

Eliyahu and Acknowledging Vulnerability

These are the words of the Haftorah that is read in many synagogues around the world. And there are many commentators that say that that is the very reason for the description of the Shabbat as Shabbat HaGadol. This is the great Shabbat, because we are looking forward to a day that is called the great day. The day that is called HaGadol, the great and awesome day.

And then the prophet Malachi goes on to say that one of the signature features, one of the signifying moments of that great and awesome time will be the return of the hearts of the children to their parents, and the hearts of the parents to their children. As if to say you will know that you are in the Messianic era when parents and children get along. As if to say that that is a specific quality that we should associate with a kind of Eschaton, a kind of end of days. We look forward to that end. And it's hard when year after year, Passover after Passover, we read these words. Today is the 29th anniversary of my having read them with my brother in Jerusalem. And I think 57 years ago, my father-in-law too. And one wonders when one comes to a landmark, a moment when you can have perspective.

This whole week I kept asking myself, what about those children? What are we doing? Because the prophet says that it is that relationship between the generations. In other words, the theme of Passover. And you will tell your children on that day that Exodus is possible. That liberation isn't some utopic notion. That it is possible for adults to consider the next generation. It is possible for us to remove ourselves for just one moment from the frantic pace at which we throw ourselves at life, eating it. Because we don't trust there will be anymore left. To think about what is being left over. What about those children? So this Shabbos is Shabbat HaGadol.

And in the coming week, we know that many things will happen in our community and in the nation at large. And the question is, when we think about the children. When we think about children who are going hungry today and tomorrow. When we think about children who will be without life, without insurance, health insurance. Probably. When we think about all of those places in our society, the question inevitably becomes, how do we grow? How is it possible to meet crisis with the courage to make a change? How is it possible to meet the inevitable with the courage of the possible?

So I heard something this week that really gave me chizuk, it strengthened me. And I wanted to share it with you as our little Dvar for this morning. I've already shared it with the community and I think in the Kabbalah Cafe. But in essence, if we refuse, if we refuse the brokenness around us. If we refuse to acknowledge it, if we refuse to admit it, if we refuse to participate in it. If we hold ourselves aloof, as if to say, here I am shielded from all of those ailments that we speak about. Here I am shielded. As long as I can go to a hospital and go to a doctor and have my needs taken care of, then that's all that matters. If I don't acknowledge in my own small way that I too am broken in a country that is as wealthy as ours when others don't have. If we can't open the door to our shuls and to our schools and to our homes and say, everyone who needs come. If we can't acknowledge that, then we don't sing the deepest song that we have. It's not just about a responsibility of being compelled from beyond us. You must, you must, you must.

But if we don't develop that inner source, that inner place that says that there am I, that is me too. If we can't break ourselves, then we have no story to tell. So this person said that, you know, next Friday night when all of us will be sitting around the table and we'll have our three whole matzahs.

The person said to me, you know, David, those three matzahs are all of the wholeness in our lives. All of those places that we spoke about before, here are my three matzahs. I have it all together. I have my Cohen, my Levy, my Yisrael. I have my BA, my MBA, and I have my PhD. I have my this, my that, and my this. I have all of these, my whole resume here. And then we do this miraculous thing. We take the middle matzah and we break it in half. And he said, you know what you do to a cinnamon stick? He said, try to smell a cinnamon stick that hasn't been broken yet. How does that smell? He said to me. I said, eh, not so good. He said, you break it. You break the cinnamon stick in the middle and then it wafts. This is the places in our lives that we admit that we are also broken. And not just admit that we are also broken, but we ask others to come and participate in that. When parents acknowledge vulnerability with their children, it gives permission to the children to acknowledge vulnerability. When society admits it doesn't have an answer, it looks for better answers. When society acknowledges that it is broken, it can begin to heal. When systems acknowledge that they don't have all the answers, they can begin to work on deeper answers. Eliyahu HaNavi stands always waiting at the doorway, at every doorway when we open the door. To open a door is to break something that was sealed. When we break the middle matzah, we invite Elijah to come and tell us the story of liberation.

So I'm praying this morning for all of the brokenness, all of the broken matzah in the world. I'm praying for a day when children will be our ultimate value to some degree. I'm praying for a day where leaders of this country won't be able to sleep at night. Because there are people whom they could have helped, but they didn't. So let us all pray for that day. Let's pray for the children. May Elijah come soon.

Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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