

In 2004 the American Film Institute came out with a list of the 100 best movie songs. It won't come as a surprise that song # 1 was *Over the Rainbow*. Sung by Judy Garland in the *Wizard of Oz* in 1939, *Over the Rainbow* was picked in voting by about 1,500 actors, filmmakers, writers, critics and others in Hollywood. And you can probably guess the next four songs and who sung them.

5 : A song written by a nice Jewish boy, Irving Berlin, *White Christmas*, from the film *Holiday Inn*, sung by Bing Crosby in 1942.

4: *Moon River*, from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, sung by Audrey Hepburn in 1961

3: *Singin' in the Rain*, from the movie of the same name, sung by Gene Kelly in 1952.

And number 2: *As Time Goes By*, from *Casablanca*, sung by Dooley Wilson, in 1942

Dooley Wilson played Sam the piano-player and singer, who "played it again" at the request of Ilsa. You must remember this ...I mean, you must remember the famous lyrics:

*You must remember this,
a kiss is just a kiss.
a sigh is just a sigh ...
As time goes by.*

Interesting lyrics. Is a kiss really 'just a kiss'?

There are activities common to most humans that we enjoy immensely, without much thought, and as frequently as opportunity and instinct provide. Recently, experimental psychologists at Oxford University explored the function of kissing in relationships.

Surprise! It's complicated.

The first function of kissing is in romantic and courtship behavior. When we think of what a kiss is 'for', that, perhaps, would be the first function that would come to mind.

But in many cultures, kissing was, and remains, a way for individuals to get close enough to sniff each other in socially acceptable ways -- like the way we shake hands

-- The Inuit press their nostrils on the cheeks or forehead of someone for whom they feel great affection, gently inhaling their scent.

-- A *hongi* is a traditional Māori greeting in New Zealand. It is done by pressing one's nose and forehead (at the same time) to another person at an encounter.

Kissing isn't just for humans: Some animal species do something very close to what we call kissing. Chimpanzees press their mouths together. Certain parrots tap their beaks. Elephants put the tips of their trunks in one another's mouths and swirl them about. It's what biologists call an affiliative gesture (affiliate -- like 'to affiliate with a synagogue') -- a way of attaching or coming close.

And of course, there are many religious functions of kissing that aren't necessarily ways of demonstrating affection toward another person.

-- Isaac kissed and smelled Jacob just before giving him the blessings

-- Samuel kisses Shaul as an act of reconciliation

-- David kissed his son Avshalom as an act of saying goodbye

Others: In Psalms, a kiss of welcome, in Song of Songs, spiritual kisses, and in the Book of Samuel, hypocritical kisses.

And let's not forget kissing the Western Wall, a mezuzah, tallis, siddur, and other *sifrei kodesh* (holy books).

So ...while it may or may not be true that "a kiss is just a kiss," in a story connected to Shavous, we see that at times a kiss isn't enough.

Naomi, a Jewish woman living in Moab, decides to return to Eretz Yisrael after losing her husband, her two sons and all her wealth. Her two widowed daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, both of them Moabite princesses, want to go with her. However, Naomi pressures them and insists that they return to Moab.

Orpah agrees with her mother-in-law's wishes, but Ruth, remaining loyal to Naomi, refuses to leave her mother-in-law. Together, Naomi and Ruth return to Eretz Yisrael, where Ruth ultimately marries Boaz and becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Orpah returns to Moab and becomes the ancestress of Goliath.

How and when was Ruth's loyalty expressed? We all know her famous words:

Wherever you go I shall go. Wherever you sleep I shall sleep. Your people are my people, your G-d is my G-d. (Ruth 1:16)

But if we look earlier in the Book of Ruth we see that Ruth's loyalty had become clear even before she spoke these famous words.

Two verses earlier (1:14) the text says:

And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, and Ruth embraced her. And [Naomi] said (to Ruth), 'Behold, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and her gods. Follow your sister-in-law.' And Ruth said, 'Do not press me to abandon you . . .'"

