

This week I learned something about New Orleans archaeology. We think of the city as having layers but what is not so well known is that in one specific area there is a layer that goes further back than anyone might have realized.

This only came to light – literally – when our member Will Samuels was cleaning out the building known as The Mortuary for his special seasonal project. He found an ancient ceramic container that, when cleaned, revealed itself to be purple, green and gold. Inside, to his astonishment, he found some pieces of parchment with Hebrew written on them.

So of course he brought them to me. And I translated them. And it is my pleasure to present you with what I believe is the very first version, in English, of the Pesikta d'Yama Shlashah Shamna – which, roughly translated, means: “The Midrash of the Third Day...the fat one.”

*When the Israelites saw it they said to each other “what is it?” for they did not know what it was - [Shemot 16:15]. This refers to the mysterious round cakes that appear in the springtime from the place of the dead, as it says, *I shall rain down bread for you from heaven* [Shemot 16:4] - that is, from the place of the dead. And these cakes are a mystery, as it says, *it was round...and in color it was like bdellium* [Bamidbar 11:7] - and *bdellium* can have many colors all at once, even though we do not know exactly what they are. And these cakes contain strange objects hidden for little children to find as it says, *Both fresh-picked and long-stored/I have hidden for you, my beloved* [Song of Songs 7:14]. And the children seek these objects but do not always find them, as it says, *I sought my beloved/but I did not find him* [Song of Songs 3:1] and then they weep, as it says, *A voice is heard in Ramah/the sound of bitter weeping* [Jeremiah 31:5]. So more cakes must be purchased so as to fulfil the words of King David: *Weeping may tarry for the night/but joy comes in the morning* [Psalm 30:5]. And together we say *Ken yehi ratzon* which means: It is according to thy Will.*

*They have made themselves a molten calf [egel masecha - Shemot 32:8]. What color was this calf? Obviously it was of gold! It says, *The people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. This he took from them and cast in a mold and made it into a molten calf* [Shemot 32:3]. But Rabbi Bacchus teaches that it was purple, as it says, *These are the gifts that you shall accept from them...blue, purple and crimson yarns* [Shemot 25:4]. And some say*

that it was green, but we do not believe them. Rabbi Nyx teaches: Do not read *egel* with an *ayin* (calf); rather, read *egel* with an *alef* (bead or droplet), for the calf was entirely round in shape, like a bead, and fifteen cubits high. And Rabbi Nyx saw this in a dream. But Rabbi Thoth teach that *egel* simply means that the people were adorned with golden beads, but the calf was shaped like a calf.

[Moses] hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain] Shemot 32:19]. Mar Dina, called the Gra, teaches: How could Moses commit this act of desecration? For we know that *the tablets were God's work and the writing was God's writing, incised upon the tablets] Shemot 32:16]?! It is because when Moses came down the mountain a parade of angels followed him, singing and dancing and playing brass instruments, as it says, On the third day...there was a very loud blast of the horn] Shemot 19:16].* When Moses heard the people making merry, Joshua said to Moses, *There is a cry of war in the camp! But Moses replied, It is not the sound of the tune of triumph/of the sound of the tune of defeat/it is the sound of song] kol anot] that I hear] Shemot 32:18].* Do not read *kol anot* but rather, *kol hamatanot*“ ,All the gifts,” for the people were shouting to Moses and demanding gifts from him. And so Moses was justified in throwing the tablets to the people; and it is their fault that they failed to catch them and were punished, as it says, *And some three thousand of the people fell that day] Shemot 32:24].* And Rabbi Shilshaya teaches that the people were shouting, *Throw me something, Mister!* - so Moses did.

*Have a wonderful Mardi Gras.
Shabbat shalom!*