

# ~ I Live Amongst My People ~

## A Rosh Hashona reflection on the importance of community

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As a Novi (Prophet), Elisha would travel around Eretz Yisroel. One of the cities that he would frequent was the city of Shunem. Each time that he would visit, a wealthy woman who lived there, identified only as the *Shunamis*, would feed him.

*One day Elisha visited Shunem. A wealthy woman lived there, and she urged him to have a meal; and whenever he passed by, he would stop there for a meal<sup>1</sup>.*

After visiting Shunem a number of times, the *Isha Shunamis* said to her husband;

הִנֵּה-נָא יֹדְעֵתִי כִי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא עֹבֵר עָלֵינוּ תָּמִיד:

*"I know that this is a holy man of G-d who passes by us regularly."<sup>2</sup>*

She suggests to her husband *"Let us make for him an enclosed upper chamber and place there for him a bed, a table, a chair and a lamp so that he can stop there whenever he comes to us."<sup>3</sup>* The next Posuk says *"One day he came there; he retired to the upper chamber and lay down there<sup>4</sup>."*

On that day, Elisha sent his servant Gechazi to ask the Shunamis to appear before him. He told Gechazi to ask tell her 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can we do for you? Can we speak in your behalf to the king or to the army commander?'

Recognising the great effort that she made to prepare accommodation for them and look after them with such diligence, Elisha offered to reward her efforts with assistance.

She responded

בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אֲנִי יֹשֶׁבֶת:

*"I live amongst my people<sup>5</sup>"* and have no need for anything else.

Elisha asks Gechazi, "what then can be done for her?" to which Gechazi responds, "she has no son, and her husband is old." Elisha summons the Shunamis and blesses her with a son which she bears one year later.

The Zohar<sup>6</sup> says that this took place on Rosh Hashona, a day on which the world is judged and the barren (like Sarah, Rochel and Chana) are remembered. When Elisha asked her if "we can speak on your behalf to the king", he was referring to the day on which we call Hashem King. He asked if he could intercede on her behalf for forgiveness or for anything that she may need from the King.

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<sup>1</sup> Melachim 2 4:8

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 4:9

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 4:10

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 4:11

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 4:13

<sup>6</sup> Beshalach 44a

Despite the fact that she was an older woman who had not been blessed with children, she did not ask Elisha for a child. Even though it was an auspicious day when Hashem remembers the barren, she did not plead her case. She simply replied

בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אֲנִי יֹשֶׁבֶת:

“I live amongst my people”.

The Zohar teaches that at a time that the world is being judged, one should not separate themselves and speak only for themselves. On the day of judgement, those who stand alone, even if they are righteous, will be ensnared first. Therefore a person should never separate themselves from the community, because Hashem’s compassion is always on the community, all together.

This is the meaning of her response “I live amongst my people”, that she does not wish to separate herself from the community.

To not have children is one of the greatest pains a person ר"ל could ever experience. The Shunamis had the opportunity of a lifetime and could have asked to be blessed with her deepest desire for a child to be fulfilled. Yet she did not want to stand alone and pursue her own personal needs and be treated differently and separately from her people, even if it meant giving up this opportunity. And the Zohar says that her response was the right one.

There are a number of lessons that we can learn from this account and its relevance to Rosh Hashona in our own lives.

הַנֵּה-נָא יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא עֹבֵר עָלֵינוּ תָּמִיד:

*“I know that this is a holy man of G-d who passes by us regularly.”*

The *Ish Elokim Kadosh*, ‘holy man of G-d’, refers to the Divine spirit of inspiration - Hisorrerus. This spirit comes to us from above and it passes by us regularly.

We constantly receive times of inspiration and spiritual revelations from above that can enable us to grow spiritually in our closeness to Hashem and keeping of Torah and Mitzvos. But it passes by us. Inspiration and spiritual upliftment comes to us but it is short-lived and passes on. If we want to internalise it so that it remains and resides with us, “so that he can stop there whenever he comes to us”, like the Shunamis, we need to put in genuine, diligent effort.

During the Yomim Noraim, a holy spirit is showered upon us from Above. The energy of these days fill us with inspiration and aspiration to live higher, to better ourselves as Jews and deepen our relationship with Hashem. If we want the inspiration to remain with us and not evaporate as Yomtov comes to an end, we need to make the Keilim for it through concrete action and resolutions, with effort.

A second message;

On Rosh Hashona we stand before Hashem in judgement. We all have our deepest prayers and requests for ourselves and our families for things that we may be lacking or that we need in our lives.

The message of the Shunamis is that we cannot separate ourselves from those around us. We cannot think only of ourselves and daven only for what we need. We are part of a collective. We are members of a community, our own local community and part of the broader community of Klal Yisroel.

When we stand alone; when we live for ourselves, protecting our own and not regarding those around us, we face Hashem's judgement. Hashem judges us whether we are really worthy and deserving of having our wishes granted.

On Rosh Hashona we have to declare "I live amongst my people". We come before Hashem as part of a community.

When we are willing to put ourselves aside for the sake of others; when we feel their pain and lacking as acutely as we do our own and when we long for their wellbeing and blessings as powerfully as we do for our own; we do not face Hashem's judgement and scrutiny. In the words of the Zohar, Hashem's compassion is always on the community –all together. When we are genuinely united as a community, Hashem showers us with love and blessing without any judgement.

And then, like the Shunamis, we will be blessed - as part of the community – with our own personal desires as well.

May we all be inscribed and sealed for a year of overflowing Brochas, as a community and in our personal lives. May Hashem grant every one of us with all of our heart's desires for children, Nachas, health, prosperity, Shidduchim, spiritual growth and inspiration and the ultimate Brocha of the Geulah Shleimah and the coming of Moshiach now.