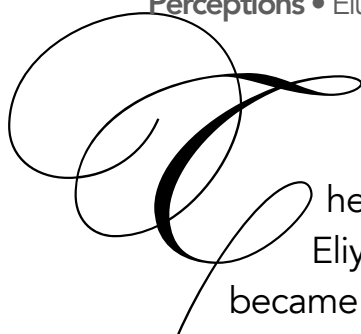


ki seitzei

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Here is a midrash I saw years ago about Eliyahu HaNavi meeting a fisherman that became relevant for a new book I am just finishing, b"H. It's especially powerful at this time of year, and it goes like this:

Once I was walking from place to place and I found a man who did not know any verses or *mishnah*, and he would joke and make fun of things. He came before me so I asked him, "My son, what will you answer to your Father in Heaven on the Day of Judgment?" He told me, "Rebi, I have an answer. Wisdom and knowledge have not been given to me from Heaven to read and to learn." So I asked him, "What work do you do?" He answered me, "I'm a fisherman." I asked him, "My son, who taught you this, and told you to bring flax and weave it into nets and then throw them into the sea to catch fish?" He answered me, "Rebi, for this I was given understanding and knowledge from Heaven!" I asked him, "To find flax and weave nets and throw them into the sea and catch fish you have been given wisdom and knowledge from Heaven, but for Torah, in which it says, '*For the thing is very near to you in your mouth and in your heart to do it*' (Devarim 30:14) they have not

given you wisdom and knowledge from Heaven?" Immediately he raised his voice, cried, and moaned. I told him, "Don't take it so harshly because many people will answer the same answer, but their work will be proof against them!" (*Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu, Eliyahu Zuta* 14)

The message: Just because something doesn't come naturally or easily to you doesn't mean it is not relevant to you. It may just mean you have to want it enough for God to give it to you, and that may be your test in life. So, before you say some mitzvah is not for you, ask God to give what you need to change that.

We can use this line of thinking to understand something from the parsha. The Torah starts off talking about the captive woman taken by a Jewish soldier during war, which it certainly doesn't promote. However, rather than confront the man's yetzer hara head on which doesn't usually go to well, the Torah instructs the man in how to halachically do it, and the obligations that come with it.

One such obligation is, "And it will be, if you do not desire her, then you shall send her away wherever she wishes" (Devarim 21:14), regarding which Rashi comments and says, "The Torah is telling you that you will eventually despise her."

It is? The Torah only says that if you happen to eventually to not desire her, not that you will for sure despise her. What compelled the Sifrei that Rashi quoted to take the Torah's statement to such an extreme?

For the same reason why Amnon hated Tamar more than he loved her after he forced himself on her. She had still been the same righteous woman she was when Amnon became infatuated with her, so what was there to hate?

Himself. To look at her was to recall his own barbaric act and

make him loathe himself. And being the coward that he was, rather than blame himself and try to rectify the situation somewhat, he blamed her for how he felt about himself. And the same is going to be true of the soldier who capitulates to his yetzer hara and desires a woman he shouldn't.

It's the way we're wired. We have a body that controls so much of everyday life, but also a soul that constantly begs us to live up to a higher standard. It creates inner friction that pushes some people to drown it out by increasing their volume of their material life, and others to soul search and spiritually improve.

All Eliyahu had to do to wake the fisherman up to his self-delusion was point out the truth he had been overlooking. Once he heard it, his soul said, "Exactly! That's what I've been trying to tell you for the longest time!" The body crumbled at that moment, and he woke up to the ridiculousness of his rationalization.

It's a truth that applies to everyone, and it is up to each individual to figure out where in their life to apply it.

I will be giving a two-part series on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur b"H on Monday, August 24 and Monday, August 31, called "Renewal & Rebirth." The classes will be on Zoom at 8:15 pm Israel time, but recorded for registrants to watch on their own time. You can register using this link: <https://www.-matara.pro/nedarimplus/online/?mosad=7014140>, or write to me at pinchasw@shaarnun.org if you prefer an alternative means.

Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston