

RABBI TUVIA VINITSKY-ROSH CHODESH IYAR – 04/30/2014

THE PINTELE YID-ELIYAHU HANOVI AT HAR HACARMEL

Our shiur was sponsored by 3 different Aneinu members: One for her uncle's yorzeit-Fred ben Boruch o"n; by an Aneinu member l'refuah shelamai rochel leah bas yehudis and by Devorah Cohen l'ilu nishmas her son Refael Elisha Meir ben Yaakov. May she and her family know from no more tzaar.

Rabbi Vinitsky is a master story teller. He makes the anshei tanach come alive and this shiur was no exception. This shiur is really about the wicked King of Israel, Achav. And to understand, Achav we need to go back in time and so Rabbi Vinitsky in his inimitable style, started with a brief history lesson.

Shlomo Hamelech finished all the work his father, Dovid haMelech started. The Palace, the Bais haMikdash. The reign of Shlomo Hamelech was a most amazing one. Shlomo Hamelech was the leader of the whole world, the nations all around Israel respected and feared the Jewish King. He had a strong army and never used it. There was economic prosperity in the land. Every man was a talmid chochom. The Jews had no worries. People came from all over to ask his advice and countries did whatever they could to be in Shlomo's good book. Shlomo HaMelech was truly 'ON TOP OF THE WORLD'.

But Shlomo Hamelech did make one grave mistake. Since he was so smart and understood the reasoning behind the mitzvos, he allowed himself to take 1000 wives and concubines. Even though the Torah doesn't allow such a high number, he felt that the reason this is not allowed did not apply to him. But he was wrong. All the neighboring countries were sending him their daughters to marry or to have as concubines. These women were converting. But ultimately in Shlomo's own palace they reverted back to their former ways and started serving avoda zoro. Did Shlomo realize? Was he too busy to notice? But he did nothing to stop them. And Hashem issued him a harsh punishment for this grave sin.

Hashem decreed that the Kingdom of Israel was to be divided into 2 into-the northern Kingdom of Yisroel half and the southern half which is shevet Yehuda and Binyomin. The halacha is that no one, except for the King is allowed to sit in the Bais haMikdash-how this translated in that time was if the King of the Northern half came to daven in the Bais HaMikdash, he would be standing with all of the nation while the King of Yehuda would be sitting. The King of the North, Yeravam ben Nevat, did not like this, and he forbade his people from going to Yerushalayim. He put up 2 golden calves and introduced idol worship to his nation. He also brought in the worship of other deities that existed in the world, the worship of the Baal, of the Asherah and others. Now 5/6th of Am Yisroel were worshipping idols with the encouragement of the King. Hashem sent prophets to try tell the people to repent but they didn't listen.

Forty years after the death of Shlomo Hamelech, the 8th King of the Northern Kingdom was Achav. He didn't even pretend to do anything Jewish. In his time, he made a big business out of this avoda zoro cult, he made holidays for each of the avoda zoro, he sold priesthoods for them. He then married Jezabel. She was not Jewish, was not interested in the country and she was a major ovada ovoda zoro and she did whatever she could to serve her idols. Achav didn't care.

She was very charming and she constantly expressed how she loved her people and wanted to help them (in the service of avoda zoro). Of course, if charm didn't work, she did not hesitate to use force. In the Northern Kingdom, somehow, there were still 7000 people who did not serve avoda zoro.

The novie Ovadia, who was frum, was Achav's cook. It seems that Achav did not know he was a prophet. Achav wanted to kill all the prophets and 100 of them ran away and hid in a cave. Ovadia, would take food from Achav's kitchen and secretly go to the cave and feed these prophets.

At this point, Eliyahu Hanovi enters into the scene. He was kind and gentle but when it came to serving Hashem, he was a zealot. It pained him to see the people serving idols. He walked into Achav's palace and demanded that Achav stop serving avoda zora, he said, "The honor of Hashem will not tolerate this for one more minute." He was forced to flee after this because both Achav and Jezabel's armies were looking for him.