How did Naomi know Orpah had decided to return but not Ruth? The clue seems to have been in their different reactions to Naomi's appeal that they return home: Orpah *kissed* Naomi, but Ruth *embraced* her. Clearly, there was a significant difference between Orpah's kiss and Ruth's embrace, a difference with important ramifications for the future.

What was the difference between a kiss and an embrace? Why -- at least in this case -- wasn't a kiss enough?

I'd like to answer this question by sharing with you a remarkable story.

In Ohio in 1939, twin boys were separated at birth. The adopting sets of parents, living 40 miles away from each other, were each unaware that their new son had a living brother. Both families named their boys James. As schoolboys, both Jim Lewis and Jim Springer enjoyed math and carpentry -- but hated spelling. Both Jims pursued similar adult occupations: Jim Lewis was a security guard at a steel mill, and Jim Springer was a deputy sheriff. Both Jims married women named Linda, only to divorce and remarry - each a woman named Betty. Both Jims have sons: James Alan Lewis and James Allan Springer.

And growing up, the two Jims both had a dog named Troy.

The men reunited after 40 years in 1979 and were able to share their amazing identical life stories.

The two Jims shared one other fact in common. Neither the Springers nor the Lewises ever met the 15-year-old (unwed) mother of their sons, and both couples were told that their adoptive child had a twin who died at birth. Then one day, when Jim Lewis was 16 months old, his mother visited the courthouse to settle the adoption paperwork, and an official remarked offhandedly, "They named the other little boy 'Jim' too."

As Jim Springer put it, "I always felt an emptiness." Growing up, the brothers felt something missing. Both Jims and knew there was something more that they didn't have.

This explains how a kiss differs from an embrace.

A kiss is a glancing touch, an incomplete physical contact. A kiss may even express strong inner emotion, but doesn't show or create the fusion of two souls.

An embrace, however, is an expression of *total attachment, of two hearts that beat as one, that one cannot live without the other.*

When Orpah kissed Naomi, she showed that her feelings for her mother-in-law were purely emotional. Naomi immediately understood that these emotions would not lead Orpah to accept the sacrifices that lay ahead if she were to become Jewish.

But Ruth hugged her mother-in-law. Ruth's embrace showed an attachment, a dependency, an emotional *and* intellectual recognition that without Naomi, without Naomi's G-d, and without becoming Jewish, there was an emptiness that couldn't be filled. And Naomi understood Ruth would not be easily persuaded to return home. When Naomi tried to send her away, Ruth responded with her celebrated declaration of undying loyalty.

Orpah's kiss wasn't enough to convince Naomi. But Ruth's embrace showed Naomi that her need was deep and real.

The story of the two Jims had a happy ending. In 1979, when he was 40 years old, Jim Lewis decided to see if he did, in fact, have a long-lost twin brother. Inquiries and phone calls were made. Jim Lewis said,

"I came home one day and had this message to call 'Jim Springer.' " When he phoned Springer, Lewis blurted out: "Are you my brother?" "Yup," Springer replied. Four days later Jim Lewis drove to meet his twin for an emotional reunion. Not long after, when Jim Lewis was ready to remarry, Jim Springer served as his newfound brother's best man.

Shavous is a celebration of when we received the Torah. But in addition to the celebration, it's a renewal of vows. We recommit to our relationship with Hashem. G-d says, "You are my children. My *Am segula*. My special treasure."

And like Ruth, we say, "You are my G-d."

We don't just say it -- we embrace it. We embrace being Jewish. *Aitz Chaim hi l'machazikim bah*. The Torah is a tree of life to those who *embrace* it. To those who cling to it. To those who hold on to the Torah, embrace being Jewish, and cling to their relationship with G-d with all their might.

So; it may or may not be true that "a kiss is just a kiss." But at times, a kiss is not enough. An embrace is needed. *Aitz chaim hi, l'machazikim bah*. That which is truly important to us is the Tree of Life. Let us embrace it!