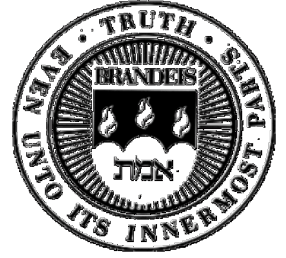




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

8 Tishrei 5770 / 26 September 2009 Vol. XI Issue 5

PARSHAT HA'AZINU

Candle-lighting: 6:20 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: 9:36 am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 10:36 am
Mincha 6:00 pm
Shkia: 6:34 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 7:17 pm

Parsha in a Box

- Moshe's song
- The *shira* is a testimony that when things go bad for Bnei Yisrael, we should know that it is because of our sins, not because of Hashem
- Hashem has done so much *chessed* for Bnei Yisrael
- Ignoring Hashem will provoke His wrath
- Hashem will bring bad things upon us....
- But will always save Bnei Yisrael
- Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael to keep the words of the Torah, because it is our life
- Hashem tells Moshe to go onto *Har Nevo* to see *Eretz Yisrael* and die

Ne'ilat Ha-Sandal

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

Based on a shiur from Rabbi Mark Dratch, head of JSAFE: The Jewish Institute Supporting an Abuse-Free Environment, and former congregational rabbi.

One of the things that always bothered me about *Yom Kippur* is the prohibition against *ne'ilat ha-sandal* – wearing leather-soled shoes. I often wonder what someone on the street would say seeing everyone dressed in their finest *yom tov* clothing wearing *Tevas* or *Converse All-Stars* on their feet. If we are meant to look like angels on *Yom Kippur*, how do sneakers help create that image?

I recently heard a beautiful insight into the prohibition against wearing leather-soled shoes. *Yom Kippur* is not the only time we see a direct connection to shoes and spirituality. The *halachah* mandates that anybody who went to the *Beit ha-Mikdash* (Temple in Jerusalem) they had to remove their shoes. Even the *kohanim* (priests) who served in the Temple had to remove their shoes. This practice is still manifest whenever we have *birkat Kohanim* (the Priestly blessing). Furthermore, when Hashem appears to Moshe for the first time at the burning bush, God instructs him: "Do not come closer to here, **remove your shoes from your feet**, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground" (*Shemot* 3:5).

Many commentators understand the need to remove one's shoes when entering holy space as an assurance against tracking mud, dirt and spiritual impurity into that space. But there is a deeper message in this *halachah*. Rabeinu Bachya understands that the requirement to remove one's shoes is symbolic – shoes represent all physicality. When entering holy space we must remove

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 3)

The Power of Shira

By Rebecca Pollack '13

When reading *Ha'azinu* the obvious first choice comparison is to look at "*shirat ha-yam*" (the Song of the Sea) in Exodus. Whereas in Exodus the *shira* (song) is spontaneous and full of G-d's praises, in our *parsha* G-d commands Moshe to teach Bnei Yisrael this *shira* which on a superficial level does not appear to be one of intense praise of G-d at all. When examining *parshat Ha'azinu*, it is clear that the intention is for Bnei Yisrael to be a future witness for the future sins of the future generations of Bnei Yisrael. But why a song? Why not prose like *Ki Tavo*? To answer these questions we need to examine *shira* in other contexts and see its accomplishments. In *Shir Hashirim Raba* 4 it says,

Chizkiyahu should have said *shira* over the fall of Sancheriv, as is written, "But Chizkiyahu did not render according to the benefit he had received, for his heart has lifted up" (*Divrei Ha-yamim* II 32,25). We know Chizkiyahu was a righteous king, and yet it is written that his heart has lifted up (haughty)? It means his heart was haughty and did not say *shira*. Yeshayahu came to him and said: "Sing to G-d" (*Yesh.* 12,5). He answered: Why? [Yeshayahu answered]: "For He has done mighty things" (*ibid.*). [Chizkiyahu] said to him: This is already "known throughout the land" (*ibid.*). R. Levi said: Chizkiyahu said, "Why should we say retell the greatness and miracles of G-d, when this is already well-known from one end of the world to the other. Has not the sun stood still in the center of the heaven, and G-d's miracles were seen from one of the world to the other?"

