

MORASHAH
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**Perfect Misunderstandings:
 Akdamut and Yetziv Pitgam**

It is amazing how people can misperceive old constructs by viewing them with modern eyes. For example, some are uncomfortable with the fact that Jacob had four wives. Well, in those days, polygamy was accepted and common. How could Thomas Jefferson have stood for Liberty when he was a slave-holder? Well, in those days, many fine people were slave-holders.

Yetziv Pitgam and *Akdamut* are said only on Shavuot. *Yetziv Pitgam* still follows the first verse of the Hafatara on the second day of Shavuot. And *Akdamut* used to follow the first verse of the first day's Torah reading. But the Taz (a 17th- century commentator) was shocked to see this Aramaic poem interrupt the Torah reading. So *Akamut* was moved to be recited before the first *brakhah* on the Torah. (Note: German Jews, following Wolf Heidenheim, never moved the position of *Akdamut*. They still recite it following the first *pasuk* [verse]. Read on to find out why!)

Furthermore, what are these Aramaic poems doing anyway? Virtually all *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) are in Hebrew, some in "friendly Hebrew" like ibn Ezra, and some in obscure Hebrew as in Kallir. But Aramaic?

The "modern" answer is that they must be highly esoteric and therefore Qabbalistic!

Aramaic might be esoteric nowadays, but if we go back far enough, it was the common vernacular.

Let us go back to the year 600. What did the Torah reading look like? Or better yet, what did it sound like? Every Torah verse – with a few exceptions – was followed by the Aramaic Targum. Every verse was translated publicly into the Aramaic Targum, and it was not considered a *hefsek* (an interruption).

So what is *Akdamut*? It is an Aramaic introduction to the Targum on the Torah reading of the day! Nothing esoteric - albeit quite poetic and mystical, as is any *piyyut*!

Yetziv Pitgam is the introduction to the Targum Yonatan on the Haftara! This is virtually

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explicit in the passage “*Yehonatan gvar invetan*” where the translator is mentioned by name. But “misperceivers” have somehow (mistakenly) read this as a reference to Moses. Yet this cannot be. *Yetziv Pitgam* is in the language of the Targum because it serves as a poetic segue into the Targum.

And therefore: Neither poem is a *hefsek*. Each follows the first *pasuk* and is in Aramaic simply as an introduction.

Chag Samei'ach!

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