

Persistent Prattle: Siach Sifsoteinu – Yom Kippur

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Adapted by Channie Koplowitz Stein

One of the sins we ask atonement for during the confession prayer of *Yom Kippur* is the sin of *siach sifsoteinu*/idle chatter of our lips. ArtScroll explains that this refers not only when we pray or study *Torah* without concentration, but when we are uncomfortable with silence and fill the void with aimless chatter. Rav Salanter suggests that we pick one aspect of the sin to concentrate on rather than the whole sin. With small steps we are more likely to succeed. Rav Meishlsh explains the sin of *siach sifsoteinu* as related to prayer. If our minds and hearts are elsewhere while our lips are mouthing the words, we have transgressed and degraded *tefilah*. This includes making a *brachah* or answering Amen to someone else's blessing without concentration. In addition, talking during davening makes a mockery of the ongoing prayer. The Shulchan Aruch's warns that one who talks during the Chazan's Repetition has committed a sin too great to bear.

Heorat Derech points out that thoughtful, articulated speech is called *dibur*. Prattle is referred to as *siach*, analogous to *siach hasadeh*, wild shrubbery. This can refer to both thoughtless conversation and prayer. Our words should be measured. After all, the *Midrash* claims that we each are given an allotted number of words to speak in our lifetime. From the Steipler Rebbe to the Vilna

Gaon we are told of the great reward for reining in one's speech. By refraining from speaking or even pausing momentarily, one merits the primal, hidden light of creation. In *Ashrei* we say, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." *Tiv Hatorah* explains, Hashem opens His hand and instills in each person the ability to desire. Will we use that desire to seek a closer relationship with Hashem? Rav Schwab says the verse refers to Hashem's providing the livelihood of each individual. But whether or not one is successful in what one does is determined by how others view him. This grace is what Hashem Himself provides or withholds. In this way, a person's livelihood comes directly from Hashem.

It is for this reason that our rabbis have decreed that if you did not have the proper intention when mouthing these words, you must repeat the verse. Since the entire chapter is written in the order of the *aleph bet*, you must repeat everything that follows that verse as well. The orderly progression of the verses in *aleph bet* represents the human input, logic, honesty and integrity, while the verse itself proclaims full faith that Hashem is the sole Provider of one's livelihood.

Every word of our prayers has unimaginable depths of meaning. Rabbi Kaplan explains this

with the conclusion of the first *brachah* of *shemonei esrei*. First, Hashem is our Melech/King, One distant and almost unapproachable. Then He is our *Ozer/Helper*, a Friend we can call on in difficult circumstances. Then He is our *Moshia/Savior*, One Who sees our plight and jumps in to save us. Finally, He is our Shield, protecting us even when the danger is not even discernible. He is always in front and around us. Relating to these four words will transform the quality of our prayers.

Rabbi Sutton points out that although Man was created with the power of speech on Friday, his power of sanctified speech was created on *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* should be a day of introspection when we limit our speech to lofty ideas. The Ben Melech suggests we involve the family in elevated speech. Telling stories of our great Rabbis, recounting *medrashim* on the parsha, and asking each family member to recount a moment when he sensed Hashem's presence in his life.

Only Man has the ability to speak logically and to utilize speech in a creative process to communicate with others. Let us train ourselves in small incremental steps to use this power wisely in our prayers and in our social interactions.

Symbolism of Yonah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop
Summary by Devora Kaye

Mafkir Yonah, read before *Mincha* on *Yom Kippur*, is one of the most enigmatic books in Tanach. Typically books of the *Navi* might give small glimpses into the life of the prophet, but the overwhelming message are the prophecies. Yet the book of Yonah contains only one small prophecy. What is the connection to *Yom Kippur*?

The word *navi* comes from the root word *niv*, to express. The power of a prophet is to tell us what we cannot see and to reveal the hidden truths of life. It's not how much he foretells but more about his digging into our hearts and uncovering what is there.

The word of Hashem came to Yonah to go to Ninveh and arouse the populace to repentance. Yonah sought to flee from Hashem's command and boarded a ship to Tarshish. The Ibn Ezra asks, how would it even occur to a wise prophet to think he could flee from Hashem? He answers based on Rav Sadya Gaon, that he fled from the presence of Hashem. If he left Israel he would not be able to get any more prophecy.

Hashem sent a mighty wind and there was a great tempest. The ship was close to breaking. The sailors cast Yonah overboard and a great fish swallowed him. The Malbim explains that he was able to survive because he reverted to

pre-utero. The belly of the fish to some degree was nothing more than a gigantic *gehinom*. The Zohar and the Gra explain that the big fish is the place where we go after we die. We go back to where we started. *Gehinom* is not some other land. It's here inside the troubles we experience, close to death, when there's no air to breathe, and all one can do is pray.

