



SHOSHANA JUDELMAN

TORAH TIDBITS CONTRIBUTOR

One White Shoe...and Another

It was 5AM, I had just landed home from another journey in Poland. I was bleary-eyed and exhausted. As I walked through the Arrivals Hall at Ben Gurion, I noticed a woman in front of me. She too had gotten off of a plane that morning and I'm sure she was also very tired. Yet, she was walking with a bounce in her step and wearing a pair of (very) high-heeled, white platform sandals. For a second I thought, "Why would anyone wear such absurdly impractical shoes on an airplane? And, why have them on this early in the morning?"

My mind flashed back to earlier in the week. And another white shoe.

We were in Majdanek and had just entered the barracks that contained the shoes of tens of thousands of Jews who were murdered there and in other death camps during the Holocaust.

When we enter this barracks, there is always an audible groan. Sometimes it takes a few seconds before the group's eyes adjust to the dim lighting and they understand what they are looking at. But there is always a reaction.

This is usually the first time on a journey that we come face to face with the personal belongings that remain from the catastrophe

of the Holocaust. And it is shocking. And visceral. And personal.

Because we all wear shoes.

Shoes are symbolic of a life being lived. A life moving forward. They mold to the shape of the wearer's feet and represent hours of walking, standing, working, and being. Many survivors mention shoes in their testimonies because in the dire conditions of the camps, good shoes meant a greater chance of survival.

But these shoes in Majdanek represent a hard stop. They belonged to the people who didn't walk out, who didn't get to continue moving forward.

In the front of one of the bins sits a lone white shoe. A student points it out and we are all flooded with sadness for what the shoe represents and for what was lost.

Chazal recognized the importance of shoes. They taught that a person should even sell the beams of the roof of their house to have money to buy shoes. In the morning brachot, the blessing, "Blessed are You, King of the Universe, who provides me with all of my needs." "שעשה לי כל צרכי" was intended to be said as we put our shoes on because Chazal recognized that shoes were an integral piece of feeling safe and having the strength to move forward.

Interestingly, we don't make this bracha on Tisha B'Av or Yom Kippur since we are not allowed to wear leather shoes.

On Yom Kippur we are likened to angels who do not need shoes.

But on Tisha B'Av, we are likened to mourners, broken and incomplete without the Beis

HaMikdash, the one place where we could consistently find the presence of the Shechina. We sit on the floor without our shoes and we acknowledge

that without that clarity of connection to Hashem, it is very difficult to keep moving forward. To keep being a person who walks with alacrity towards the next project.

It has been said that a person can live for three weeks without food, three days without water, but not even three minutes without hope.

So, when Tisha B'Av is over, we put our shoes back on and we keep trying to grapple and grope our way forwards towards what Hashem wants from and for us.

Very simply, we grab onto hope and we keep moving forward.

That's what I felt at 5AM at Ben Gurion airport, as my heart linked those white shoes together.

One shoe stuck in Majdanek and the other pair being joyfully, frivolously worn on the feet of a woman who landed that morning in our Eternal Jewish Homeland.

I followed those bouncing white shoes towards the exit and heard my heart sing Am Yisrael Chai. ■

Shoshana Judelman is passionate about learning and growing through Chassidus. She gives shiurim to women in many communities around Israel, including Efrat, Elazar, Raanana and Jerusalem as well as at Midreshet Rachel V'Chaya. Shoshana also guides groups at Yad Vashem and leads journeys to Poland and other countries around Europe for JRoots.

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