



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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SERMON TITLE:

DON'T IGNORE THE HOST AT THE PARTY

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

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Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

TERUMA

DON'T IGNORE THE HOST AT THE PARTY

Why is Jerusalem is considered a holy city to Muslims— “Jerusalem” does not appear in the Koran at all.

The story goes like this: One hundred years after the death of Muhammad, the Umayyad Dynasty ruled Jerusalem. The Umayyads were locked in a fierce power struggle with a renegade governor in Mecca, the official holy place of Islam. Since the Umayyads didn't want their citizens making pilgrimages to Mecca, they decided to turn Jerusalem into a new Muslim holy city. They organized a convention of Muslim scholars and worked hard to create references to Jerusalem in the Koran.

The Koran describes Muhammad's nighttime journey, the one in which he supposedly rose to heaven in a chariot, as follows: “Allah took his servant at night from the holy mosque to the farther mosque—and “the farther mosque” in Arabic is “al masjid al-aksa.”

So, the Umayyads went and built a beautiful mosque on the Temple Mount and named it the Farther Mosque, or Masjid Al-Aksa in Arabic, thus accomplishing two things: successfully inserting Jerusalem into the Koran after the writing of the Koran, and also inserting a new chapter in Muhammad's life—inventing the place from which he supposedly rose up to heaven.

The concept of a prophet rising up to heaven alive and in the flesh is drawn from Judaism.

Everyone has heard of Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet. On the night of the Passover Seder, we prepare a special cup for Eliyahu HaNavi; at every bris, we prepare a special chair for Eliyahu HaNavi; and on Saturday night after Shabbos, we sing the famous song “Eliyahu HaNavi”.

In the Book of Kings 2:2, we are told about the passing of Eliyahu HaNavi. Eliyahu was walking with his student Elisha, his eventual successor. Eliyahu suddenly turned to Elisha and said to him: “Wait for me here. I need to go somewhere.” But Elisha, being a devoted student, would not agree. He swore that he would not leave Eliyahu. So they continued walking together.

Finally, Eliyahu turns to Elisha and says, “Ask what shall I do for you before I am taken from you.”

Essentially, Eliyahu was saying, “Make your last request before I am taken from this world.” So Elisha asks, “Please let there be double of your spirit upon me”—in other words, I want to be twice as great a prophet as you.

To such a request, Eliyahu replied, “You asked with difficulty”—meaning, you asked for too much. However, Eliyahu gave Elisha a sign that would tell him whether his request would be fulfilled or not: “If you see me being taken from you, it shall be unto you so, and if not, it shall not be.”

That meant that if Elisha physically witnessed Eliyahu’s passing, it would be a sign that G-d had granted him twice as much prophecy—and if not, it would be a sign that his request had not been fulfilled.

So the story continues that they continued walking and talking together—and suddenly, a wall of flame appeared and separated the two of them. The verse then states: “And Eliyahu rose up in a storm wind to heaven.”

Eliyahu disappeared. He did not die like everyone else. His body simply disappeared. Only his coat remained. Eliyahu himself simply disappeared alive. This is where the Muslims got this story.

Now, it may seem that this is the pinnacle of spiritual achievement for any human being to achieve—to go up to heaven in his very body. What could possibly be holier than that?

Nevertheless, we see that Moshe Rabbeinu, for example, the greatest Jew who ever lived, did not go to heaven like that. Rather, he died like all people: his soul rose to heaven and his body was buried on Mt. Nevo.

Now, if there is anyone who deserved to rise to heaven alive, it would be Moshe Rabbeinu, the master of all prophets and a much greater prophet than Eliyahu and all the other prophets. Still, he didn’t go to heaven alive. Why not?

The story is told that before the Baal Shem Tov passed away, he said that he had been given the choice to be like Eliyahu and go up to heaven alive in a storm wind. However, he explained that he did not want to lose the opportunity to fulfill the verse, “Dust you are and to dust you shall return.” But why? What is behind the Baal Shem Tov’s words?

To understand all of this, let's take a step back and look at this week's Torah portion.

This week's Parshah deals with the construction of the Mishkan. All the commentators ask, why were the Jews required to build a house for G-d? As the commentator Abarbanel puts it: "Why did the Blessed One order the making of the Mishkan, as if He were a defined body limited by space—which is the opposite of the truth?" In other words, G-d is above time and space and is not limited by anything—and we little humans are going to build Him a house?!

What indeed was the goal of this project of building a house for G-d? On the surface, it rings false to anyone who believes that G-d is not limited in any way.

So the Abarbanel provides an amazing answer to his own question: "The Blessed One's intention in the making of the Mishkan and all its vessels was that no one think that G-d abandoned Earth... saying that His throne is in Heaven and He is distant from mankind. To remove this false belief from their hearts, He ordered that they make Him a Mishkan as if He lived among them—so that they would believe that He lives within them."

In other words, the entire goal of the Mishkan was to create the feeling that G-d is here on this earth, right down here among us.

In other religions, the ultimate goal is to get to Heaven, because that's where G-d is found. In Judaism, however, it's the exact opposite: the entire goal is not to transport yourself up there to G-d, but to transport G-d down here to you—to this physical world. That's why Moshe Rabbeinu's body remained down here.

Here's another example of this concept: At Mt. Sinai, at the first encounter between G-d and the Jewish Nation, the Torah tells us, "G-d descended upon Mt. Sinai"—and ever since then, it has been our mission to draw down the Divine Presence, the Shechina, down here on Earth.

Now, picture for yourselves someone throwing a huge party. He spends a lot of money—and, as you can understand, he is the party's host. But suddenly, a bunch of people who don't know the host show up at the party. They start eating, drinking and partying. They ignore the host. They act like it's their party. They ask one person to say a few words and another one to start dancing as if the host is simply not there. The host, of course, is offended in the deepest possible way.

None of us would let something like that happen at our party, now, would we? However, my dear friends, this is what happens in our world every day.

G-d created the universe and organized a massive festival—but millions of people came, ate, drank and ignored the real host. Worst of all, they acted as if they were the hosts—as if they had organized the festival.

Our mission as Jews is to make sure we do not forget who the host of the party is. That's why the Rebbe started his ten Mitzvah Campaigns: to remind Jews that this house has an Owner, whether that's through putting a mezuzah on the door, lighting Shabbos candles, giving tzedakah or any other mitzvah. The entire mission is to remind us at every moment just who the host of this whole giant party is—and thus ensure that we're always invited to the party

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