

May the Merciful One Send Us Eliyahu the Prophet

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, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our Haftorah contain two well-known *pasukim* that conclude both *Sefer Malachi* and the *Nevi'im* section of Tanach. Herein, Malachi prophesizes the eventual arrival of Eliyahu the prophet who, according to some opinions of *Chazal* (our Sages), foreshadows the coming of *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (the Righteous Messiah):

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

The phrases “*v'hashiv lave avot al banim*” and “*v'lave banim al avotom*” are difficult to understand, and one feels that they hide more than they reveal. Fortunately, in the context of a discussion of Eliyahu’s task, the *Chachamim* of the Mishnah suggest the following rationale for these expressions:

[Eliyahu the prophet...is coming for solely one purpose:] *la'asot shalom ba'olam* — to bring peace to the world. As the text states: “that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers.” (*Mishnah Eduyot* 8:7, translation and brackets my own)

The Rambam (1135-1204) expands upon this statement in a celebrated passage in the *Mishneh Torah*:

... a prophet will arise to inspire Israel to be upright and prepare their minds [to serve the Almighty], as the text states: “Behold, I am sending you Elijah.” He will not come to declare the pure, impure, or to declare the impure, pure. He will

not dispute the lineage of those presumed to be of proper pedigree, nor will he validate the pedigree of those whose lineage is presumed blemished. Rather, *la'sum shalom ba'olam* — he will establish peace in the world as the text continues: “He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, [and the heart of the children back through their fathers.]” (*Hilchot Melachim* 12:2, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, brackets my own)

In sum, the Mishnah and the Rambam interpret the expression “*v'hashiv lave*” in our verse as *la'asot* or *la'sum shalom ba'olam*. What, however, does this mean? In his commentary on the Mishnah, *Tifferet Yisrael*, Rav Yisrael Lifschitz *zatzal* (1782-1860) examines the explicit point of focus of our *pasukim*, namely, fathers and sons, and determines that *v'hashiv lave* should be interpreted as engendering peace “between man and his fellow man.” In contrast, Rav Yom Tov Lipmann Heller *zatzal* (1579-1654), in his commentary on the Mishnah entitled *Tosafot Yom Tov*, interprets *la'asot shalom ba'olam* in a much wider sense: “In reality, *la'asot shalom ba'olam* means to make peace between the Jewish people and the other nations of the world...”

Thus far we have seen two approaches to understanding the Mishnah's phrase, *la'asot shalom ba'olam*. The first is personal, whereas the second refers to peace between the Jewish people and the rest of the world. In my estimation, Eliyahu's task can be understood in an even broader manner, namely, to bring peace to all humankind. This interpretation is in consonance with a close reading of the Rambam's text, “*la'sum shalom ba'olam* — he will establish peace in the world,” an expression that suggests nothing less than universal peace. This idea was given powerful voice by Yeshayahu in one of his most celebrated prophetic visions: “...and they [the nations of the entire world] shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 2:4)

As we say in *Birkat Hamazon*, “May the Merciful One send us Eliyahu the prophet — may he be remembered for good — and may he bring us good tidings, salvation, and comfort,” and may we witness true and everlasting peace, soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* 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. Please click on the highlighted link.