The Gra says Yonah represents every human being. The soul comes down here with a purpose and may not be merely distracted but quite rebellious as it seeks to flee its destiny. It has to sometimes hit rock bottom and reach near death before it remembers what it was meant to do. When the soul attempts to flee its

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destiny and then begs Hashem for another chance its spit out on dry land and is reborn. It can happen in one's lifetime and sometimes according to the Gra after death. This might explain a lot of the vagaries of our life. For many of us its not our first lifetime. If we didn't finish our job, we'll come back again until we've done what we're meant to do.

Yonah goes to Ninveh and gives over Hashem's message. The king and his people immediately put on sackcloth and proclaim a fast. Hashem sees their actions, rues the plan to destroy Ninveh, and the people are saved. Yonah initially fled Hashem's command because he didn't want the Jews to look bad. Here the people of Ninveh immediately did teshuva and the Jews didn't. In addition, Assyria would in a few years destroy Israel and exile 5/6th of the Jewish nation. Yonah

falls into a deep depression. He was the son of Amitai which comes from the root word emet. Truth requires that sin be punished. If Hashem is slow to anger and merciful to the evil, then this world is an *olam hasheker*. He asks Hashem to take his life so that he can escape this absurd existence.

Yonah goes east of the city and Hashem appoints a *kikayon* plant to shelter him from the terrible heat. He then sends a worm that shrivels up the *kikayon* overnight. The sun beats down on Yonah and he swoons and wants to die. Hashem then tells Yonah, you had pity on the *kikayon* for which you didn't work for, and you want me to show no pity on Ninveh, a city filled with people. The Malbim explains that the word *l'chus* means to feel the loss of something because it serves your purpose. Ashur would become the staff of

Hashem's wrath against *Bnei Yisrael* and therefore He wanted them to survive.

The word *emet* is composed of the first and last and middle letters of the aleph bet. We don't know what came first and what came after. We're stuck at *mem*, in the middle, trying to make sense of life with nothing but the moment in front of us. Hashem in his great infinite love for us chooses to judge us as we are at the very moment. We stand before Him heads bowed begging for forgiveness, regretting what we've done. Although Hashem knows that tomorrow we might falter, he chooses to have mercy and save us. We cannot fathom Hashem's love just as we cannot fathom His justice. All we can do is be true to what it is we were sent to accomplish on this world.

Travelling Through Life Accompanied by Tehillim Part 12 Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn
Summary by Devora Kaye

The Malbim says that when Hashem created the world He began with *ohr atzilut*, the spiritual light of the first level of creation. With each stage of creation, the curtain hiding the light of Hashem became thicker until the world reached the concealed state Hashem wanted it to be. Yet on the third day, when vegetation was created it seems Hashem moved in the opposite direction towards higher spirituality, as inanimate objects, on a lower level, had already been created. Hashem then created animals and then man, the focal point of creation, fashioned in His image.

David Hamelech says man is like ladder standing on earth while his head reaches the heavens. This imagery is taken from the famous dream of Yaakov and symbolizes what man is about, a physical being with the ability to reach great heights. In the smelting

furnace of Mitzrayim, the Jews were purified by suffering. The shell separating them from Hashem was removed leading to the creation of the Jewish nation. At *Har Sinai*, Moshe and the Jewish people experienced Hashem the way angels do in heaven. But in a sense, it was even greater, because angels were created this way. Man however, must choose to elevate himself, and when he does, he can see what angels see and maybe even more.

The world is like a circle. Hashem's presence hovers at the top. If you draw a half circle, it descends from the top to the bottom. This depicts creation going lower and becoming more physical as the world developed. But once the lowest point is reached, to complete the circle, one must go up again to reach the starting point. That is man's mission in this world. We are placed here in a physical reality

and our purpose is to go up and up until we reach the point where we started. Utilizing free choice, purifying our emotions and desires, brings us back to Hashem, completing the circle once again.

Chazal say at the time of *Mashiach*, Hashem will make, so to speak, a circle for the *tzadikim*. They will point with their finger at Hashem, as if seeing Him before their eyes. When we reach the top of the circle we will come back to the presence of Hashem in a way that we were before we came into this world. Man's purpose is to praise Hashem using all the elements in creation. In this way he brings creation back to the top of the circle to where it's supposed to be. We can now understand why it only say hallelu once in this section. Man through his praise brings all of creation back to where it was meant to be.