

"THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL"

The Haftorah offers us a fascinating view of life in ancient Israel of over 2800 years ago. It takes us back to an era when there flourished in Israel a King and a Prophet. It is a time when the Kingdom of Israel was in essence a satellite of Aram or Syria, and the Israelites' King was a vassal of the King of ~~Aram~~ Syria. The Prophet was Elisha, disciple of Elijah.

The Haftorah's narrative may be summarized as follows: Naaman, the General of Syria, was a leper. A captured Israelite girl, who was taken as a handmaid for Naaman's wife, told Naaman that he could find relief by consulting the Prophet. The King of Syria thereupon sent his General to the King of Israel asking that the latter provide for his cure from his leprosy. The King of Israel panicked, for he had no idea on how to cure lepers, and suspected that the Syrian King was using this as a pretext for destroying him. When Elisha heard about that, he sent word to the King that he, the Prophet, will effect the cure: לכ"א  
וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלִישָׁה בְּנֵי אִמּוֹ, "and let him know that there is a Prophet in Israel." Elisha then sent a messenger to Naaman telling him to dip into the Jordan seven times and he will be cured. Naaman was offended, because the Prophet did not personally greet him at the door, and because the prescription he offered seemed so ridiculous. I thought, the General said, that the Prophet would wave his hand and cure me magically. Furthermore, I have much better rivers in Syria than this little rivulet called the Jordan! Nevertheless, his advisors prevailed upon him

to follow the Prophet's advice, which he did, whereupon he was healed.

The Haftorah then reaches its climax in the words of Naaman: כֵּן הָיָה  
וְכֵן הָיָה כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם כִּי אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, "Now

I know that there is no God in all the world save in Israel." It is the act of Kiddush Ha-shem, the glorification or sanctification of God's Name.

Now, this is more than just a flashback to a fascinating piece of ancient history. As we say in our blessings over the Haftorah,

כִּי כֵן הָיָה וְכֵן הָיָה, nothing in Holy Writ ever "returns empty" to modern days; all of it is full of abiding significance.

Three things stand out especially in this story, and they make of it a parable of eternal relevance, especially for our time.

Notice, first, how Naaman is described: וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ גִּבּוֹר וְהָיָה לֵצָרֵת, "the man was a mighty hero, but a leper." What a startling juxtaposition, what a striking contrast: mighty, but a leper...

The second item is the teaching implicit in the Haftorah that healing can only come from Israel. Remember that leprosy was always regarded in the Biblical and Rabbinic tradition as more than a skin-deep disease, but as something which somehow reflects the inner corruption and illness of a man's soul. The captive girl reminds the powerful leper: the only source of recovery and regeneration will be found in Israel.

Third, within the camp of Israel itself, there is a troublesome tension between King and Prophet. The captive girl recommends the Prophet, but the King of Syria sends Naaman not to the Prophet, but to the King of Israel. The latter, in his despair, rends his clothes out of sheer frustration and worry -- and he does not even think of sending the leper to the Prophet! Ultimately, however, it is only the Prophet who can, by imploring God, heal the leper: ה' ירם ע'ל נביא ישראל so that all may know that there is a Prophet in Israel.

I read this story, as our tradition puts it, as ה' ירם ע'ל נביא ישראל, as the events in the lives of ancestors prefiguring and anticipating the lives of their descendants, as something that can happen and is happening to us today.

Naaman, the gibbor chayyil metzora, is for me a symbol and picture of modern society: powerful, but a leper. The very boldness of this juxtaposition is expressive of a painful paradox of Western civilization: technologically powerful, but ethically leprous; scientifically progressive, but spiritually regressive; materially mighty, but morally a midget.

From the distance, when you behold this gibbor chayyil, this powerful man who symbolizes modern society, you think he is self-confident, assertive, optimistic, problem-solving. But draw closer to him and you see that he is -- a metzora, a leper, corrupt, fearful, in despair, uncertain and perplexed, withering away inside.

And all this time, the Jewish captives, the "daughter of Zion"

that is plundered and dispersed throughout the world, exiled to the Syria's and France's and Russia's and America's, remain a living reminder that no help will come for the world, it will achieve no ultimate solution, no healing for its real illness, except through the word of God, except through Torah as it is taught in Judaism. Only in Jerusalem will the moral leprosy of mankind be healed -- and only then by the Prophet.

But in Israel there is always the tension between Prophet and King, between the sacred and the profane, between that aspect of the life of Israel that is represented by the King -- profane knowledge, power, material wealth, cleverness -- and that represented by the Prophet: the supreme word of the Lord, the spirit, the Jewish way of life. We have often erred and misled others, by offering the world the King instead of the Prophet as a source of healing. We have told ourselves and others that the ancient vision of salvation from Israel will come through a Jewish government or through Jewish nationhood, through Jewish scientists or Jewish Nobel prize winners, through Jewish wealth or through Jewish writers.

Not so! Those who are symbolized by the King of Israel can help, they are indeed indispensable. Without a material framework, without secular knowledge, without the profane, the Prophet cannot flourish. But the main task of healing the Naaman's of the world of their spiritual ills, of resolving their inner contradictions, can come only through prophecy and Torah.

סלח'א לך' ד' ד' 83'1 !

