

Coming Before Adonai Elohim

26 April, 2014

This Shabbat's Parsha contains the line, *When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to Adonai, offer it in a way that will make you accepted.* (Leviticus 19:5) This is a simple statement; observing it more closely, though, brings us to a whole new level of understanding of Adonai Elohim's holiness. We, His children and His servants, are to come before Him in a holy state, a state of purity, a state of contriteness, a state of humility. But more than this, we must come before Him with intentionality, with hearts focused on Him. These are the understandings given to us through His prophets and through Adonai Yeshua; however, knowing what these commands mean to us is something deeper and more powerful than just these words. The focus of His message to us today, then, addresses the question, How do we come before Adonai?

Pray for our understanding to deepen.

We read in Micah 6, *With what can I come before ADONAI to bow down before God on high? Should I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves in their first year? Would ADONAI take delight in thousands of rams with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Could I give my firstborn to pay for my crimes, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* (Micah 6:6) Notice how Adonai sets the bar of offering so high we would never succeed in achievement. The message He sends us is quite clear – He does not want us to bring gifts to Him, if our hearts are not right with Him. But what does it mean to have hearts right with Adonai Elohim Tzivaot, Lord God Almighty?

Adonai Yeshua showed us clearly what a heart right with Adonai Elohim means, as we read in Deuteronomy 6:4, Numbers 19:18 and Matthew 22:37-39. We read these commands this morning, during our Service: Love your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might and love your neighbour as yourself. When we consider these commands, often we focus only on the letter of the commandments, ignoring their spirit. I want to tell you a story of Hilda, a Messianic Believer, who dedicated her life to bringing others to the door of salvation, encouraging them to open their hearts to the God who loves them beyond understanding.

Hilda was a spry senior, a good eighty-four years young, and regularly visited her doctor, William Stratton, whom she affectionately called 'Will'. However, her visits to the office were not only for medical purposes. While she sat in the waiting room, she would strike up a conversation with those sitting beside her. Before long she would pose the question, "Do you know God loves you?" Although she was not always received well, her gentle approach intrigued many of those to whom she witnessed and she drew many to accept Adonai's promise of salvation.

One day, after she had some routine tests of her health, her doctor called her into the office. He did not have the usual smile, as was his custom and this caused Hilda to ask him, "Why are you so sad, today, Will?"

"Hilda", he said softly, "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you. The test results indicate you have breast cancer and that you do not have much time to live."

"Will", Hilda responded, "Please do not be sad. You have just told me the best news I could have heard from you! I now have a ticket to join my Lord and

Saviour, having the greatest blessing ever of worshiping Him in person, and you want to reduce the joy I have, with your sadness? Just do me a favour, please; put me into a room where I may invite as many as possible to share in the joy I have.”

Hilda’s stay in hospital was not long; however, everyone on the floor loved her and she led many nurses to Adonai Elohim. In addition, many female patients came through Hilda’s room, those who were waiting for tests or for procedures. With each one, Hilda had a conversation which inevitably led to a salvation invitation.

Well almost everyone loved Hilda. One of the nurses, Shannon, who formerly held a position as a field nurse in Afghanistan, was not as appreciative of Hilda’s approach, as were other nurses on the floor. Her experiences in Afghanistan had left her with a hard heart and a desire to do everything by the book. She despised religion, claiming it did nothing for those who suffered and died for theirs and others’. When Hilda asked Shannon if she could pray for her, Shannon replied, “I don’t need prayer and I do not want you to ask me ever again.”

That did not stop Hilda from asking Shannon each time she entered the room “How may I pray for you now?” One day, after being asked the same question for so many times she could not count, Shannon told Hilda she did not want her to speak about prayer ever again. Hilda said to her, “I have asked God not to take me home until you have accepted His invitation to receive His grace and blessings.” To which Shannon responded, with a smirk, “Then, Hilda, you will be here for ever, because that is never going to happen.” Not long after, Shannon came into Hilda’s room late at night to find the old woman awake and reading her

Bible. Shannon sat down on the edge of her bed and asked Hilda, “Tell me what you mean by Salvation?”

