stands before the priest, and says, “I have told today to the Lord your god that I have come into the land which the Lord swore to our fathers to give to us.” The priest then takes the basket and lays it down on the altar, and the offeror makes another liturgical statement, that tells of God’s rescue of the Children of Israel from Egypt “with a strong hand and an outstretched arm” (a phrase that still appears in our liturgy today.) The person then is required to bow before the Lord. After that, as usual in Jewish ritual, it’s time to eat. (Translation from Alter, 2004)

In a moment of poetic synchronicity, this *parasha* comes ‘round again with the wheel of the year just as CBST in New York and Sha’ar Zahav in San Francisco, two LGBTQQI (and straight-allies’) congregations bring to press their first *siddurim*. While each congregation has employed locally compiled and self-published spiral bound *siddurim* for many years, the shuls separately came to the conclusion that the time had come to make these LGBTQQI *siddurim* available to a wider audience.

In honor of this queer liturgical first, here’s a list of other queer-for-their-time liturgical firsts collected from some on-line sources.

The earliest existing codification of the prayerbook was drawn up by Rav Amram Gaon of Sura, Babylon, about 850 CE. [Wikipedia entry for siddur].

The first publication of rituals and prayers (Yiddish *tehines*) written (by men) for women were published in 1577 [MyJewishLearning.com, entry for tehines written by Shulamith Berger].

Also according to Wikipedia, the first – unauthorized – English translation, by Gamaliel ben Pedahzur (a pseudonym), appeared in London in 1738. It took 100 more years to have an English language siddur in the US.

Finally, if you haven't yet visited Jewish Mosaic's LGBT Jewish Resources , please go to the main page and search by "type" for "Liturgies" and you will find several, [including four wedding ceremonies, two coming-out rituals, and a haggadah.](#)



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