Dr. Nahum Goldmann, according to this week's press, in his now-famous -- or infamous -- article in Foreign Affairs, questions if the present State of Israel is indeed a fulfillment of the great visions of the past, even the realization of the Zionist dream. I sympathize with him. It is a legitimate question, one which, for our very spiritual health, we must constantly keep on re-asking. But certainly his solution -- that of Israel becoming a United Nations protectorate -- will not make of Israel the source of salvation. I am not now concerned whether this presents a viable or totally naive suggestion. But Dr. Goldmann should have learned by now that the real solution, the real fulfillment, the real vision is that of "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Simply to make of Israel a U.N. protectorate will just incorporate into Israel the tzaraat, the leprosy, of the Naaman's of the world. Let. Dr. Goldmann, the leaders of Israel, and all of mankind "know that there is a Prophet in Israel."

In the Diaspora the same tensions between King and Prophet prevail. The great contribution to the world by Jewry will come not from the kings of assimilation and philanthropy which keep Jewish spiritual needs at the bottom of the pile. The Jewish activist students who this week picketed and took over the offices of Federation were venting their bitterness and their frustration at the official arm of domestic Jewish charity in this great city which has fallen behind the Jewish federations of other cities throughout the land in providing for Jewish education and

Jewish survival. These young Jews were dramatizing the need of our community; the spirit, Torah, education. And do not mistake them: they are not hoodlums, they are not just kids out for excitement, they are not the radicals of the New Left. They are our children -- youngsters of Yeshiva University and Yavneh, of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Havura and Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry. Maybe they are sometimes hotheaded -- but they can hardly be hotheaded on behalf of a greater cause. At a time when students throughout the world are rebelling, and when it causes us so much misery and anguish to notice Jewish names amongst the radical New Left who support revolution against America and who identify with the Black Panthers and their Nazi sympathies -- at a time of this sort we must thank God that there are Jewish youngsters who demonstrate "that there is a Prophet in Israel," that there breathes a spirit of prophecy and Jewish devotion in the hearts and minds of our young people. What they were saying was that the aristocratic remoteness of the financial barons of "Our Crowd," their distance from the Jewish community as such, their antiseptic assimilationist concern for their image in the eyes of the Gentiles, their almost regal disdain for the real needs of the Jewish community, are not only not a healing, but a part of the disease itself. They are trying to tell something to the so-called "establishment": that the Jewish community today is not, on the one hand, a ragged bunch of greenhorn immigrants who have to be fed, clothed, cleaned up, and taught passable English in order to be Americanized; nor, on the other

hand, are we so well off in all respects that we can afford safely to be ignored while Jewish philanthropy attends to the needs of every other community in this country. What these youngsters were telling us was "that there is a Prophet in Israel" -- and thank God for that.

But it is always unpleasant if King and Prophet are at odds with each other. It is a tension that must be resolved if the lepers of the world are to regain their might and their health at the same time.

How then can we undertake the task of offering the healing for the spiritual lepers of the world? How shall we discharge our function as the prophets of healing for mankind? How shall Torah go forth from our midst and the word of God to an agonizing world?

The answer is not by fighting with the King and wasting our energies in internecine battles. And certainly it is not by the Prophet cloistering himself and withdrawing from life. Torah Judaism will succeed neither by the satisfaction of venting its spleen upon other Jews, nor by ghettoizing itself. As Elisha put it, "and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." The Prophet lives amongst his people, in Israel, with the people and with the King too as part of daily life.

Our way must be to teach Torah at the highest levels, to offer the Prophet side by side with the King, nevuah with malkhut, Torah together with technology and science and philosophy -- not unthinkingly but critically, accepting the viable and rejecting the unacceptable.

For 85 years there has been one great institution that has, by its very existence and by virtue of its basic philosophy, proclaimed for all the world to know: there is a Prophet in Israel.

Yeshiva University incorporates in itself the elements of both Prophet and King, the sacred and the profane, and offers the Naaman's the hope of a resolution of their inner spiritual incoherency.

It is a difficult solution that Torah or prophecy offers: it requires going in over your head, seven times over again, accepting God and His word and the heavy regimen that that implies. But it is a glorious way. It teaches those going in to the Kingly areas of profane wisdom not to disdain Prophecy, but to remain "sons of Torah." And it teaches those aspiring for Prophecy, the religious functions in society, religious teaching in the Jewish community, not to reject the help of the King but to appreciate his contribution.

It has taught American and world Jewry that it is possible to raise several generations of Jews who combine in themselves, with varying degrees of reconciliation, King and Prophet, sacred and profane.

This Saturday has been proclaimed Yeshiva University Sabbath, in honor of the Chag Ha-Semichah, the convocation of ordination, which will take place tomorrow. This Monday, the Rabbinic Alumni will honor the President of our Congregation, Max Stern, the great benefactor of Jewish education -- a man who has given more for Jewish education than any man in American Jewish history, possibly world Jewish history. He is a man who has proven himself a melekh who not only does not ignore

and is not antagonistic to the navi, but his greatest supporter, one whose whole career exclaims for the world to hear: "let them all know that there is a Prophet in Israel."

The Jewish Center has had intimate connections with Yeshiva University throughout its history. The leaders of The Jewish Center have given Board members and officials to Yeshiva. Two of the major schools of Yeshiva, the Erna Michael College and Stern College for Women, have been founded and endowed by members of this congregation. Both of its Rabbis and several of its members, have served and do now serve as professors on its faculty.

It is altogether appropriate, therefore, that the members of this congregation continue their support for Yeshiva University in a manner unprecedented, corresponding to the unprecedented crisis which Yeshiva University is experiencing right now because of general financial conditions, and because of new governmental restrictions.

When we declare our support for Yeshiva, we are in effect proclaiming, in the words of Elisha as they re-echo throughout the ages:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׁמַע בְּכָל זֶמַן וְעוֹמֵד לְפָנָיו יִשְׁמַע בְּכָל זֶמַן , let all the world know that there remains and always will flourish a prophet in Israel.