Session #2: Of Fields and Tables - Community and Connection Ariel Evan Mayse

Joy Harjo, "Perhaps the World Ends Here"

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 27b

Rabbi Yoḥanan and Reish Lakish both said: When the Temple is standing the altar atones for a person, but now one's table atones for them.

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וְרֵישׁ לָקִישׁ דְּאָמְרִי תַּרְוַיְיחוּ: בּּזְמַן שֶׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קַיָּים — מִזְבֵּחַ מְכַפֵּר עַל אָדָם, עַרְשָׁיוּ שֻׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מְכַפֵּר עָלָיו.

Rashi, ad loc

One's table atones – through welcoming guests.

שולחנו מכפר עליו - בהכנסת אורחין:

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 55a

Prolonging one's time at table [is a virtue] — because a poor person may come and receive food [immediately], as it is written: "The altar, three cubits high... (Ezekiel 41:22), and it is written "And he said unto me: This is the table that is before the Lord." It begins with the altar and concludes with the table. Rather, Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Elazar both say: As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel's. Now one's table atones for them.

ְּוָהַמַּאֲרִידְּ עַל שֻׁלְחָנוֹ: דְּלְמָא אָתֵּי עַנְיָא וְיָהֵיב לֵיהּ. דְּכְתִיב: ״חַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֵץ שָׁלוֹשׁ אַמּוֹת גָּבֹהַ״, וּכְתִיב: ״וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלַי זֶה הַשָּׁלְחָן אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי הי״, פָּתַח בְּמִזְבֵּחַ תָּרְוֹיִיהוּ: כָּל זְמַן שָׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קַיָּים — מִזְבֵּחַ מְכַפֵּר עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְעַרְשָׁיוּ, שֻׁלְחָנוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מְכַפֵּר עָלָיו.

Tosafot, ad loc

One's table atones for them – great is the power of shared eating and bounty.

שלחנו מכפר עליו. דגדולה לגימא (סנהדרין דף קג:)

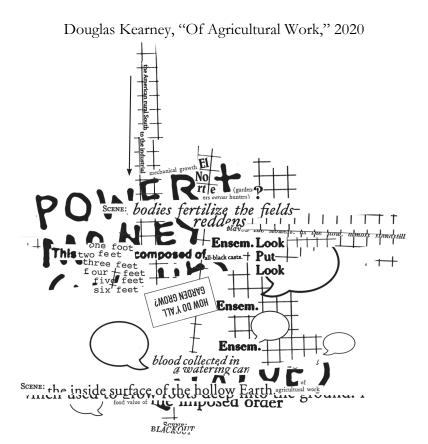
I know of a tailor in the holy community of Brisk in Lithuania who instructed the Burial Society before his death to construct his coffin out of his work-table and place his measuring stick in his hand. When they asked him the reason for this request he explained that his work-table and yardstick were his two faithful witnesses that in his entire life he had never stole even one piece of his working materials. Fortunate is he for wishing to benefit only from the work of his hands and not from theft.

וְרָאִיתִי חַיָּט אֶחָד בִּקְהַלַּת קֹדֶשׁ בְּרִיסְק דְּלִיטָא, קֹדֶם מוֹתוֹ צְוָה לַחֶבְּרָה קַדְּישָׁא, שֶׁינְשׁוּ מִשֵּלְחָנוֹ שֶׁהָיָה מְוֹתוֹ צְוָה לַחֶבְּרָה קַדִּישָׁא, שֶׁינְשׁוּ מִשֵּלְחָנוֹ שֶׁהָיָה בְּּבִיתוֹ אֲרוֹנוֹ, וְהָאַמָּה, שֶׁהָיָה מוֹתֵחַ בּוֹ הַבְּגָדִים, יִתְּנוּ בְּיָדוֹ. וְשְׁאַלוּ אוֹתוֹ הַחֶבְרָא קַדִּישָׁא מַה כַּוְנְתוֹ בְּיֶה הַצֵּיְאָה, וְהַשִּׁיב, שֶׁהַשֵּׁלְחָן וְהָאַמָּה יָעִידוּ לוֹ כִּשְׁנֵי עֵדִים נָאֱמְנִים, שֶׁכָּל יָמִיו לֹא נְּנַב מְאוּמָה מִן מְלַאכְתּוֹ. אַשְׁרֵי יִלוֹ שְׁהַיָּה רוֹצְה לַהַנוֹת רַק מִינֵע כַּבּוֹ, וְלֹא מִשׁוּם גְּזֵל יִלִּי רוֹצְה לַהַנוֹת רַק מְיֵנֵע כַּבּוֹ, וְלֹא מִשׁוּם גְּזֵל

