

Peretz Wolf-Prusan

Shabbat Shuvah 5786

A grandchild is sitting with Saba, asking questions.

“Why is everyone standing up?”

“It’s the Amidah, the Standing Prayer.”

“Why is everyone standing up again?”

“The Torah is coming out of the Ark.”

“Why is everyone standing up again?”

“The Torah is going back into the Ark.”

Then the Rabbi takes off a watch and puts it on the Bimah.

“What does that mean?”

“Absolutely nothing. *Gornisht mit gornisht, zilch, bubkes.*”

It is a tradition for rabbis to give longer-than-usual sermons during

But I will not do that.

So here we are on Shabbat Shuvah, the name comes from the special reading from the prophets (Haftarah) that we heard today, which began with the words Hosea 14:2 *Shuvah Yisrael* ("Return O Israel"). And concluded with a portion from the Book of Micah 7:18-20, the Alter translation.

Who is God like You dismissing crime

And forgiving trespass for the remnant of His estate?

He does not cling forever to His wrath

For he desires kindness

Again He shall have mercy on us

And he shall cleanse our crimes.

And you shall fling into the depths of the sea

All of our offenses

Grant truth to Jacob,

Kindness to Abraham

As You swore to our fathers

In ancient days.

If you had troubles with Avinu Malkeynu, get ready for so many more metaphors!

The Book of Life... something you should worry about or another powerful metaphor?

L'Shana Tova Tikatevu - **may you be written in the Book of Life**

It's ancient. It's in the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 32b) says that on Rosh Hashana, God inscribes everyone's name into one of three books. The righteous go into the Book of Life (mazzal tov), the evil go into the Book of Death (bye bye), and those in-between, have judgment suspended until Yom Kippur. That's where we are, a congregation of in-betweens.

The greeting *L'Shana Tova Tikatevu* (May you be inscribed for a good year) changes after Rosh Hashanah ends. It is replaced by *G'mar Hatimah Tovah* (A good final sealing), which is used during the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

In these days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Daily Amidah has additions:

"Remember us for life"

"Who is like you, merciful parent?"

"And inscribe us for life...",

"And in the book of life."

Zochreinu is inserted in the beginning of every single Amidah from the beginning of Rosh Hashanah through the end of Yom Kippur, making it one of the most repeated lines in the high holiday prayers.

On Shabbat Shuvah:

"Remember us for life, Melech who delights in life, and inscribe us in the Book of Life for Your sake, Living God",

"remembering Your creatures in mercy for life",

"Inscribe all the people of Your covenant for a good life",

"May we and the entire House of Israel be remembered and recorded in the Book of life, blessing, sustenance, and peace."

Rabbi Levy reached out to us about the metaphors of "Our Father, Our King," a challenging metaphor. However, Hasidic storytelling fully embraced these metaphors: Kings, Queens, Heavenly Courts, prosecutors, defense attorneys, tzadiks, thieves, angels. The Heavenly Courts featured the "Righteous Judge" (*Shofat Tzadik*), a prosecutor and a defense attorney, often a rebbe.

The Miser and the Thief

Everyone knew Shmilke, the wealthy miser. Miser Shmilke. One day he awoke dead. He found himself walking up a narrow mountain passage, he had on his great coat, the one he had died in. He was a miser, after all.

The Miser knew where he was going, to the *Beit Din shel Ma'alah* (the Heavenly Court). There he would be faced with The List of his mitzvot and The List of all of his "Averos" (or Avayrot), all the times he avoided doing a mitzvah.

He trudged up the path towards the Heavenly Court, only to find that he was now side by side with a thief. He tried to hurry. He slowed down. No matter what he did, he walked side by side with the thief, who had died in jail and was wearing only the thin shirt of a prisoner.

It was getting colder.

The thief began to moan.

The Miser had on his great coat, the one he slept in, the one he had died in.

The thief continued to moan and cry out.

The Miser had spent his life avoiding this. It went on and on. He could not take it anymore and all of sudden he gave the thief his coat.

The thief looked at the Miser with such gratitude. He had rarely got anything.

Now the Miser knew.

“My life, the miser said, has been ‘*Gornisht mit gornisht*,’ without meaning.”

“Not true,” says the Thief, “you gave me a coat. I’ll go ahead of you and tell them.”

“It will be of no use...” the Miser said.

Suddenly the Miser found himself in the Heavenly Courtroom. The judge stared down. The defense looked lost. The prosecutor presented the "Righteous Judge" (*Shofat Tzadik*) had a tremendous list. The largest list in a long time. All of the Miser’s missed mitzvot.

The "Righteous Judge" (*Shofat Tzadik*) pointed to the list, the voice thundered: “Miser Shmilke, do you know what this is?”

“Yes.”

The defense held up a little slip of paper and gave it to the Judge.

The Righteous Judge read aloud, “Gave a coat to a thief. After death. Do you know where you are going?”

“Yes”

The Righteous Judge bellowed, “Next case, the thief!”

The Miser found himself walking alone down a mountain. Now, for the first time he reflected on his life. He came to a resolve. He was *B’shalom*, at peace with his sad life.

Suddenly, a voice thundered, “Miser Shmilke, come back to the Heavenly Court.”

“No!”

“Yes!”

“No!”

“Yes!”

He was back. It was chaos. The prosecutor was on the floor, searching for something. The Judge was disheveled and angry.

The Judge looked down upon Miser Shmilke, and said, "You may remain!"

The Miser replied, "But what about the List?"

"The Judge shouted, "Don't talk about the list."

"But what about the List? It was so long!"

"Don't talk about the list."

"But what about the List?"

"Don't talk about the list."

"Why not?" said the Miser.

"The thief stole the list."

I wish you "a good ending of the sealing in the Book of Life," in this life, or the next.

גמר חתימה טובה