

“I am Sending to You Elijah the Prophet”
Shabbat Tzav Ha-Gadol 5780

In the Zchut of a Refuah Shleimah Mindel bat Tobah Hessa

I.

In the exquisite Haftarah from Malachi¹ that we will, sadly, not have the opportunity to read together tomorrow, but which we surely can and should read to ourselves at home, Hashem makes a remarkable promise to His people. “Behold, I am sending to you Elijah the Prophet, before the arrival of the Day of the Lord, [a day] of greatness and awe.”

It is for this reason that we all, just a few days from now, will open the door for Elijah just as we are concluding our Sedarim, in the hope that his arrival will be the harbinger of the ultimate redemption. After all, we have every right to be optimistic. Our Sages taught us, “In Nissan we were redeemed, and in Nissan we will be redeemed.”

And yet, a deeper question lurks beneath this beautiful and precious custom. Why was it that Elijah, of all of the great prophets and leaders of the Jewish people, was chosen for this mission? Why should Elijah be the one to bring us, the Jewish people, the Almighty’s message of redemption.

To be sure, the notion of Elijah returning to bring this message is consistent with the fact that he is the only figure in Tanach who does not die. Instead, as is described in such detail in Sefer Melachim, he ascends to the Heavens in a chariot of fire, leaving behind his cloak, and the prophetic spirit that it embodied, to his disciple and replacement Elisha. And yet, the question persists, why Elijah?

II.

One of the singular privileges of my rabbinic career was to serve as rabbinic intern, and in subsequent positions, at The Jewish Center on the Upper West Side. There, one of my “congregants,” though that word is surely not exactly appropriate, was one of Modern Orthodoxy’s towering figures, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm. The wisdom that Rabbi Lamm shared with me regarding the rabbinate remains a guiding light for me, in so many different ways, every single day.

One of Rabbi Lamm’s most extraordinary qualities, during this period, was his great humility. He would come to classes, lectures, and shiurim which I would deliver, and very often share words of

¹ Malachi 3:4-22.

insight, constructive criticism, alternative approaches, and the like. One particular Yom Kippur, during the 'break', I delivered a shiur on the persona of the Biblical figure of Yonah, who, according to rabbinic tradition, was the son of Elijah the Prophet.

After the shiur, Rabbi Lamm approached me with some insights on this connection, and then, spontaneously, shared the following thought. 'Elijah had given up on the Jewish people. He accused them of abandoning the path of the Torah, and he did not believe they were redeemable. And that's why Hashem makes him come to every one of our brisim, and every Pesach Seder, so that Elijah will see that the Jews still guard the covenant, and are deserving of redemption. Elijah will not have finished his prophetic mission until he tells the Jewish people that they are, in fact, deserving of redemption.'

If one looks carefully at the verses when Elijah, who surely was given one of the most difficult tasks of any Jewish leader, runs away into the desert, and laments to the Almighty regarding the Jewish people's abandonment of the covenant, one will see Rabbi Lamm's words are absolutely correct. Elijah told the Lord, "for the Jews have abandoned your covenant," and It is only "I who alone remain" in your service.

Rabbi Lamm's words have always stayed with me. One can never doubt the spiritual credentials of the Jewish people, and certainly, a leader may never give up on his flock. This was surely Moshe's finest hour, even after the Jewish people created the Golden Calf, and Hashem was fully prepared to destroy them, and build through Moshe alone, our great shepherd would not have any of it. He told Hashem that He would rather go down with the ship. Consequently, we were spared.

III.

My wife showed me a news item this week that reflects the spiritual greatness of the Jewish people, even in this hour of the greatest crisis of our lifetimes. It moved me deeply, and I wish to share it with you. It is an undeniable testament to the words which Rabbi Lamm spoke to me.

Yaron Yitzhari, the Israeli CEO of the international conglomerate Medtronic, made the decision to simply release the patents on PB 560 Ventilator, to allow other companies to scale up production of these desperately needed life saving devices. While others might have realized that being in ventilator production was their opportunity to make a fortune,

Yitzhari, when questioned about his actions, simply waved off the question, and said, "In the present situation, I'm proud to work at Medtronic. Our goal is to prolong lives, to save lives...This is what is needed right now, in the emergency situation we're in, and this consideration comes before anything

else...So when it comes to financial impact, it has negligible weight, because the main thing is saving lives, and that's what our company knows how to do."

I don't know anything about Yitzhari's spiritual life, his beliefs, his level of knowledge. I don't know whether or not his decision was made with direct knowledge of the halakhic demand that a Jew be prepared to part with his own money, to the last penny, to save the life of another, so as not to violate the prohibition of "Do not Stand Idly by One's Brother's Blood."

But, none of this matters in the least. What I do know is that this is one of the greatest acts of the sanctification of God's name of which I have ever become aware. As our Sages said long ago, there are those "who earn their entire portion in the world to come with one act." Were this the only good deed, and I'm sure it isn't, Yaron Yitzhari does in his lifetime, it will surely be sufficient.

And so, when Elijah comes to us, in God's good time, to tell us that we indeed, are deserving of redemption, that he in fact does not remain alone in service of the Almighty, it will be because there are people out there like Yaron Yitzhari who have internalized the sacred values we hold dear, that human life must be honored, and preserved, and that this is more important than any corporate profit.

Surely, such a people, which has produced a Yaron Yitzhari, is in fact deserving of full redemption. May we merit one now, in our moment of crisis, when we need it the most.

"In Nissan we were redeemed, and in Nissan, we shall be redeemed."