(Rebecca Pollack continued on page 3)

Shabbat Shalom!

Hashem Made Me Do It

By Jacob “J-Chat” Chatinover ‘12

The *vidui* is an alphabetical confessional for private and national sins. Because the *vidui* has to include every Hebrew letter, and because the sins to which it refers belong to the entirety of Israel, we may find ourselves confessing to sins to which we have trouble relating, and some which, frankly, seem like kind of a stretch. Furthermore, the last letter (*taf*) is repeated three times without explanation. The last item, “*tit`anu*”, “You have led us astray” or “You have allowed us to stray” poses serious theological problems. It seems to accuse G-d for either giving us free will and thereby enabling us to sin, or for sustaining our free will by not intervening and straying our hands and minds from sin. In this week’s *sedra*, *Ha`azinu*, G-d is described as “The Rock, His doings are perfect (1) (*tamim*), because the entirety of his paths is equity (*mishpat*)(2): He is the Master of trustworthiness without flaw, is righteous (*tzaddik*) and upright (*yashar*) (*Dev.* 32:4). Each phrase of this *pasuk* illustrates how G-d’s judgments and decisions are fair, correct, and uncorrupt (see my footnotes for more (3)). How could we possibly pass the responsibility for our malfeasance onto The Lord, of whom it is said that “all His doings are blameless”? Not only is this illogical, it is arrogant and counterproductive! Are we not attempting to appear before the Judge from Whom we have strayed? Do we not declare in the previous sentence “none of us are so brazen as to say: ‘we are right and have not sinned!’ Rather we and our ancestors have sinned”!

Bar Kappara states (in BT *Nedarim* 50b) that the word *to`eva*--abomination--can be said to mean “*to`e atta bah*”—“you stray because of it to it”. With this reading, all three of the last three items of the *vidui*, which all begin with a *taf*, boil down to the same root (t.`h., to stray in the manner that a sheep wanders off) and are thus not three separate items but three segments of the same concept. R’ Shmuel Miller (4) notes that the first of the three phrases “*ti`avnu*”, which literally means “we have abominated”, includes any action through which we deny our human element and place our selves on level with or below animals. That is, we deny that aspect which separates human from beast and which reflects our status as “made in G-dly image” which is, according to R’ Shlomo Yaffe, free will in moral choice. This is evident from the inclusion of both “*ta`inu*”—“we have strayed” and “*tit`anu*”—“you have let us stray” and their attachment to the prayer after what should have been the last item, “*ti`avnu*”. R’ Miller considers “*ta`inu*” as only the first part of “*tit`anu*”, and that the latter is the sin to which we are really confessing. The *Vidui Zichron Shalom* (5) quotes R’ Eliyahu E. Dessler, who relates in the name of R’ Chaim of Volozhin that “*tit`anu*” does not, in actuality, criticize G-d for granting free will, but rather refers to human misuse of “G-d’s blessing of free will.”

But what does it really mean to “misuse free will”? Misusing moral choice cannot mean making the wrong choice, because that’s what all the other items in the confession are for! Misuse of free choice does not mean making the wrong choice, but rather making no choice at all. We set ourselves lower than all the animals and deny our G-dly essence when we weasel out of making a choice. How is this done?

Jean-Paul Sartre writes that humanity is made up of two parts. One is our “being”—our background, our surrounding, all of our past experiences, our genes—everything that has happened in the past and exists now. The second part is our “becoming”—this is the uniquely-human freedom to transcend our current situation and to change the course of our lives. He posits that there are three chief ways in which free will is denied: the first is when we ignore our “being”. We deny any responsibilities or obligations, and escape to a false freedom. We allow ourselves to believe that reality has no hold on us, and that we can do whatever we want. The second is when we deny our “becoming”: we allow ourselves to believe that we cannot change. We are the way we are now and can be nothing different. The course of our life is already planned out for us and we have no part in determining it. All of us are guilty in transgressing the sin of abuse of free will because we have all tried to avoid making choices and to escape our responsibilities in these two ways. The last manner in which free will is denied is something we are all also guilty of, but one most of us have never considered. This is when we stand behind tradition or law, and say that we cannot do anything because the law is a brick wall. We justify our unjust actions by claiming religious or traditional obligations. We all know when we are beholden to *halacha*, and when we have made a mistake in our trying to hide behind it.