It didn’t take Hilda long to share the glorious story of forgiveness and redemption with Shannon nor did it take before she led Shannon to pray for forgiveness and to ask for God to come into her life. As she finished her prayer, Shannon felt an incredible peace settle within her, a peace of the like she had never before experienced. As she wept with joy, she saw Hilda’s face settle into a comfortable, yet frozen smile and realized she had gone home.

Shannon left Hilda’s room a much different person than the one who entered; she never returned to that state of hard heartedness and, as time went on, she too became a tireless worker for Adonai Elohim.

As I pondered this incredible moving story, I focused on the crucial element of Hilda’s unrelenting faith in her God: the condition of her heart. Examining how she interacted with people and how she faced her own mortality, I could see clearly what made her such a faithful servant for Adonai Elohim – a deep bond with the living God, Adonai Elohim Tzivaot. Let’s examine what a deep bond with Adonai Elohim means.

First, though, have you ever been taught passion is a danger for believers, because it leaves a door open for the enemy to sneak in? If that were the case, then wouldn’t Adonai Tzivaot be passion-free? What does Scripture tell us?

In Genesis 6 we read, *ADONAI regretted that he had made humankind on the earth; it grieved his heart.* (Genesis 6:6) If man’s wickedness grieved His heart, how is it possible He does not have passion, as believed by the late Albert Einstein

and by Baruch Spinoza, the great Jewish philosopher of the 17th Century, and as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith?

And then, as we read in Psalm 78, Adonai Elohim does feel anger, *Therefore, when ADONAI heard, he was angry; fire blazed up against Ya'akov; his anger mounted against Isra'el; because they had no faith in God, no trust in his power to save.* (Psalm 78:21.22) Was this anger, though, rhetorical or was it real? How do we know? If God's anger was rhetorical, there would be a legal justification for a charge of dishonesty and manipulation of emotion. But our beloved Abba's emotion is real. And if there is any question about His passion, listen to the following verses from both the Hebrew and Apostolic Scriptures: *"Here, the days are coming," says ADONAI, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says ADONAI.* (Jeremiah31:30,31), as Adonai Elohim prepared to announce the New Covenant to the House of Ya'akov and the House of Isra'el.

And, when Miriam confronted Adonai Yeshua with the news of her brother's (Lazareth) death, it is reported, in John 11: *When Adonai Yeshua saw her crying, and also the Judeans who came with her crying, He was deeply moved and also troubled. He said, "Where have you buried him?" They said, "Adonai, come and see." Adonai Yeshua cried.* (John 11:33-35) and, when Adonai Yeshua foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, found in Luke 19, *When Adonai Yeshua had come closer and could see the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you only knew today what is*

needed for shalom! But for now it is hidden from your sight. (Luke 19:41,42) If Adonai Elohim and Adonai Yeshua both display passion in their relationships with us, are we not granted to display passion in our relationships with them and with each other? Obviously the answer to this question is yes, within boundaries. The passion we express must be within the boundaries of agape and filial love.

I've spoken of agape and filial love before and, as with all biblical concepts, these would gain from reinforcement. Agape love is often viewed as a sterile form of love, a distant love reserved for the pious. This could not be further from the truth.

Agape love is a difficult love for many but especially difficult for believers. Why? Agape love is unconditional; it doesn't depend on the other loving us back, as human love often functions. Contrary to human love, agape love is not based on emotion, rather, agape love is a choice of will. We choose to love someone unconditionally; that is how Adonai Elohim loves us, through a conscious choice of will. Another name for agape love is covenantal love.

Filial love is also known as brotherly love and it is based on chemistry existing between people. This is the love David and Jonathan had for each other; this love is neither a choice of will nor is it romantically based – filial love is created when two or more people have an especially strong bond. Terror and mafia cells are composed of men and/or women sharing filial love. Husbands and wives, who have forged a warm loving relationship over many years, often achieve a form of filial love but only through a conscious choice of will, are they able to achieve agape love, love without conditions.

