



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

APRIL 17TH, 2015 / כחי ניסן ה'תשע"ה

PARSHA:

Shmini / פרשת שמיני

SERMON TITLE:

THE COMING OF ELIJAH AND WHAT IT MEANS

Shmini

The Coming of Elijah and What it Means

Good Shabbos!

From time to time, air travel becomes scary; not only plane crashes, or hijacking, but there are even reports of flights that just disappear over the ocean. Search parties are sent out to no avail – they seem to be gone without a trace.

Now, a Jew needs to look for answers for everything in the Torah. But where throughout the Torah would we find a similar story where an individual or group simply disappeared? The first thing that might come to mind would be Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet.

Eliyahu HaNavi didn't depart from the world the way all flesh and blood does. Instead, the Tanach tells us that he went with his student Elisha, who had been appointed as a prophet in his place, to be carried to heaven in some kind of tornado.

“And it was that they were going, walking and talking, and behold a fiery chariot and fiery horses, and they separated them both. And Elijah ascended to heaven in a whirlwind” (Melachim II:2:11). That's the verse that describes the prophet arising to heaven in a wind. When Elisha returned to Eliyahu HaNavi's students and told them that their master had disappeared, they suggested that he go and search for him, because their master had the habit of disappearing for various times. Elisha said that there's nothing to search for, but they insisted—and 30 men looked for him for three days, but they didn't find a thing.

It was specifically because of his strange disappearance that Eliyahu HaNavi became the most famous prophet in Jewish and world history. Not only that, but his presence figures stronger in every Jewish person's life than any other prophet. One Seder night, we prepare a cup for Eliyahu HaNavi. At a bris, we set out a chair for Eliyahu HaNavi. One Saturday night, with the departure of Shabbos, we sing the song “Eliyahu HaNavi.” There isn't a Jewish kid who hasn't heard of Eliyahu HaNavi.

Just like the whole world still wants to know what happened to that fateful jet, for over 2,700 years the whole world has wanted to know what happened to Eliyahu HaNavi. But what has been accepted as authoritative tradition in Jewish circles is that he turned into an angel. That's why—and how—he comes to every circumcision. (See Pirkei D'Rabbi Elazar, Chap. 29; Zohar 1:10.)

What's more, the Talmud contains many stories on how Eliyahu appeared to the Tannaim and Amoraim, the various Sages of the Talmudic era—a phenomenon referred to as “Gilui Eliyahu,” or “Revelation of Elijah.” For example, the Megillah (that we read not long ago on Purim) tells us that Haman and King Achashveirosh sent out letters to the Persian Empire “to destroy, kill and eradicate” the Jews. Right after that, the Megillah tells us: “and Mordechai knew of all that had been done” (Esther 4:1)—which prompts the question, how did Mordechai know of that

decree before everyone else did? There was no CNN or Twitter back then, you know! So the Targum comments: “Mordechai knew by means of Eliyahu the High Priest of everything happening in the supernal heavens... and the Master of the Universe sent Eliyahu to appear to Mordechai that he might rise and pray for my nation.”

What the Targum says is that G-d sent Eliyahu HaNavi to Mordechai to tell him what Haman and Achashveirosh had decreed and what had happened in heaven that such a serious decree had been decreed upon the Jewish Nation—and that by means of prayer, it would be possible to negate the decree.

Here’s another story from the Talmud about Eliyahu HaNavi. Everyone knows the story about Rochel, the only child of Kalba Savua the millionaire, who got married against her father’s wishes to the poor Rabbi Akiva before he became a famous Torah scholar and leader. As a result, her father disowned her from his entire estate and essentially banished her from his home.

But Rabbi Akiva and Rochel got married and lived in a little shack outside of town, where they slept on beds of straw on the floor because they had no furniture.

In the morning, Rabbi Akiva would pick the straw out of her hair and say to her, “If G-d helps me and I become rich, I will make you a Jerusalem of Gold.” That was an ornate and very expensive piece of jewelry that they used to make thousands of years ago; it was some sort of golden tiara worn on the head or forehead engraved to look like the mountain city of Old Jerusalem. (Ultimately, by the way, he kept his promise.)

But then, the Talmud tells us, “Asa Eliyahu”—along came Eliyahu.

Eliyahu HaNavi appeared to them as an ordinary person and said to them, “Give me a little straw! My wife just gave birth and I have nothing for her to lie down on!” To that, Rabbi Akiva said to his wife, “Look! There are people who don’t even have straw!” (Talmud, Tractate Nedarim 50a).

Now, why did Eliyahu HaNavi do that? He did it to console Rabbi Akiva and his wife and to show them that there are people poorer than them.

Eliyahu HaNavi was involved in so many miracles throughout the ages. In Jewish lore, it’s established that when a miracle happens to someone involving an unknown stranger who is never seen again, then that mysterious “angel” is credited to Eliyahu HaNavi striking again.

As a matter of fact, there was a story going around the Jewish community right after the 9/11 attacks in New York that a strange old man showed up in a synagogue the morning of 9/11/01 to lead the group of men for morning services. He said he had to say Kaddish. But he prayed so slowly that by the time they finished, all the commuters missed their buses and trains to work... at the World Trade Center. No one recognized him and, perhaps predictably, he was never seen again.

But here’s a more down-to-earth Eliyahu HaNavi story.

In 1911, a wealthy Jew from England named Herman Landau was visiting Jerusalem. Strolling through the Old City, he stepped into a study hall and joined a class that was taking place at the

moment. But as he sat there, he overheard a conversation between two seniors sitting off to the side.

One of them was saying to the other that his daughter was engaged to be married, but that the dowry was 40 Napoleons and that he had just one week left to pay it before the engagement would be broken off. The man was crying as he spoke to his friend, and his friend replied, “Aren’t you a Torah scholar and a G-d-fearing man? Is it not possible for G-d to send you Eliyahu HaNavi with the money?”

So Herman Landau did a little investigating and found out the man’s name and address. He then went to the man’s house, where the man’s daughter opened the front door. He handed her a “bag of coins,” told her that “I owe this to your father,” and went on his way. Inside the bag were 40 Napoleons.

When her father came home and heard about what had happened, he was sure that G-d had indeed answered his friend’s prayers and had sent Eliyahu. The news spread throughout town that the man’s daughter—and entire family—had earned an Eliyahu sighting.

However, at least in this case, it was Herman Landau who had been G-d’s agent in helping the family—but who got the credit? Eliyahu HaNavi. (From *Pianuach Agados* pg. 316.)

But the real reason for why the entire Jewish Nation talks and sings songs about Eliyahu HaNavi is because of what the last Prophet to rise in the Jewish Nation, Malachi, says in his book, right at the end (which ends all the books of the Prophets).

Malachi’s final words are a promise from G-d: “Behold I send you Eliyahu HaNavi... that he redeem you from the place of your exile... and he shall return the hearts of the fathers upon the sons and the hearts of the sons upon their fathers” (Malachi 3:24).

The Rebbe explains (*Toras Menachem* 5711 Vol. I. pg. 226) that this is the reason why Eliyahu physically went up to heaven in a wind—because he needs to physically return in a physical body so as to herald the redemption.

Eliyahu HaNavi, after all, is the one who will come and inform us that Moshiach is coming. He won’t just inform us, though—he will bring the Jewish Nation to the state of readiness required for the coming of Moshiach by means of “returning the hearts of the fathers upon the sons.”

As the Rebbe quoted from Rashi, the meaning of this verse is that Eliyahu will bring about the returning of the fathers’ hearts by means of the sons—meaning that the young generation will be the one to return to its roots and to Judaism and will be the one that will bring the fathers and grandfathers back to their roots, too.

The Rebbe took this prophecy and brought it down to concrete action. He specifically turned his attention to the young generation and attracted them to Judaism, and they indeed brought back their parents, too.

In 1975, the Rebbe came out with a call for little Jewish girls to light Shabbos candles. As a general rule, a married Jewish woman lights two candles every Friday evening just before Shabbos—one for her and one for her husband (plus one more for each child). A young Jewish girl, however, lights only one.

In a farbrengen of Tishrei 6, 5736 (Sichos Kodesh 5736 Vol. I. pg. 26), the Rebbe related about a five-year-old girl in England who had heard in school from her friend about the Rebbe's newest campaign. So she came home and asked her mother if she could light Shabbos candles, too. The mother happily agreed because she had always lit Shabbos candles—and so she was happy that her daughter wanted to continue the tradition.

In that home, the Rebbe continued, they had the custom of eating dinner every night at 6:00 p.m. when the father would come home from the store he owned. Winter arrived, and the little girl told her mother that we need to start lighting Shabbos candles earlier, before Shabbos comes in. The mother replied, "What's this? You want to start changing me?!" The daughter responded, "I'm not telling you what to do. Just let me light my candle before Shabbos starts." And so the daughter began lighting her Shabbos candle on time.

Later, when her father came home from work, he saw his daughter's one candle burning but not his wife's two candles. It seemed strange to him. A discussion was held in the household, and they decided that the father would start coming home early from work on Friday afternoons so that the mother would also be able to light Shabbos candles on time.

When the Rebbe finished telling this story, he said that this is the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, "and he shall return the hearts of the fathers at the hands of the sons."

Today, with the generation of the sons already bringing back their fathers for some time now, we're ready for the appearance once again of Eliyahu HaNavi to come and inform us of the coming of Moshiach, speedily in our days, amen!