In contrast to these, we actualize our divine aspect when we become active agents in our lives. This is why “we have gone astray” is the first part of “you had let us stray”: It is our responsibility to activate the divine part of ourselves, and when we do not, we sin against ourselves and against G-d. Let us all realize this responsibility, and let us never say that “Hashem made me do it”.

Footnotes:

1. The word *tamim* connotes total blamelessness, blemishlessness, non-guilt and innocence, roughly translating to “perfect” in the sense of “without any fault”.
2. *Mishpat*, often translated as “justice” comes from sh.ph.t., to judge, is with a connotation of judging for each what is best for him, which roughly translates to “equity” (in contrast to d.i.n., which connotes judgment against objective standards).
3. Also note how similar this *pasuk* is to the last *pasuk* of the psalm for *Shabbat* (*Tehil.* 92:16), which as a whole seeks to prove that G-d is just even though the wicked thrive.
4. In The OU *Vidui* Companion
5. A *vidui* guide from *Vidui* Publishing, a branch of *Keren Ner Tomid*

“A byline for Jacob? Oh man, where do we even start?”

- Ariel Marks

SHORT VORT

A Letter from My Sixth Grade Self

By Michelle Siegel '11

On December 31st, 1999, my 6th grade teacher had us write letters to ourselves, which she promised would be sent to us in about 10 years. To my surprise, I traveled home on *Rosh Hashana* this year to see a letter addressed to me, in my own hand-writing, sitting on my bed. After reading it's contents, I started thinking about how much I have changed – not just how my chicken scratch handwriting has evolved, but also about my life. Looking at just how much has changed (and hasn't) in ten years, one important thing stood out: priorities. My priorities then and now are drastically different. While then I was thinking about geometry, my seat at the lunch table and the clothes I wore, now I am thinking about my resume, Yom Kippur and the

clothes I wear (so I guess that has not really changed!). I found that by looking at the past, it can really help us to appreciate the amount that we have changed and grown. Thinking about the years as they pass, and how our lives change is very important at this time of year, as we move into a new semester and a new year. It is also one of the topics discussed in this week's *parsha* (*perek lamed-bet, pasuk zayin*): "Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of [other] generations". While we may be constantly moving forward, we also need to take time to look back on the things that we have done and the people we used to be. By doing that, we can really see how far we have come.

Shabat Shalom.

"Got the best parking spot ever!" - Michelle's g-chat status

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

our physicality and become more spiritually-focused. Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Hashem's instructions to Moshe to remove his shoes is a directive about Moshe's own spirituality. He explains that Hashem said to Moshe: "Instead of trying to find out about a phenomenon that lies beyond your sphere, understand and devote yourself to the loft destiny of the ground upon which you already stand." In other words, Moshe's spiritual yearnings could be satisfied by concentrating on his task in this world. True spirituality is achieved by focusing on the world around us and what we can achieve in it. We need not climb to great heights or reach beyond our capacities. I would argue that the same message is being sent to those worshipping in the Temple. *Halachah* says that while the *Beit ha-Mikdash* was a truly unique place, it is wrong to think that spiritual fulfillment is possible only in such a setting. Rather, by removing our shoes and maintaining constant contact with the ground, we are sent a strong reminder that our spiritual energies must be focused on our life in this world.