Kitsur Shulhan Arukh no. 199

When making a coffin, take care that the remnants of the boards not be used for any other purpose. They should be burned for fuel to heat the cauldron in which water is warmed for the ritual purification. Benevolent people, who in their lifetime fed the poor at their table, should be buried in a coffin made of boards from the table, as it is says, "Your righteousness shall go before you" (Isa. 58:8)

ְּבְשֶׁעוֹשִׂין אָרוֹן, יֵשׁ לַזָּחֵר בְּשִׁיוּרֵי הַנְּסְרִים, שֶׁלֹּא לַצְשוֹת מֵהֶם אֵיזֶה תַשְּׁמִישׁ, וְיֵשׁ לְהַסִּיק בָּהֶן תַּחַת הַבְּלִי שֶׁמְחַמְמִים אֶת הַמַּיִם לְטָהֱרָה. טוֹבֵי לֵבָב שֶׁהֶאֶכִילוּ עֲנִיִם עַל שֻלְחָנָם, יֵש לַעֲשוֹת לָהֶם אָרוֹן מִן הַשֻּׁלְחָן, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב, וְהָלַףְ לְפָנֶיףּ צִדְקֵף.



Leviticus 19:9

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God.

וִּבְקֵצְרְכֶםׂ אֶת־קְצֵיר אַרְצְכֶּם לְא תְכַלֶּה פְּאַת שָׂדְדָּ לִקְצָר וְלֶקֶט קְצִירְדָּ לָא תְלַקֵּט וְכַרְמְדְּ לָא תָעוֹלֵל וּבֶּרֶט כַּרְמְדָּ לָא תְלַקֵּט לֶעָנִי וְלַגֵּר תַּעַוָב אתָם אַנִי הי אֵלוהַיבֵם:

Deuteronomy 24:19

When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.

פִּי תִקְצר קְצִירְךְּ בְשָּדֶךְּ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ עמֶר בַּשָּׂדֶה לא תָשׁוּב לְקַחְתּוֹ לַגֵּר לַיָּתוֹם וְלָאַלְמָנָה יִהְיֶה לִמֵעֵן יִבַּרַכְּךָּ הי אֱלֹחֵיךְּ בָּכל מַעֲשֶׁה יָדֵיךְּ:

Mishnah Peah 1:1

These are the things that have no definite quantity: The corners, first-fruits; [offerings] on appearing [during pilgrimage festivals], works of kindness, and the study of Torah. The following are the things for which one enjoys the fruits in this world while the principal remains in the world to come: honoring one's father and mother, works of kindness, and bringing peace between two people. The study of Torah is equal to them all.

אֵלּוּ דְבָרִים שָׁאֵין לָהֶם שִׁעוּר. הַפֵּאָה, וְהַבִּכּוּרִים, וְהָרֵאִיוֹן, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, וְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה. אֵלּוּ דְבָּרִים שָׁאָדָם אוֹכֵל פֵּרוֹתֵיהֶן בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְהַקֶּרֶן קַיֶּמֶת לוֹ לָעוֹלֶם הַבָּא. כִּבּוּד אָב וָאֵם, וּגְמִילוּת חֲסָדִים, וַהֲבָאַת שָׁלוֹם בִּין אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ, וְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כַּלָם:

Mishnah Peah 1:2

One should not leave a *pe'ah* of less than one-sixtieth. They said, "there is no definite quantity for *pe'ah*," but everything depends upon the size of the field, the number of poor people, and the extent of the yield.

אֵין פּוֹחֲתִין לַפֵּאָה מִשִּׁשִּׁים, וְאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁאָמְרוּ אֵין לַפֵּאָה שָׁעוּר. הַכֹּל לְפִי גֹדֶל הַשָּׁדֶה, וּלְפִי רֹב הָעֲנִיִּים, וּלִפִי רֹב הָעַנָוָה:

Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 47a

It was taught: we say to one who comes to convert in the present time...

We tell them some of the less stringent commandments, and some of the more

תָּנוּ רַבָּנֵן : גֵּר שֶׁבָּא לְהִתְּנַּיֵּיר בִּזְמֵן הַיֶּה... וּמוֹדִיעִין אוֹתוֹ מִקְצָת מִצְוֹת קַלּוֹת וּמִקְצָת מִצְוֹת חֲמוּרוֹת, וּמוֹדִיעִין אוֹתוֹ עֲוֹן לֶקֶט שִׁכְחָה וּפֵּאָה וּמַעְשֵׂר עָנִי. וּמוֹדִיעִין אוֹתוֹ עָנְשָׁן שֶׁל מִצְוֹת. אוֹמְרִים לוֹ : הֱנֵי יוֹדֵע שָׁעַד שָׁלֹא בָּאתָ לְמִדָּה זוֹ, אָכַלְתָּ חֵלֶב — אִי stringent ones, and we inform them of the sin of [neglecting] gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and the corners of one's field, and the poor person's tithe. אַתָּה עָנוּשׁ כָּרֵת. חַלֵּלְתָּ שַׁבָּת — אִי אַתָּה עָנוּשׁ סְקִילָה. וְעַכְשִׁיוּ, אָכַלְתָּ חֵלֶב — עָנוּשׁ כָּרֵת, חִלַּלְתָּ שַׁבָּת — עָנוּשׁ סְקִילָה.

