



Lessons from the 613th Mitzva

By Akiva Thalheim, 12th Grade

So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel. (31:19)

In this week's parsha, we're taught the 613th mitzvah of the Torah: the commandment on each individual of Bnei Yisrael to write for themselves a Sefer Torah.

The Rambam in Sefer Torah 7:1 quickly answers the question of how we learn out the commandment to write a Sefer Torah, when the posuk only said "song," by explaining that the real commandment is to "write a Sefer Torah with this song in it." The song that is being referred to is Ha'azinu, also in this week's parsha.

Being that this mitzvah is the last of the Torah, it is easy understand that there are important lessons we can learn out from it. From the fact that a Torah is such a central part of Judaism, one could look at it for inspiration to live a better, halachic lifestyle.

1) Each letter in the Torah must be "mukafot gevil" – "surrounded by parchment." This means that while each letter can't touch the letter next to it, the letters must also be adequately spaced so that one can see that they are part of the same word. From this we can learn two important lessons: A) It is up to each person to fulfill his obligations of being a halachic Jew, and can't rely on some-

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Changing for Inspiration

By Aaron Nassir, 9th Grade

There is an interesting halacha in Shulchan Aruch which states that during the Ten Days of Teshuva, one who isn't stringent on eating Pas yisroel or cholov yisroel during the year should try to be stricter with these customs. Furthermore, even if one does not plan on continuing this custom after Yom Kippur, he should still keep it. A famous question on this is the following: What's the point of telling people to take on certain stringencies that they don't plan on keeping? In order for teshuva to count, it has to be sincere and authentic!

There are certain people who get inspired very easily, while others may not. Usually, when people are inspired, they start feeling the need to get closer to Hashem, especially around Yom Kippur time. However, after trying and trying they realize that it's not so easy. Many will think that their lack of ability to do teshuva is because they do not fear Hashem properly, so they learn Torah and listen to speeches, but the truth is that the problem may not just be that they lack yir'at shamayim. Rather, the issue is that they are set in their ways and have a difficult time dealing with change.

Chazal tell us that Noach built an Ark for one hundred and twenty years. He was a tzadik and the Gadol

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Torah Teasers

By Rabbi Moshe Erlbaum, 9th Grade Rebbe

**Parshas Vayelech
Questions**

1. What is unique about this parsha with regard to the annual Torah reading cycle in the synagogue?
2. In this parsha, Moshe passes away at the age of 120 years. Where from the Torah do we see an explicit verse that 120 years is an appropriate age to die?
3. What holiday is referred to in this parsha?
4. To whom are the encouraging words "be strong and courageous" said in this parsha? (2 answers)
5. In this parsha, where do women and small children appear in the same verse? What 4 other places in the book of Deuteronomy are women and small children mentioned in the same verse?

Answers

1. Vayelech is the only parsha that can be read in its entirety twice in one year. This can happen if parshas Nitzavim and Vayelech are read on separate weeks, in which case Vayelech is read *after* Rosh Hashana. Then in the following year, if the parshas are read together, Vayelech is read *before* the Rosh Hashana - i.e. twice in one year.
2. In parshas Bereishis, Hashem explicitly states that the days of mankind should be 120 years (Genesis 6:3, according to the Ibn Ezra; see Rashi).
3. The festival of Sukkot is explicitly referred to as the time when the mitzvah of Hakhel takes place, following the Sabbatical year (Deut. 31:10).
4. Moshe encourages the Jews to "be strong and courageous" in their war against the Canaanites (Deut. 31:6). Moshe also encourages Yehoshua to "be strong and courageous" (Deut. 31:23).
5. Regarding the command of Hakhel, women and children must come to Jerusalem to hear the king read the Torah (Deut. 31:12). Elsewhere in the book of Deuteronomy: (1-2) Twice in parshas Devarim when Moshe recalls the destruction and occupation of Cheshbon and Bashan, women and small children are mentioned together (Deut. 2:34, 3:6). (3) In parshas Shoftim, regarding the rules of conquering a city, the Jewish army may keep alive the women and small children (Deut. 20:14). (4) In parshas Nitzavim, Moshe lists groups of people who are "standing" before Hashem - including women and children (Deut. 29:10).

