

# HISTORIC B'NAI JACOB SYNAGOGUE



Nissley at Water Streets

Middletown, Pennsylvania 17057

SUMMER 2013

## GETTING BACK TO THE DRY LAND

As we prepare to afflict our souls and hear the lessons of the Book of Jonah that will be read by our Shul's Baal Koray on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, on Saturday, September 14, we can consider just what atonement requires from us. After Exodus teaches the Lord "will redeem you with a stretched out zero'a, and with *mishpatim gedolim*;" Jonah questions why his participation is needed at all to redeem Nineveh:

I pray Thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in mine own country? Therefore I fled beforehand unto Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repentest Thee of the evil.

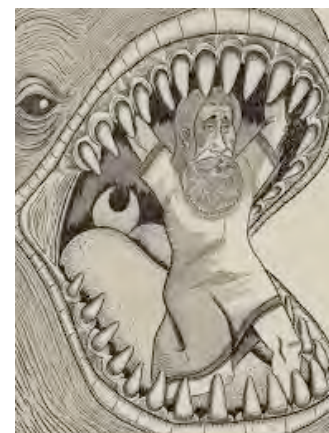
ב ו י ת פ ל ל א ל י הו ה ו י א מ ר , א נ י ה י הו ה ה ל ו א ז ה ד ב ר י ע ד ה יו ת י  
ע ל א ד מ ת י י ע ל כ י ק ד מ ת י ל ב ר ח ת י ש י ש ה : כ י י ד ע ת י כ י  
א ת י ה א ל ח נ י ו ו ר חו י מ , א ר ר , א פ י מ ו ר ב ח ס ד , ו נ ח מ ע ל ה ר ע ה .

When Jonah is given his second chance to serve the Lord, he declares when he is redeemed and placed once again on his path upon the dry land:

ו א נ י ב י קו ל ת יו ד ה א ז ב י ח ה ל ר , א ש ר נ ד ר ת י א ש ל י מ ה י ש ו ע ת ה ל י ה ה :

"But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; that which I have vowed I will pay."

Yet, Jonah makes no sacrifice and we never hear the words of Jonah's vow. Does atonement require more than thanks, sacrifice and a new vow, an intentional one not released through the Kol Nidre?



In Leviticus, we are taught that Yom Kippur is as an everlasting statute forever for us to afflict our souls and do no work at all on the tenth day of the seventh month when at a holy convocation the Priest shall make an atonement for us, to cleanse us, that ye may be clean from all your sins for the Lord; and, that any person who is not afflicted in soul on that day shall be cut off from his people. There is an old Yom Kippur Eve ritual that seeks a shortcut to atonement. In *Kaparot*, sin is transferred to a rooster that is then killed and eaten after being waved over the head with the chant: "This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement, this rooster will go to its death, while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and peace." This exchange has roots in Leviticus Chapter 16, where a scapegoat is chosen by lot to carry away the sins of the Congregation into the desert after all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites are confessed and put upon the goat's head. The *ez ozel* ("the goat who departs") is not killed or eaten but sent away, just as those who do not afflict their souls on Yom Kippur must be. But can sins be carried away unless we first afflict our souls so that they may be confessed and separated from our lives?

In Numbers 15, we are taught that inadvertent sins are forgiven and atonement achieved through sin offerings, but that, where one acts "highhandedly," one blasphemes the Lord and must be cut off from his people. We are also taught in Midrash that even when sacrifice at the Temple is not possible, atonement can still be achieved through deeds of loving-kindness for "doing charity and justice is more desirable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3).

We are given additional time during the Days of Awe to right our wrongs against others so we may have forgiveness and communal harmony. Even Jonah sought to set things right with his shipmates by telling them to cast him into the sea. Is it then those other great sins that are to be cleansed only on Yom Kippur if confessed and separated from our lives? Is our return from such rebellion to walk humbly with the Lord what such atonement requires of us? The Talmud after all teaches that teshuva (literally – “return”) was created even before the dry land. The casting off of our sins into the water --- as we do for tashlich on Rosh Hashanah --- like Kaparot --- is no shortcut to atonement, but one more way we may afflict our souls to recognize what we have to do to reach the dry land. When Nineveh is granted forty days, not one, for its second chance, from the greatest of them even to the least of them, they afflicted their souls to cry mightily unto the Lord and turn every one from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands. Why then is Jonah “displeased and angry” that Nineveh is not destroyed after it heard his message and repented? Jonah never answers the question in the parable of the gourd as to why they should not have a second chance just like Jonah.



A later Jonah, Rabbi Jonah of Gerona, as part of his own path of return, wrote, in his *Gates of Repentance* (c. 1250) that sins can be forgiven by “performing *teshuva*,” which includes: regretting and acknowledging the sin; forsaking the sin; worrying about the future consequences of the sin; acting and speaking with humility; acting in ways opposite of the sin; refraining from lesser sins; confessing the sin; correcting the sin however possible; pursuing works of chesed and truth; remembering the sin for the rest of your life; refraining from committing the same sin; teaching others not to sin; and, praying for atonement.

In our High Holy Day Service, we will come together to cry out the *Unesaneh Tokef* prayer: “*U’teshuva, u’tefilla, u’tzedoka maavirim es roah hazezeirah!*” --- that through our return to what the Lord made us to be, through prayer and acts of loving-kindness, each of us, like all of Nineveh, may have atonement from even the judgment written for us on Rosh Hashanah. On Yom Kippur, we, like Jonah, are given a second chance; and, must afflict our souls to confront and confess our sins against the Lord so that they may be separated from us so that we, with a voice of thanksgiving, can make our vows to live in the New Year returned on our path with the Lord upon the dry land.

## BY THE WAY

The winner of the Shul’s Ida Betty Orstein Scholarship for 2013 is Rachel Johnson, who transferred to Middletown High School as a sophomore. After struggling to adjust to her new school, she got involved in activities and became a very reliable student, completed the Nurse Aide Training program this past fall and is planning on continuing her education in nursing.

The Shul is now also raising funds for a new scholarship for Members.

Kudos to Harry Kapenstein, our Shul’s Assistant Shamas, on going from just a casual tennis player last Winter to winning on his home court and this year winning the Mid-Penn Conference Title.

Mazel Tov and L’Chaim to Marlin and Roxanne Toser celebrating their 57th Wedding Anniversary at the Shul this August. Roxanne is a descendant of one of our Shul’s Founders and Marlin is the source of facts and stories about life and times in the Harrisburg-Middletown area.

Historic B’Nai Jacob Synagogue is located in Middletown, Pennsylvania, near the Harrisburg International Airport.

If you have Community News that you would like to share in the next Shul Newsletter or would like to be added to our mailing list, PLEASE e-mail that information on the Website e-mail link at:

<http://www.bnai-jacob.org> AND ALSO CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE AND “THE COMMUNITY REVIEW” FOR OUR SCHEDULE OF SERVICES.

*Shul Officers (2013):*

Deb Barisch (President) (August)

Marlene Snell (President) (September)

Bruce Baron (Secretary)

Larry Kapenstein (Treasurer & Shamas)

Loren Barisch (Assistant Treasurer)