

**SHABBAT SERMON**  
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*A KISS to Susan Boyle ... and Israel*

This morning I want to speak to you about a man that I consider one of the unluckiest people in the entire Bible. His story comes from the second Book of Kings, and is told in the Haftorah of one of today's two Torah portions. He was a man who had everything to live for but was one of the unluckiest men to be found in the Bible. His name was Naaman.

We are introduced to Naaman with these glowing words: "Naaman was a captain of the army of the King of Aram. He was a great man before his master. He was held in high esteem because through him the Lord had brought victory to Aram. He was a mighty man of valor." Sounds good ... sounds great! But then the Bible goes and spoils it all by adding one word to his description: "*metzora*" ... he was a leper! Now you might think that that's what I had in mind in describing him as being one of the unluckiest people in all the Bible, but no! In a sense, his having leprosy was pretty *mazeldik*. It's because he had leprosy that his story was chosen to be used as the Haftorah for one of today's Torah readings; a Torah reading that focused on the laws of leprosy. So, it was leprosy that caused us to pay attention to his story, to read his story as a Haftorah. But here is where his luck ran out. We hardly ever read his story. You see, his Haftorah is the one for Tazria – the first of our two Torah portions. And most years, like this year, Tazria is read together with the next Torah portion, Metzora. And in our tradition, when two Torah portions are read together, we read the Haftorah from the second Torah portion, not the first. And even in those years when Tazria is read by itself, invariably it ends up on a Shabbat that is either Parshat Hachodesh or, like today, Rosh Chodesh when a special Haftorah is read. The fact of the matter is, Naaman's story gets read maybe once in 20 years. The man made it all the way to the Broadway stage, but the curtain never goes up on him. Talk about not having mazel!

And yet, today I want to talk about Naaman because I think the lesson of his story is one that speaks to our country this year; and that speaks to our people this weekend. And besides that, it goes a long way in explaining the explosive rise to fame of Susan Boyle.

Naaman was not a Jew, but when nothing helps cure his leprosy he takes the advice of a poor slave girl who says: "You've tried everything else, all the other doctors ... why don't you try going to the Jewish prophet Elisha? Maybe he can cure you." In desperation, Naaman packs his bags and travels all the way from Aram to Israel seeking this miracle cure.

Elisha hears what Naaman has to say and gives him a prescription. He prescribes water. He tells Naaman to bathe for seven days in the waters of the Jordan, and he will be cured. Naaman gets angry; he feels he is being made a fool of. He traveled all the way from Aram with this terrible disease and he is being told to try water? He feels like you would feel when you are

in terrible pain with a seemingly incurable disease, and the doctor tells you to take two aspirin and call him in the morning.

Naaman is ready to go home, but his servant says to him: “If the prophet had asked you to do some difficult thing, wouldn’t you have done it? He has asked you to do something simple, why don’t you at least try it?” And try it he does ... and cured he is!

There is a little of Naaman in all of us who think the more expensive an item, the bigger the sacrifice, the more complex the solution ... the greater the reward, the greater the chance of success. The trouble with Naaman ... the trouble with all of us ... is that we are not familiar with Occam’s Razor.

William of Occam lived in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. He was a brilliant man, educated at Oxford; he might have been too smart for his own good, because eventually he was excommunicated from the Church. But Occam left behind a theory known as Occam’s Razor, which has had an affect on science, religion, medicine, statistics, biology, and philosophy to this very day. The theory of Occam’s Razor is that when confronted with a choice, the simplest answer is usually the best answer. Leonardo DiVinci put it in these words: “Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.” Albert Einstein put it in these words: “Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.” Isaac Newton put it in these words: “We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearances.” Occam’s theses is put into these Latin words: “Entia non sunt multiplicanva praeter necessitatem” or “entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity.” But we moderns have put it in even clearer terms, indeed into just one word ... the word: KISS ... “keep it simple, stupid.”

Naaman came to understand this. And I believe it helps us understand the success of Susan Boyle. Susan Boyle has taken the world by storm. Two weeks ago Susan Boyle was what the *Los Angeles Times* described as, “just another 47 year old Scottish virgin” who says she’s never been kissed! Then she appeared on a TV show, “Britain’s Got Talent,” – that country’s versions of “American Idol” – and sang an incredible rendition of “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Miserables*. And her world has never been the same. Through the Internet and You Tube and Twitter, her performance spread to the four corners of the earth! I asked our Chazzan if he had seen her, and he said yes ... on Israeli television! She has a magnificent voice, no question. But a lot of people have magnificent voices. What captured the hearts of hundreds of millions of people was that this voice was coming from what has been described as a “frumpy looking, frizzy haired, several double chinned, gawky woman ... a woman with no makeup, no voice lessons, no wardrobe.”

