

**Dave Sherman**  
**Shavuot 2015 Sermon Slam**

Two questions on [this blessing](#) from the Amida, middle of the page, which initially doesn't seem relevant to Shavu'ot:

1) To what historical event do we refer here?

Departing from this Sidur's translation to try to take the prayer more literally, we find the answer in the second sentence: "Bless us, our Parent, as one, with the light of Your countenance, for in the light of Your countenance *did you give us*, L-rd our G-d, *a Tora of life...*" This must refer to the Giving of the Tora! which we celebrate tonight (Interestingly, this reference does not occur in the evening version of the blessing.)

2) What is the type of speech used in the blessing?

The answer is clear from the word כִּי (also in the 2nd sentence)--a key word both in seriousness and in bilingual punning. The word means "for," in the sense of "because." This word makes it clear that the blessing is an argument! "Place peace..., goodness and blessing,...*because...* You gave us a Tora of...peace. And it is good in Your eyes to bless Your people Israel in every season and in every time with Your peace."

By the way, it's a silly argument. If it were good in G-d's eyes to grant us peace, G-d would have done so already. (And by the way, the Conservative addition of the word בעולם--"in the world," or "in the universe" only detracts from the argument further: Grant peace in the world because you put all of us Israelites together and gave us the Tora? I see no logic there; I don't add the word. A better place to pray for world peace, as opposed to praying for peace for or among Jews, in the addition ועל כל יושבי תבל--"and on all dwellers of the earth," to the Oseh Shalom lines of the Amida and of the half and mourner's kaddishes, as Cantor G has always done and the new Conservative mahzor does now).

In any case: this blessing is an argument. In making it to G-d, we join with an honorable tradition of arguing with G-d: Avraham, Moshe, Yirmiyahu.

And the argument is for peace. If we argue for peace to G-d, how much more so should we argue for peace to human beings. I don't want to get too political on Shavuot, but I first saw this blessing in this way at a time when Yasir Arafat was

answering hostile questioners about his policy of inciting terrorism with answers like, "Talking about that is bad for the peace process." No, making the argument that inciting terrorism means inciting war and not making peace, is an argument that's good for peace and should be done at every turn.

What applies to international politics applies as well to the playground. Lynn [Baum] spoke a few minutes ago about cyberbullying. Whether it's bullying or an all-out war, chances are there's a great historical wrong in the background that needs to be set straight in order to get to peace--by argument--even before the power relationships and inequalities come into play. The ex-Rashi School Family Educator--an old acquaintance of mine named Lesley Litman--used to always conclude her Divrei Tora with the question, "How do we make peace," and then suggest answers. One of my answers is that this blessing tells us to engage in argument on behalf of the aggrieved party. In a playground or on a world stage, we should not shirk from doing so.

Lastly, let me say that the intricacies of this blessing are why I absolutely hate it when the Amida ends before I can get to Birkat Shalom, which it usually does!

הג שמח!