

A-115

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1. Describe Elijah, in today's Haftorah, as wearily looking for G-d in the desert, tired of treachery of his people Israel etc. Then, read from in middle of I Kings ~~verse 11 thru verse 13~~ verse 11 thru verse 13.
2. Here indeed, in a story as simple as a fable and as powerful as drama, lies the kernel of the message of Judaism for our day and all days.

The message of G-d is not in powerful winds. You cannot disseminate religion as if it were merchandise. You cannot sell G-dliness like you sell soap. Wind and sound and propaganda and advertising techniques will just not do. LO BA'RUACH HA'SHEM.

The message of G-d is not in ~~fire~~ earthquakes. Size and activity of certain kinds are no assurances of true religion. A big building does not mean a great spirit. Earth-shaking structures do not move the heavens. You get no closer to G-d through big campaigns. LO BA'RA'SH HA'SHEM.

The message of G-d is not in fire. Oratory, denunciation, zeal, artificial enthusiasm, will not produce the voice of G-d. Heat alone cannot generate closeness to G-d. Something else is needed. LO VA'EISH HA'SHEM.

Where then does the message of G-d lie? What are the optimum conditions under which a man can hear the voice of G-d moving within him? - In the KOL DMAMAH DAKAH, in the "still, small voice". The very expression is a paradox. For if there is a voice, it is not still, and if it is still, there is no voice. Yet this is just what our Torah teaches. Like a voice, it must have individuality, personality and meaningfulness - specific Jewish message. Yet all this must be perceived in silence. When there is silence, when all the strange noises all about us have been lowered, when we have silenced the roar of the machines, the din of radio and television, the bleating of our egos and desires, the hollow noises of our shallow nonsenses, after all the extraneous sounds have been stilled and we concentrate on the silence, then and only then can we hear G-d speaking, the voice of Religion asking the ultimate question, the one it takes a life-time to answer: MAH L'CHA FO ELIYAHU, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" What is it all about? What is the reason for my existence? Now that it's quiet, what was all the noise about? What is my purpose in life?

3. That question cannot be heard, much less answered, when men concentrate on the noises, on the propaganda and the superficial.
4. Many of us are now preparing to go away on vacations of varying length. Some of us will be at the beach, others in the country, and still others will travel.

May I suggest that we follow Elijah's example. Let's listen closely and try to hear the voice, the voice of G-d. Elijah was in the desert - he had the sand of the beach, the "nature" of the country and the distance of the traveller. Yet you can't hope to hear the ultimate question in the wind, the shouting or the fire.

Let us not fool ourselves. All year long we have the excuse of "busy", and so we cannot take off the hour or two to just think - just think, and nothing more.

Now we shall be on vacation. Our excuse is gone.

I have no doubt that very many of us will turn our eyes heavenward and thank G-d for what we see. Some of us will look out over the vast expanses of the Atlantic, perhaps thrill at the moonbeams playing on the incessant waves, and from the depths of our heart exclaim, "Ah, G-d created a wonderful world". Others will marvel at the beautiful contours of rolling plains and hills, valleys and cliffs, rustic scenery and all kinds of wildlife, and then too conclude, "What a great G-d to create such a great world". Fine. The sentiments are noble beyond reproach. We should do more of it in the same way. It's true, G-d created all this, and it teaches you something. But you won't hear G-d's voice there. It doesn't last. The wind-swept Atlantic, the valleys, the waterfalls, the rainbows are all G-d's handiwork, but not his microphone.

I wonder how many of us will try something else. Let me say that I know that 99% won't, because it is much too difficult and much too frightening. It can drive one insane. What I refer to is the VAYALET PANA V BA'ADARTO VA'YEITSEI VA'YAAMOD PESACH HA'ME'ARAH, "he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood out in the entrance of the cave." I mean to leave the party for a while, yes - a short respite from the gin or bridge game - , to go off on a side, even away from the breath-taking natural phenomena, away from all the noise, just wrap yourself in your mantle, perhaps even literally in your Tallith, and wait a while.

I dare say that it can be a terrible experience. Because in the silence and loneliness, a question begins to crop up in your consciousness, a question so crucial to your entire being that it can shake a man to the bottom of his soul. The question seems to be a G-dly one: MAH LCHA FO? What are you doing here, what are you on this earth for, what's it all about? It's a question you're too busy to hear otherwise. But now it's audible. It's G-d's challenge. MAH LCHA FO. What's the purpose of all your toil and work and existence?

It is a question that is sharp and searching. But to hear the question is to beg the answer. Elijah gave it, this time in quiet not loud, in soft and not fiery, syllables: KANO KINAISI LA'SHEM ELOKEI TS'VAOS. I have been jealous for the Lord, G-d of Hosts. What am I doing here? I am trying to lead a G-dly life, and that is the goal, purpose and end of all. When I can hear the question and face it, then I can begin to answer it. When I can hear G-d in silence, I can begin to understand the noise - its value and lack of value. But the question cannot be heard above the daily din. When we are busy asking "what are you doing tonight?" or "do you know what so-and-so did yesterday?", we cannot hope to hear the important question of MAH LCHA FO. We must get off to a side, wrap ourselves up in the mantle and, in the KOL DMAMAH DAKAH hear G-d Himself saying MAH LCHA FO. Then we can answer KANO KINEISI, that Torah and Jewishness are my aim and purpose in life.

5. This week, this Rabbi will attend the annual convention of RCA, the national organization of young Orthodox Rabbis, take place in Detroit. It is my hope and prayer that nothing sensational will result. I hope that it will not make too many and too big headlines. I hope that we shall not emulate the wind of one national non-traditional body which recently exploded a bomb-shell about changing the KESUBAH. I hope we shall not copy the fiery zeal of the Reform Rabbinate which, having convinced itself that all Jews are good Jews is now out on a campaign to proselytize gentiles and make Jews out of them - for the first time, perhaps, in Jewish history, and certainly for the first time in the N.Y. Times. No, I know that I shall not come back and

report wind and earthquake and fire. G-d shuns sensation and headlines. ^{He} e prefers
tye KOL DMAMAH DAKAH.

That is the purpose for which we meet. To quietly, in a still small voice,
sum up the year's work and plan for the coming year, knowing all the while that
constructive and creative work for the Jewish community na for Judaism is not
accomplished by sudden splurges of noise and wind, but by slow, quiet everyday labor.
I hope to be able to come back and repoert that we are still working on the answe
to MAH LCHA FO, that we are slowly but surely progressing, that we are KANO KINAYSI
we are trying in as dignified, solid and unsensational manner as peesible,
to build up support for Torah in our synagogued and schools.

I know that the results will be forthcoming in the KOL DMAMAH DAKAH.
For only thus can we hear and answer G-d's crucial question.

6. When we as Jews and as individuals can succeed in attaining that repose
and silence, and hear and answer that Divine question, then we can hope to hear
the rest of G-d's message: the evil kingdom shall be spoiled, and a new and good king
rise in his place; and even after the Elijah's will have left the earthly scene,
there will be no despair, for in his place there will come Elishas and
prophets evermore, so that Torah, Judaism, Jewishness shall never wane from the
hujan scene.