But I’m not convinced that this explains the intensity of her popularity. After all, this story has been told before on the same show just a few years ago. That time it involved a man named Paul Potts ... remember him? He was the one who had teeth that could keep a dentist busy for a lifetime! He was described as being, “tubby” “cripplingly shy,” a cell phone salesman who opened up his mouth and sang “Nessum Dorma” from Puccini’s *Turandot*. That eventually led him to win the competition and sell two million copies of his first album. Susan Boyle’s story is not much different, but I think it struck a responsive chord because it came at the right time. It came at a time when all of us are being required to live by Occam’s theory.

The age of excess has come to a crashing end. The economy is forcing all of us to cut back and keep it simple. In the words of this week's *Time Magazine* cover: "The New Frugality" has arrived! We had become a society obsessed with appearance ... the right face, the right clothes, the right look. We had become a society that looked up to those who had their own corporate jets as being the symbol of success. Now we know that they were flying on empty. We were like Naaman ... we didn't think that something as simple as water was good enough so we paid for Perrier and lattes and designer bags. Now, when we can no longer afford it, we have come to realize that we really didn't need it! Peggy Noonan writes in the *Wall Street Journal* that due to the economy we were trading in affluence for authenticity. In her words, "People will be allowed to grow old again. There will be a certain liberation in this, there will be fewer face-lifts and brow-lifts, less Botox, less dyed hair among both men and women. They will look more like people used to look before perfection came in. Middle-age bodies will be thicker and softer, with more maternal and paternal give. There will be fewer gyms and fewer trainers, but more walking."

If you think about it, Susan Boyle is the poster child for our age. When asked if she intended to have an "extreme makeover" she replied: "Why should I?" Susan Boyle, the 47 year old who says she has never been kissed, certainly reminds us of the importance of a KISS ... "keep it simple, stupid."

And I think this message is important for all of us as Jews to remember on this weekend. This week we celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut – the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the re-establishment of the state of Israel. Someone said to me that here it is, Israel is 61 years old and it is not any closer to being accepted than it was at the time of its birth. And sadly, there is so much truth to that statement. Israel is the only country in this world whose right to exist is always questioned ... whose right to exist is not recognized by so many of its neighbors. India and Pakistan were established at the same time that Israel was. India and Pakistan don't like each other; they've had wars with each other, they have each built a nuclear arsenal in case some day they decide to destroy each other. But they recognize each other's right to exist! Somalia was established in 1960; it is a totally failed state ... the only thing it seems to be able to produce is pirates. Over a million people have died in civil wars in Somalia but nobody says it doesn't have a right to exist. The Republic of the Congo was established in 1960; so far nearly six million people have died in that country ... a country that is totally torn apart. But you don't hear anyone question its right to exist. Only Israel is asked to negotiate with its neighbors so that they will recognize its right to exist. And everybody's got all sorts of ideas of what Israel has to do: "You've got to sit down and negotiate," "You've got to stop the settlements," "You've got to pull back the borders," "You've got to give up the land," "You've got to accept their right of return," ... then they'll be satisfied ... then they will make peace. Well, you know what? We've tried all that! We exited from Lebanon, we exited from Gaza, we offered to return the Golan Heights and 97% of the West Bank ... and in response to all that, last week after being in hiding since the war in Gaza, Hamas' leader, Mahmoud al-Zahar said, "We can not, we will not and we will never recognize the enemy in any way, shape or form." You've got to give Hamas credit – they understand Accum's Razor – they keep it simple! And we have to do the same. We have to stop analyzing and hypothesizing and strategizing in trying to understand why millions of Arabs refuse to

recognize Israel. It's simple ... they hate our guts! They really don't want to accept that we exist. They hate everything Israel stands for and it's as simple as that!

But is that reason to despair? I don't think so. My questioner, in saying that after 61 years Israel is no closer to peace than it was at its birth, is wrong! Israel is 61 years closer to peace than it was at birth. At birth, Israel suffered the loss of six thousand Israelis in its war of liberation. Now it is the Arabs who, in war, suffer losses by the thousands. It's as simple as that! Someday they'll learn and we've got to stand with Israel until the Arabs do! It's as simple as that! God kept it simple ... the Arab lands he gave oil ... to the Jews, just a land of milk and honey. But Israel has turned green, while the Arab countries are green with envy.

And so, on this weekend ... a KISS ... a KISS to Susan Boyle, a KISS to Accam for teaching us the deeper essence of the word, and a KISS to the people of Israel as they celebrate the greatest miracle in modern Jewish history – the 61<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Israel's re-birth. May our commitment to that land and people ever be sealed with a kiss. Amen.

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