He davened to Hashem to withhold rain from them to force them to do teshuva. Hashem taught him, that he must have more patience with the Yidden just as Hashem has patience with us. Finally Eliyahu could not take it anymore, so he challenged the followers of the Baal and the Ashara to a 'duel'. The prophets of the Ashara refused to participate, but 450 prophets of the Baal came to Har Hacarmel. So it is 1 man against 450 to finally determine who is right.

The whole country heard about this and thousands of people from the Northern Kingdom came to Har HaCarmel to watch which korbon will be accepted. Eliyahu allowed the korbon of the baal to go first. When they put sacrifices on their mizbach, nothing happened. No fire came down from Heaven. And Eliyahu taunted them, 'maybe try dancing more', 'you're not trying hard enough' but still nothing happens.

Then Eliyahu offers his korbon to Hashem and of course the fire comes down and consumes his sacrifice. The masses of people fall on their feet and proclaim, "Hashem who HaElokim" (what we say at the end of Yom Kippur). Eliyahu then killed all 450 prophets of the Baal.

But on Har HaCarmel among all the people, was the King of the nation, Achav. He was there with his whole royal entourage. He did not try to stop Eliyahu from killing all of these prophets. He is the man who singlehandedly introduced massive avoda zora to the nation, at an unprecedented rate and he did nothing to stop the Novie of Hashem. When the whole nation proclaimed, "Hashem Who Ho"Elokim" he did nothing.

Why? asked Rabbi Vinitsky. Because some small spark within him seems to have been ignited in him (even though he is going to have to go home and explain all this to his wife).

Achav's story, says Rabbi Vinitsky gets even more interesting. The Yidden started to slide back into serving avoda zora. Aram, one of the neighboring nations, (part of today's Syria) was the first nation to attack the Jews under the Shoftim and they were always looking for opportunities of attacking us. They were a thought out nation and realized, that now that they saw that the Jews were serving idols again, they realized that Hashem might not save them from the hands of their enemies. The King of Aram gathered the Kings of the 32 neighboring countries to join him. They were thrilled, they would now finally be able to rid themselves of the annoying Jews. They attacked and whatever military plan Achav might have had, failed miserably and the enemy came all the way to the capitol city and made a siege on Shomron. The messenger of the King of Amram comes to Achav with 2 demands: the King of Amram wants all the treasures in the kingdom, all the gold and silver should be transferred to him; he wants all the women and children to become slaves to him. Achav agrees, but then the messenger comes back with a 3rd request.

Every Jewish King had to have a Sefer Torah written for himself and wherever he went (i.e. riding on his horse) he had to carry it with him. The King of Aram demanded the Sefer Torah. And to this Achav said 'no'.

And for standing up for the honor of the Sefer Torah, Hashem rewarded him, by granting him a reign of 22 years. The torah is comprised of the 22 letters of the alef bais, so he was rewarded with a 22 year kingship. It might seem to us to be tremendously out of proportion to reward such a rosho with such a reward, but we can see from here, how generous Hashem is with his rewards, even for a rosho like Achav.

How can we explain Achav's actions? Rabbi Vinitsky explains that something in Achav could not forgo the Sefer Torah-what was this something? It was a spark that every Yid has deep within him, the spark that we call 'the pintele Yid'. A Yid is created differently from a goy. Every Yid, frum or not frum is created with this spark, with this 'pintele yid'. We're the chosen people and that means we are given a different composition than the goyim. This exists within the 90% of Yidden even today who are not frum today, as well.

Eliyahu hanavi knew this fact. He knew that every Yid at Har HaCarmel possessed this pintele yid within him. He knew he had to kindle that spark and he found a dramatic way to awaken the people and he even managed to ignite the spark within the rosho, Achav.

We have to reach within ourselves and ignite our spark and say, "Hashem who HaElokim"