A final insight into the prohibition against wearing shoes is offered by Rabbi Yehoshua Baumol, who served as Rabbi of Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Rabbi Baumol was also a founder and the first president of Agudas Yisroel in America. He writes: "with shoes, humans are undeterred, unaware, unconcerned with what they trample underfoot. When barefoot, they are sensitive to every blade of grass, pebble. By divesting themselves of shoes, [they] open up new areas of sensitivity, concerns, empathy...." Rabbi Baumol is emphasizing another element of spirituality – the sensitivity and empathy we must have for the world around us. The removal of our shoes heightens our awareness of the world around us, and of the little things that would literally be trampled under our feet if we did not have that heightened sensitivity. Perhaps our feeling of awkwardness at wearing sneakers, Tevas or Crocks with our *yom tov* attire contributes to this heightened spiritual sensitivity. Just as we are meant to be more aware of the physical world around us, so must we become aware of the social realities and vulnerabilities of our fellow humans.

G'mar Chatimah Tovah!

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz got all of the fish for the Sushi making event from Massell pond.

(Rebecca Pollack continued from page 1)

In Tractate *Sanhedrin* 94a it then goes on to say that this is the reason Chizkiyahu was not declared to be the *Mashiach*.

This shows the power of *shira*: *shira* is a vehicle where the king connects with G-d and builds a relationship, like with *shirat* David in Samuel II. Chizkiyahu praises G-d, gives a request, gets his request but then does not do *shira*- that was his fatal flaw. He thought what happened to him could have happened to anyone. He missed the point.

Over *Rosh Hashana* we read *shirat* Chana in the *haftora*. This is because she was a woman who used *shira* correctly. She saw that change was needed in her life and in those surrounding her and she was active and sought change. Most importantly she realized it was all from G-d.

But still, what makes *shira* have so much more of an impact than prose? Rav Ezra Bick says, prose states the timeless truth. *Shira* expresses the truth of this particular second, the immediate reaction to the unique moment in history. Even though *Ha'azinu* is *shira*, it is a very unusual one. It is written not for the Jews of the desert generation. It is written for "when many evils and troubles shall befall them, THEN this song shall answer them as a witness" (31,21). Today, you read it and study it only so that it should be ready "in their mouths" (31,19), so that "it will not be forgotten from their seed" (31,21). At that future time, this song will suddenly become terribly relevant - it will then be the WITNESS who comes to testify. *Ha'azinu* is a case of prepared and studied spontaneity. This, however, still leaves the question of why not prose? Rav Bick suggests that unlike *Ki Tavo*, *Ha'azinu* is not about repentance, it's about blame. The text always says "you x" and "you y" it is to counter all future complaints of "G-d abandoned us." No, right here in *Ha'azinu* G-d is laying it all out on the table, "you are abandoning Me, I will hide My face when you have done wrong."

I think from this it is clear why we are reading this on *Shabbat Teshuva*. G-d and Moshe left US - the future generations of Bnei Yisrael - a message, that we brought this all upon ourselves, that we are the only ones who can fix it with prayer and repentance. I also believe that *Ha'azinu* is in the form of *shira* so that we can make the comparisons to all the other great *shiras* in *Tanach* that were effective - David, Devorah, etc. From Chana we take away that message plus something more, that not only through our prayers and subsequent *shira* can we repent but that we can effectively make change to our society and those around us. We can take our *teshuva* and move it towards a national level, not just a personal one, and make the change that is needed to reverse the testimony from *Ha'azinu*. We should learn from Chizkiyahu and his tragic flaw when he did not sing a *shira*. I think the Talmud connecting his flaw to the loss of *mashiach* gives an important message. Even if it is not literal it shows the impact that *shira* has. We can learn a lot from *shira* and make the changes we need to in ourselves and all of *Klal Yisrael*. *Le-shana tova teikhateivu veteichateimu*.

Rebecca loves learning and the Rambam

SHORT VORTS

And When the Wind Blows... The Cradle will be Smote and seek Vengeance and Retribution!

By Yoanna Freedman '11

A sickly grandmother stands over a bed tucking her grandchild in for the last time. As parting words to her beloved she sings her last lullaby. It does not really matter which one, because as lullabies go, they are all quite threatening and depressing. Amidst images of babies falling out of cradles on windy nights, bridges falling down, useless purchases of mockingbirds and diamond rings and children making fun of Mary because of a shadowing lamb, the grandchild contentedly falls asleep.