Deuteronomy 26:1-2

When you enter the land that your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and dwell in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where your God will choose to establish the divine name.

וְהָיָהֹ בֵּי־תָבָוֹא אֶל־הָאָׁרֶץ אֲשֶׁרֹ ה׳ אֱלוֹהֶּיךּ נֹתַּן לְדָּ נַחֲלֶה וֵירִשְׁתָּהּ וְיָשַׁרְתָּ בֵּה: וְלָקַחְתָּ מֵרֵאשִׁית l כָּל־פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּבִיא מֵאַרְצְדֶּ אֲשֶׂר ה׳ אֱלותֶידּ נֹתֵן לֶדְּ וְשַׂמְתָּ בַּשֶׁנֶא וְהַלַּכְתָּ אֶל־ הַמָּלִוֹם אֲשֵׁר יִבִּחַר ה׳ אֱלוהֵידּ לִשַּׁבֵּן שִׁמִוֹ שֵׁם:

Rashi

When you go into your field see for the first time that year a fig that has ripened, you bind a piece of straw round it as an indication and say "Lo, this is *bikkurim*."

מראשית. אָדָם יוֹרֵד לְתוֹךְ שָׁדֵהוּ וְרוֹאֶה תְאֵנָה שָׁבִּכְּרָה, כוֹרַדְּ עָלֶיהָ גְּמִי לְסִימָן וְאוֹמֵר ״הֲרֵי זוֹ בָכּוּרִים״ (ספרי; בכורים גי):

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 9a

Rav Huna says: We examine one who asks for food, but not one who asks for clothing...
Rav Yehudah says: We examine one who asks for clothing, but not one who asks for food...

אָמַר רַב הוּנָא: בּוֹדְקִין לִמְזוֹנוֹת, וְאָיֵן בּוֹדְקִין לִכְסוּת... וְרַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר: בּוֹדְקִין לִכְסוּת, וְאִיִן בּוֹדְקִין לִמִזוֹנוֹת

3. Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 11a

It was also taught: When the community is suffering, one may not say: I will go to my home and I will eat and drink, and peace be upon you, my soul... One who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community.

תַּנְיָא אִידַּךּ: בִּזְמַן שֶׁהַאִבּוּר שָׁרוּי בְּצַעַר, אַל יאֹמֵר אָדָם: אֵלֵךּ לְבֵיתִי, וְאוֹכַל וְאֶשְׁתֶּה, וְשָׁלוֹם עָלַיִּךּ נַפְשִׁי. וְכָל הַמְצַעֵר עַצְמוֹ עִם הַצִּבּוּר — זוֹכֶה וְרוֹאֶה בְּנֶחָמַת צִבּוּר.

Yalkut, tehilim no. 883

"We wept" (Ps. 137:1). What did they see, causing them to cry by the rivers of Babylon? Rabbi Yohanan said: The Euphrates slew more

גם בכינו. מה ראו ישראל לבכות על נהרות בבל, רבי יוחנן אמר הרג בהם פרת בישראל יותר ממה שהרג נבוכדנאצר הרשע, כשהיו שרויים בארץ לא היו שותים אלא מימי גשמים ומימי נוזלים ומימי Nebuchadnezzar had slain. While the children of Israel were living in the Land of Israel, they drank only rainwater, running water, or spring water. But when they were exiled to Babylon, they had to drink the water of the Euphrates, and many of them died. Therefore, they cried for those murdered by their enemies, and for those killed along the way by the Euphrates. Not only this, but Nebuchadnezzar sat in his boat with all of his crops and ministers, along with all sorts of musicians, as it says, "From ships the Chaldeans shall raise their voice in song" (Isa. 43:14).

מעינות וכיון שגלו לבבל שתו מים מפרת ומתים, לפיכך היו בוכים על ההרוגים שהרגו בהם אויביהם ועל המתים שמתו בדרך ועל ההרוגים שהרג בהם פרת, ולא עוד אלא שהיה נבוכדנאצר יושב בספינה הוא וכל גדוליו וכל שריו ועמהם כל מיני זמר שנאמר "כשדים באניות רנתם"