The Haftorah Corner**Written By Adam Zahler**

As Yom Kippur comes to its conclusion and the tefila is about to reach its climax with neilah we read at mincha the famous yet very difficult to understand story of yonah. Hashem wants yonah to go to ninveh and tell them to repent. The city had descended to a level so low that was simply intolerable, and destruction was imminent. Only immediate repentance would bring about forgiveness. Yonah, however, did not want to undertake this mission, and tries to flee from Hashem. He books passage on a ship which will carry him far away from Ninveh, but a sudden storm threatens to tear the ship apart. The sailors cast lots, and Yonah is tossed into the sea, where he is swallowed by a big fish.

From the belly of the fish, Yonah cries out to Hashem in anguish and despair. Hashem answers Yonah's prayer. The fish spits him out onto the shore, and he sets off at once for Ninveh, where his message is listened to immediately. The people wear sackcloth and repent, and the city is spared.

The obvious question leaps at us from the page: Yonah was undoubtedly a very holy man if Hashem granted him the gift of prophecy. How then did he have the chutzpah to refuse to serve as the messenger of Heaven?

Our Sages tell us that Yonah was concerned for the welfare of the Jewish people who, at that time, were also guilty of grievous sins in spite of the repeated warnings of the great prophets. They explain Yonah feared the people of evil Ninveh, a nation of people on the lowest of levels, would heed his prophetic warning and repent, causing the Jewish people, the followers of the Torah, to suffer by comparison. They would stand before Hashem with nothing to say in their own defense. Therefore, Yonah chose to flee rather than have this for the Jews.

But the questions still remain: Did Yonah think he could frustrate the divine plan by fleeing on a ship? Did he think Hashem would find no other way to offer Ninveh the option of repentance? And even if he thought his flight could

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10-Minute Halacha Shiur

Given by Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz
on yutorah.org

Transcribed by
Moshe Simon

Shoes on Yom Kippur

We know that there are five main issurim placed against us on Yom Kippur. The Mishna in Masechet Yoma on daf ayin-gimel amud beis lists these five restrictions. It states: “On Yom Kippur, it is forbidden to eat, to drink, to wash, to anoint, to wear shoes and to have marital relations.”

We only know for certain that the Issur of eating and drinking on Yom Kippur is from the Torah, what about the others?

The first opinion is that of Tosfos on daf ayin-zayin amud aleph who maintains that it is merely an issue from Chazal. He says that the pesukim in the Torah that refer to the issue of wearing shoes are only an asmachta, or a “hint”. He adds a proof from a Gemara that talks about different leniencies for different types of people such as a woman who is pregnant. If the issur was really from the Torah, there would be no such exemption. On the other hand, the Ran disputes this and brings a Gemara from daf ayin-daled amud aleph that tells us that by the issue of eating and drinking the punishment is kares, whereas by the other restrictions you aren’t chayiv kares, if they were all truly only issurim from Chazal, then it would’ve been obvious that they aren’t chayiv kares and the Gemara would need not to have specified the distinction.

What does the phrase “wear shoes” exactly mean?

There are 3 basic opinions brought down by the Beis Yosef in Siman Tof Reish Yud Daled. The first is

the opinion of the Baal Hamaor who held that the definition is any material that “protects the shoe”. The next is the opinion of Rashi who says it must mean a wool or leather shoe. Finally, the third opinion is of the Rif and the Rosh who are in agreement that the definition is a leather shoe. Ultimately, the Shulchan Aruch holds that the Issur of wearing shoes on Yom Kippur is that of wearing leather shoes (like the Rosh and the Rif).

Many of the Achronim have also have different ways to interpret the issur of “wearing shoes” based on the Shulchan Aruch and other opinions. The Mishna Brura in Siman Tof Reish Yud Daled Sif Katan Hey quotes the Elyah Rabah and says that you should be stringent to follow Rashi and not wear wool or leather. While Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach holds like the Shulchan Aruch in Halichos Shlomo Perek Hey Os yud zayin in that all you really have to do is stay away from leather. Rav Schachter writes in the Nefesh Harav on page 210 that Rav Soloveitchik holds that you shouldn’t wear anything that is comfortable and should probably stick to slippers.

What part of the shoe is not allowed to be leather?

The Mateh Ephraim writes that if the sole of your shoe is leather then you have a problem. While the Maharam Shik says that the leather stitching or anything holding the shoe together would be a problem. Lastly, the Kaf Hachaim holds that leather shoelaces are not a problem of “wearing shoes.”

(The Haftorah Corner—Continued from page 2)

somehow benefit the Jewish people, what right did he have to suppress the prophecy entrusted to him?

Furthermore, what lesson are we meant to derive from this story in the climactic moments of Yom Kippur? Is it only meant to present us with another example of disaster avoided through timely repentance? Or is there also a deeper significance in the central theme of the story, which revolves around Yonah’s attempt to get out of his mission?

