

Last Call.. It's Mincha Time

Dedicated to Cynthia Whitehead. After seven years as Drash Coordinator for Congregation Netivot Shalom, this was the last drash placement of her tenure.

A Bar in Yaffo in the 8th Century BCE, during the reigns of Jeroboam II in the north and Amaziah in the south. A time of relative peace for the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was a Monday, near closing time, a seasoned sailor walks in.

Recognizing a regular, the barkeeper asks: "What will you have *rav ha-khobel* (רב־החֹבֵל), my captain?"

"Anatolian Grug."

"Herb infused wine with tree resin pine honey and herbs?"

"That's it."

The barkeep leans in, "Say," tell me everything. I heard you almost lost your ship? And threw your passenger overboard?"

"Nonsense. I swear by Adonai and all the Heavenly Hosts we never did that. Truly, we nearly sank and drown, but not that, truly. We have a sturdy Phoenician ship."

"Who then was this passenger and what happened to him?"

"His name was Jonah."

“From around here in Judea?”

“No, from Israel in the North. One of those “No God but Adonai” northerners. From the town of **Gath-hepher** near the Galilee. He was in a hurry. Self-absorbed. An emotional wreck. Confused and depressed. Needed a ship.”

“That’s quite a description.”

“You should have seen him. Wouldn’t be happy if the Good Lord put a shade tree over his head.”

“Why didn’t he book passage in the north?”

“He said he wanted passage to Tarshish, which is due west of here at the end of the sea.”

“Why would a Northerner sail with a crew of pagans?”

“Hy there! My crew are not pagans! Polyatric Hebrews. Like everyone else here in Judea. As in the Psalms: “*Who in the skies can equal Adonai among the **B’nai Elohim**¹.*” And, “*For who in the skies can equal Adonai, can compare with Adonai among the divine beings, the **B’nei Elohim**².*” Jonah was from the North – Israel. Kept

going on about, “I am a Hebrew, I fear only Adonai, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.³” So annoying.”

“So, tell me, what really happened?”

“We were only an hour on the Great Sea, *HaYam HaGadol*, and hit a storm, the mother of all storms. You know the Mediterranean can change in an instant. I’ve sailed in rough weather before but nothing rougher than this. It was Biblical! Legendary! We were a crew of 36, lamed vavniks all, and myself. We dropped anchor and lost the anchor. We tried tacking, jibbing, and the wind took our sails.”

“And Jonah?”

“Whine, whine, whine. Just useless. Barfed. Bumped his head on the boom and knocked himself out. We threw him...”

“Overboard?”

“No, down below decks into the dark hold.”

“What happened then?”

“We lost the mast and all the rigging. We began throwing everything overboard. We used Marie Kondo's Method⁴: first clothes, books, papers, miscellaneous items, and finally sentimental items, while evaluating each object by whether it sparks joy. That took a lot of time. We threw Kondo's book overboard. We sacrificed all the chickens.”

“You carry chickens?”

“*Zevachim*, everyone in Judea has offerings on board for multiple divine forces. You know, polytheurgic rituals.”

“I had no idea. What happened next?”

“We learned the hard way that Adonai doesn't want our chickens. Our little things. We must be holding back, hiding, keeping secrets from Adonai, as if that is possible! All we could do is drop oars and row. Pull after pull, page after page, rowing and rowing.

We chanted, “Heave Ho / Al Cheyt, Heave Ho / Al Cheyt, Heave Ho / Al Cheyt, Al Cheyt, Al Cheyt, Al Cheyt, Al Cheyt.”

“Over and again, until exhaustion. It does no good if your only treading water. Lost our grip of the oars and let go. Nothing left to offer...

“But what?”

But what we had hidden in the deepest private places of our souls⁵.”

The barkeep whispered, “What did you sacrifice from the privacy of your soul?”

“We threw everything over until we had nothing and were nothing. I lost my captain’s hat. No longer a captain. A ship with no anchor, mast or sails... we were no longer sailors. We lost illusions of ourselves, our little stories we carried. We were naked and soon to sink into the sea.”

The barkeep whispered, “Tell me. What did you sacrifice from the privacy of your soul?”

“That’s between me and Adonai. I gave my-self up to Adonai, just before I thought I would die.”

“That must have been terrifying.”

“Not so bad. The sea is the mother of us all, you know, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart⁶.’”

“That’s your line?”

“No, Book of Job, you’ve got to get out of this bar every once in a while.”

“OK. What happened next?”

“The sea calmed. As it does. No reason we can see. The wind died down. The waves subsided. The clouds drifted away. We could see the sun close to setting in the west and the lights of Jaffa coming on to the east. Like the songs says, “It’s not dark yet, but it’s getting there⁷.”

“That’s your line?”

“No, Bob Dylan, I’m telling you...”

“Yeah. I’ve got to get out of this bar every once in a while. Then what happened?”

Only then did we know that our prayers had been answered. We had truly prayed.”

“What did you pray?”

Sh'ma koleinu, Adonai Eloheinu CHus v'rachem aleinu. / "Hear our voice, Adonai our God, have pity and mercy on us, and accept our prayer with mercy and goodwill.

“We saw the gates of the port of Jaffa closing and we were close to the shore. Nachshon⁸ like, we jumped into the salty sea up to our necks and pulled the boat in. We came to shore like pilgrims coming out of a mikvah, wet and reborn, nearly naked and wholly unafraid of losing anything because we had tossed everything away. We had turned the ship and ourselves around, teshuvah like.”

“And Jonah?”

“Woke him up. Said he dreamt of being inside the belly of a big fish. Imagine that! He struggled to the shore with us and said, ‘I’ve come to a tremendous realization! I made a terrible mistake. I’m supposed to be going **north** to **Tarsus**⁹ in Anatolia, not **west** to **Tarshish**. Last time I trust GPS without looking around.’ We never saw him again. I heard he walked from Tarsus to Nineveh. I really don’t see that fellow learning anything no matter where he goes.”

“And you?”

The old sailor gave the bartender a little rap on the head and said, "Before you can find God, you must lose yourself¹⁰. Best to do that on dry land."

“That’s a whale of a story!”

“What’s a whale?”

“An expression. I don’t know. Something big. Alright everyone. Last Call. The Gates of this bar are closing. It’s Mincha time.”

G'mar chatima tova (גמר חתימה טובה)

¹ Psalm 89:6

² Psalm 89:6

³ Jonah 1:9

⁴ The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying: The Japanese Art
Book 1 of 3: The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up
Kondo, Marie

⁵ Deuteronomy 29:29

⁶ Job 1:21

⁷ Not Dark Yet, Song by Bob Dylan, 1997, Time Out of Mind

⁸ Mekhilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Tractate Vayehi Beshalach 6:4

⁹ The capitol of Cilicia in Asia Minor, Southern Turkey

¹⁰ Baal Shem Tov