

Parashat Tzav – Shabbat Hagadol, 5775, 2015:

*Eliyahu the Prophet and Peace*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers... (*Sefer Malachi* 3:23-24, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

These two *pasukim* (verses) of our Haftorah conclude both *Sefer Malachi* and the section of *Tanach* entitled *Nevi'im* (Prophets). Herein, Malachi prophesizes the final step immediately prior to the arrival of *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (the Righteous Messiah), and the complete realization of Judaism's eschatological vision. Rashi's (1040-1105) explanation of Eliyahu's ultimate role in the great drama of human history focuses upon two phrases in our verses, "that he may turn the heart of the fathers back" and "through the children." He interprets the first as the Jewish people returning to Hashem. This, in turn, is quite reminiscent of the penultimate *pasuk* of *Megillat Eichah*: "Return us to You, O L-rd, so that we may return! Renew our days as of old." (*Megillat Eichah* 5:21, with my emendations)

Rashi's analysis of "through the children" is a bit more complex and incorporates two distinct interpretations:

- 1) Literally, “on” [rather than “through”]. He [G-d] will say to the children affectionately and in an appeasing manner, “Go and speak to your fathers to adopt the ways of the Omnipresent.” So we explain, “and the heart of the children through their fathers.” This I heard in the name of Rabbi Menachem [ben Saruq, 10<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish philologist]
  
- 2) Our Sages, [however,] expounded upon it [i.e. our phrase] in *Mishnah Eduyot* (8:7) [in a different manner], namely, that he [Eliyahu,] will come to make peace in the world.

Rashi’s first explanation of “through the children” focuses upon the role of children in urging their parents to return to Hashem (*la’asot teshuvah*) and His Torah. It reminds me of one of my former grade-school students whose parents and family followed the Torah in many areas, except for *shemirat Shabbat* (Shabbat observance). I will never forget when she confided in me how she brought her parents and siblings to finally “keep Shabbat.” She explained to me that after listening to a number of rabbis from her community, and based upon her own study and searching, she became convinced that *shemirat Shabbat* was an absolute value of Judaism and the necessary next step in her family’s religious journey.

My student’s father, like most men in her community, attended *shul* on Friday night and Shabbat morning. Yet, following the Shabbat morning family meal, he would get in his car and drive to work. The rest of the day, therefore, became like any other – filled with cars, computers, TVs, iPads, and cellphones. Shabbat, in a word, was all but forgotten. My student enacted a clever plan: For a number of weeks, she spoke to her father regarding the beauty of Shabbat and the closeness and spiritual calm that it could bring to

the family if they would be together at home and electronically disconnected from the wider world. Her father firmly demurred and told her that he would be driven out of business if he did not work on Shabbat, that his competition would “eat him alive!”

My student decided to hide every set of her father’s car keys before the next Shabbat, so he simply would not be able to drive to work, and to secretly return them when Shabbat was over. This subterfuge went on for a few weeks. Finally, her father determined what was happening on two important fronts: He realized that his daughter was responsible for the disappearing and reappearing car keys, and that his business never suffered at all as a result of his absence. In fact, he felt better and more refreshed than he had ever felt before - clearly a perfect setup for an even more successful workweek to come. Slowly and consciously the family became fully committed to Shabbat observance and, with Hashem’s help, is flourishing until this day. One would be hard pressed, indeed, to find a greater fulfillment of Rashi’s first interpretation, “Go and speak to your fathers to adopt the ways of the Omnipresent.”

Rashi’s second explanation, “that Eliyahu will come to make peace in the world,” demands explication. As noted earlier, this phrase is first found in *Mishnah Eduyot* 8:7, and reflects the opinion of the Sages. “Peace in the world,” is an exceptionally broad concept; so much so, that we are confused as to what it actually signifies. As in most matters of this nature, however, we are fortunate that we can readily turn out tradition’s *meforshim* (expositors) for insights as to its meaning.

On measure, the interpreters of the Mishnah follow two very different approaches in their search for an understanding of the term “peace in our world.” The first is highly contextual and views this expression in the light of prior statements regarding the purpose of Eliyahu’s arrival. In contrast, the second orientation is universalistic in nature and teaches us the fundamental import of peace in our world.

Rav Baruch Halevi Epstein (1860-1942), known as the *Torah Temimah* after the name of his monumental work, notes that the complete phrase reads, “Eliyahu will not come to declare objects to be ritually impure or pure, instead, he will come to make peace in the world.” It is within this context that he states:

This means that he will not reveal [new] laws to make known that which is ritually pure and impure – based upon prophecy. Instead, he will only bring about peace between the various disputants in these matters through a thoroughgoing explanation of the fundamental reasons underpinning their arguments. He will continue this process until the Sages will agree with one another. As a result, the authentic law will be clarified and the final decision will be promulgated. (Commentary on *Sefer Vayikra* 27, comment 216, brackets my own)

Rabbeinu Menachem Meiri (1249-1310), popularly known as “the Meiri,” was an exponent of the universalistic mode of analysis of our expression, “Eliyahu will come to make peace in the world.” His trenchant comment indicates a wide-ranging and inextricable connection between *ahava* (love – as a derivative of peace) and *emet* (truth):

This is because love, and closeness [in a peaceful milieu that fosters depth-level intellectual and emotional connections], is the fundamental rationale for the existence of truth regarding all matters [of societal interaction]. As such, it is the model for everything [that is good]. This is why [Micah the prophet states:] “Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...” (Brackets my own)

With Hashem's help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness the time when "Eliyahu will come to make peace in the world," and herald the coming of *Mashiach Tzidkanu*. May this time come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on "*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis," may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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