In *parshat Ha'azinu*, Moshe sings his parting message just moments before G-d commands him to go up on a mountain and die. Much like the popular lullabies with which we are familiar, Moshe's song threatens death and destruction in a somewhat ominous tone. A similar pattern is demonstrated in numerous parting words throughout the Torah, with Yaakov, with Dovid, and with Shlomo in *Kohelet*. As one of the final things before all these men passed away, there seemed to be a certain bitterness in their tone, giving each of them a somewhat old and cranky appearance before they died. All of these parting words are strikingly similar in comparison to the depressing lullabies we sing. Why is it that before someone is laid to rest, whether permanently or just for the night, we broach topics of destructive and bitter nature?

In *L'David Hashem Ori*, a prayer we have been saying for a number of weeks now as we find ourselves in the holiday season, we mention all sorts of threatening advances from enemies.

"When evildoers approach me to devour my flesh...
though an army would besiege me, my heart would not
fear; though war would arise against me, in this I trust...
That I dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my
life... indeed he will hide me in his shelter on the day of
evil..." And so on and so forth...

But despite all of these threatening advances, we do not fear. We feel safe because we are in G-d's protection because we follow Him through the way of the Torah. Similarly in a lullaby, perhaps horrid occurrences, scary tumbles, endless embarrassment and deep torment are supposed to comfort us, in a twisted sort of way, knowing that we are in the comfort of our own bed and embrace of those that love and protect us. And while the *tzadikim* of our past time may likely have been old and cranky, there is comfort in their parting words in similar resonance to "*L'david Hashem Ori*." Although it may seem like Moshe is threatening us with destruction if we stray from G-d and do not follow the *mitzvot*, quite contrarily there is a comfort in that if we follow the Torah and act in the ways of G-d we are protected and we will have a life of fulfillment. May the coming days of the holidays bring us closer to this comfort and dwelling in the house of Hashem and lead us towards a life of greater fulfillment, and the coming of the Messiah. Amen.

*Yoanna is a Hiatt Career Center advisor. No one knows
what she does there.*

The Power of Teshuvah

By Eitan Cooper '13

At the age of twenty (yes, you read that right), Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira was appointed the chief Rabbi of small town near Warsaw called Piaseczno. During the Holocaust, he was confined to the Warsaw Ghetto, but still, at great risk and toil, was able to continue his study of Torah. In fact, he even managed to write an entire *sefer*, entitled the "*Aish Kodesh*." This was no ordinary *sefer*; it was written on crumpled pieces of paper and buried underground in bottles. Amazingly, it was found after the war and published. The *Aish Kodesh* provides with something that almost no other *sefer* on the planet can: the words of a Hassidic master during one of the most painful eras of Jewish history.

In his commentary specially devoted to *Shabbat Shuvah*, the *Aish Kodesh* asks an interesting question about the unique *haftarah* read this week. In the first *pasuk*, "*Shuvah Yisrael...*" the Jewish people are addressed in the singular form. Later, in the very next *pasuk*, they are addressed in the plural. Why the change?

The *Aish Kodesh* says that the *pasuk* is teaching us that each and every person has to do his own, personal *teshuva* in order for *Klal Yisrael* to move forward as a whole. All of our actions add up, and are part of a greater picture. When doing *teshuva*, we have to think of our own wrongdoings, and how ultimately we did not realize that we are part of a greater story. He says that when each individual returns to Hashem, a unique, new light is brought into *Klal Yisrael*. This can even happen, as he says, "...in our time of distress."

Rav Kook tells us in his famous work, "*Orot Hate-shuva*," that all of *Klal Yisrael* is constantly moving forward. We are always returning to Hashem- this process happens every second of every day. The *Aish Kodesh* was able to realize this, of all places, in the depths of the Warsaw Ghetto.

I hope that we can all reach, or even get a small taste of the amazing power of *teshuvah* that the *Aish Kodesh* was able to tap into during such a terrible time in our history. May we realize what a *bracha* it is that we live in the time and place that we do, and may we take full advantage of it.

*Eitan is one of the newest members of JFA which makes him
even cooler!*

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