Listen to this description of filial love from the prophets, specifically 1 Samuel 18: *By the time David had finished speaking to Sha'ul, Y'honatan found himself inwardly drawn by David's character, so that Y'honatan loved him as he did himself. . . . Y'honatan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as he did himself.* (1 Samuel 18:1,3) In some of your translations, you may read, *After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.* Both these translations from the Hebrew and the Septuagint mean the same, David ben Yishai and Y'honatan ben Sha'ul were of the same spirit of covenantal love and, as such, formed a covenantal relationship based on both agape and filial love. This is the relationship He wants all of us to form not only with Him but also with each other. When we gossip about each other, when we let someone else take our responsibilities from us, as part of Kehilah, when we judge each other based on rumours or unsubstantiated third-party claims we destroy both agape and filial love and we violate our covenantal relationship with Adonai Elohim Tzivaot and with each other.

And what example of agape love do we have from Adonai Yeshua? The very fact He sacrificed Himself for you and me, being obedient to the will of His Father, was an act of agape love. There was no emotion underpinning this choice, although there was passion within its execution.

And what of the love Hilda displayed in her relationships? What love did she bring before Adonai Elohim and Adonai Yeshua? This is easily answered – agape or covenantal love. But what is meant by covenantal love? Adonai Yeshua answers this query for us, as He shares with us, in John 14 we read, *If you love me, you will keep my commands.* (John 14:15) And we know the commands to

which He is referring - the Sh'ma (Deuteronomy 6:4) and love your neighbour (Leviticus 19:34), both portions of Torah. As we announced this morning, upon these two commands both the Torah and the Prophets hang. Let's not deal with the question of which covenant replaces which covenant, since we have dealt with this issue several times and will likely in the future. What we do know is the truth Adonai Yeshua only taught what His Father told Him to teach and the truth Adonai Yeshua as Adonai Tzivaot is the author of Torah. So our relationship with Adonai Elohim Tzivaot exists with covenantal love, a choice of will love bounded by the Covenants within which this love has been forged.

So, how are we to live out our covenantally-based love relationship with each other? We show agape and filial love to each other. Adonai Yeshua said very clearly to us, in John 13 - *Everyone will know that you are my talmidim by the fact that you have love for each other.* (John 13:35) And just how do we show love to each other? We honour each other – we respect and value each other's individuality; we do not try to change another into the image we have of what they should be. We provide support and guidance for each other. Insight in this regards clearly comes to us from Rav Sha'ul's writing in 1 Corinthians 13 - (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) If we harbour anger against another person, how are we able to provide support and guidance? If we are jealous of another, how may we walk alongside another in harmony, providing support for them?

I truly love the Proverbs, although I do not quote from the wisdom of Solomon as often as I might. In Proverbs 18 we find, *The words of a man's mouth are deep water, a gushing torrent, a fountain of wisdom.* (Proverbs 18:4) There's a huge assumption in this Proverb – by claiming the words from a man's mouth form a

fountain of wisdom, Solomon had the concept of the wise man in mind, otherwise, he would have used the term fool, as he does elsewhere in this Proverb. In verse 15 we read, *The mind of a person with discernment gets knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.* (Proverbs 18:15) Does this not imply, quite clearly, a wise person seeks counsel from others and a covenantal relationship requires there be openness to providing and receiving good counsel, counsel requiring discernment? Although Proverbs 3 is directed to youth, there is ample evidence it also applies to adults. What does this say to you - *My son, don't forget my teaching; keep my commands in your heart; for they will add to you many days, years of life and peace.* (Proverbs 3:1) Are we able to say we have kept Abba's commands in our hearts? Have we maintained His teachings, teachings which guide our daily lives? Or, in our pride and arrogance, have we decided our wisdom is greater than God's or His appointed teachers?

When I read Hilda's story, I was struck by the child-like humility she displayed, in her loving trust of Adonai Elohim. There was no question of her expectation He would care for her and keep her close to Him. Hilda exemplifies how Isaiah felt about this understanding of God keeping us close to Him. Listen to how Isaiah phrases this knowledge, in Chapter 26: *A person, whose desire rests on You, You preserve in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.* (Isaiah 26:3)

There is no question Hilda knew what was required to come before Adonai Tzivaot. She clearly honoured, trusted and loved Him with a love which was true and honest, faithful and grounded in His faithfulness and in His love. Who amongst us is a Hilda? Whose heart is overflowing with passion, arising from our

conscious choice to love Adonai Elohim and each other unconditionally? Are we able to say, each one of us, we come before Him with this openness of heart?

Pray for each of us to have a heart open and yearning for Abba.