The commentators explain that Yonah certainly had no illusions about thwarting the divine plan. If Hashem wanted to warn Ninveh that only repentance could save them, He undoubtedly would. However, Yonah had such an overpowering love for the Jewish people that he could not bear to be the agent of their misfortune. In desperation, he resolved to flee so that Hashem’s will would be fulfilled through some other channel. He was fully aware of the magnitude of his act and the dire consequences he would probably suffer for his disobedience, but

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Yom Kippur: The Pathway to Joy

By: Josh Beer, 12th Grade

We begin the Yom Kippur davening with the pasuk, "Or Zarua LaTzadik Ul'Yishrei Lev Simcha" – "Light is sown for the righteous, and for the upright of heart, happiness". It is a bit perplexing as to why we don't begin on the holiest and most fearsome day of the year with a more direct and powerful message. A message like "Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil decree!" which we say later on seems a more fitting start for this paramount day. So why was this pasuk chosen to start the davening?

Rav Chaim Volozhin explained the difference between someone who is upright and someone who is righteous. He said that someone who is righteous is constantly battling the yetzer harah. Although he is happy most of the time because he knows he is doing the right thing by following the ways of Hashem, sometimes he feels upset and hopes that Hashem will help him to get by. This is why the pasuk says he is merely sown with happiness. On the contrary, an upright person is someone who has improved greatly to the point that his yetzer harah does not pose a problem. He subsequently possesses complete happiness knowing that he won't stumble in the face of the yetzer harah. We do many acts before Yom Kippur to improve ourselves, such as giving tzedaka and saying vidui. These acts get us to the level of a tzadik as at that moment we know what is proper to do and we know of our mistakes in the past. Finally, on Yom Kippur we ask forgiveness from Hashem and ask for Him to assist us in doing the right thing and overcoming the yetzer harah.

Therefore, we start the davening with this pasuk. It serves to remind us as we head into Yom Kippur that if we take advantage of the opportunity to return to the ways of Hashem, we can become upright and through this be filled with joy. May we all experience that joy this year and be written and sealed in the Book of Life!

(Aaron Nassir—Continued from page 1)

Hador of his day. The reason it took so long to build was so that people would ask him what it was for, and upon hearing the answer, would hopefully be inspired to repent. And as we know from the Parsha, that is exactly what happened, but it didn't have any effect on them. The people even saw the animals going into the ark and the rain coming but they still did not do teshuva.

How is it possible that they were not affected by everything that was going on? Rav Sholom Schwadron, zt"l, comments that if Noach walked in one day and told the entire generation that in one week there would be a massive flood and they must change their ways right now, it might have worked. But Noach started building the Ark and a week later it was still there. Another week later and it was still there. A month later, and he was still there. They understood that each morning when they would pass Noach on their way to work, he will be working on his Ark. They got used to the sight and thus it was incapable of affecting them in a positive way.

The same is true over here; even if we aren't stringent on certain behaviors throughout the year, by changing a little for ten days, we are showing that we can. Even if you don't plan on keeping it, break the habit to prove to Hashem and yourself that you *can* change for the better.

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the alternative was unbearable.

Hashem, however, chose not to send a different messenger to Ninveh. Instead, He sent storms and whales to force Yonah to return and accept his mission. The message to Yonah was very clear, and it resonates down through the ages to reach us every Yom Kippur. Yonah had no right to weigh the pros and cons of obeying Hashem's command. He did not have the option of deciding whether or not to obey. If Hashem commanded him to go to Ninveh, then that was what he was obliged to do, and no amount of rationalization could change it. A person has to serve Hashem completely, to obey without question, reservation or rationalization. Hashem undoubtedly knew of Yonah's love for his people, and if He nevertheless sent him on his mission, Yonah had no choice but to obey.

In our own lives, we sometimes bend the rules to suit our convenience. We fall into the trap of "situation ethics," seeking a middle ground between our desires and the dictates of our Creator. We rationalize. We compromise. Like Yonah, we say to ourselves, "I must do what is right over what Hashem says." But in actuality, as Yonah discovered so painfully, the very statement contains faulty logic as it questions the inherent truth of whatever Hashem says. Total acceptance may indeed be difficult from time to time, but overall, it is the only path to being full and complete ovdei Hashem and the coming of Mashiaich Bimheira Byameinu. Wishing everyone an easy and most importantly meaningful and productive fast and may we all be sealed in the book of life.

(Stories of Greatness—Continued from page 6)

the outskirts of the cemetery. No eulogies were held, for what could be said of such a man?

The following Thursday evening, there was a knock on the door of the chief rabbi of Krakow, the famed Rabbi Yomtov Lipman Heller (1579–1654, known as the author of Tosefot Yom Tov). In the doorway stood a man who explained that he had nothing with which to purchase wine, candles, challah and food for Shabbat. The rabbi gave him a few coins from his private charity fund and wished him a “Good Shabbat.”

A few minutes later there was another knock on the door, heralding a similar request. A third petitioner followed, and then a fourth and a fifth. Within the hour, no less than twenty families came to ask for the rabbi’s aid to meet their Shabbat expenses. The rabbi was mystified: nothing like this had happened before in all his years in Krakow. Why this sudden plague of poverty?

Rabbi Heller called an emergency meeting of the trustees of the community’s charity funds, but they could not explain the phenomenon. They, too, had been deluged with hundreds of requests for aid in the last few hours. The communal coffers had been virtually emptied!

Adapted from Chabad.org

(Akiva Thalheim—Continued from page 1)

one else to observe the Torah for him. B) It is also important that there is a sense of unity among Am Yisrael and that each individual is looking out for his fellow Jew.

2) The Torah is always written with black ink. While other colors are easy to be changed into new colors by mixing them, it is not possible to do that with the color black. Just like the ink of the Torah can't be affected by others, a Jew should not be negatively influenced by the society they live in.

3) Halacha requires that the ink of the Torah is firmly on the parchment, and does not become "detached." The lesson implied from this is that each Jew should carefully follow the words of the Torah and not become detached from it or stray from its path.

4) In order for the Torah to be kosher, each letter must be intact. Just like the Torah depends on each letter to be kosher, a Jew should remember that they are an integral part of Am Yisrael and must represent it accordingly.

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STORIES OF GREATNESS

TOLD OVER BY: NETANEL YOMTOV

In the city of Krakow, Poland, there lived a rich Jew by the name of Israel who was famous for his stinginess. The local beggars had long since given up trying to knock at his door. All attempts by the trustees of the community's various charity funds to elicit at least a token contribution from him were met with polite but adamant refusals.

Israel's utter heartlessness outraged and mystified the Jews of Krakow. From the days of Abraham, charity had been the hallmark of the Jew; in 17th-century Europe, where Jews were subject to frequent confiscations of their property and expulsions from their homes, it was essential to the community's very survival that those of means should aid their impoverished fellows. How could a Jew be so indifferent to the needs of his brothers and sisters? People started referring to the rich miser in their midst as "Israel Goy," and the epithet stuck.

Years passed, and the rich man grew old and frail. One day, the Krakow burial society received a summons to Israel's home. "I feel that my days are numbered," he told them when they came, "and I would like to discuss with you my burial arrangements. I have already had shrouds sewn for me, and I've hired a man to recite the kaddish for my soul. There is just one thing remaining: I need to purchase a plot for my grave."

The members of the burial society decided that this was their opportunity to collect the debt owed by Israel to the community. "As you know," they said to him, "there is

no set price for a cemetery plot. Each Jew pays according to his ability, and the money is used for charitable purposes. Since you are a wealthy man, and since—if you will excuse our bluntness—you have not been very forthcoming over the years in sharing the burdens of the community, we think it appropriate to charge you 1000 gulden."

The rich man calmly replied: "For my deeds I shall be judged in the heavenly court. It is not for you to judge what I did or did not do in the course of my life. I had planned to pay 100 gulden for my plot—quite a respectable sum—and that is what I shall pay, not a penny more. I'm not asking for any special location or a fancy gravestone. Bury me where you see fit. I have just one request: on my gravestone, I want it to be inscribed 'Here lies Israel Goy.'"

The members of the society exchanged glances: was the old man out of his mind? They spent a few more minutes at his bedside, hoping to secure at least a modest sum for the community poor, but finally left his house in exasperation.

The entire town was abuzz with this latest show of miserliness by "Israel Goy." How low can a man sink! Even at death's door, he's hoarding his wealth, refusing to share his blessings with the needy.

Israel's funeral was a sorry affair. It was difficult to even scrape together the needed quorum of ten to conduct a proper Jewish burial. He was buried off to a side, on

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700 Ibsen Street, Woodmere, NY 11598
Phone: (516) 295-7700 • Fax: (516) 295-4790

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