

Understanding Elijah's Seat at the Seder

INSIGHTS FROM SHABBAT HAGADOL'S HAFTARAH

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SHEMOT 12:42

לֵיל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא לַיהוָה לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה
 לַיהוָה שְׁמֵרִים לְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדֹרֹתָם: {פ}

That was for יהוה a night of vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is יהוה's, one of vigil for all the children of Israel throughout the ages.

SHEMOT RABBAH 18:12

What did He see that led Him to call it a night of vigil [shimurim]? It is a night during which He performs great deeds for the righteous, just as He performed [great deeds] for Israel in Egypt. On that [night] He rescued Hezekiah, and on it He rescued Ḥananya and his counterparts, and on it He rescued Daniel from the lions' den, and on it Messiah and Elijah the prophet will be exalted... The Holy One blessed be He said: 'This sign will be for you: On the day that I performed salvation for you, know that on that same night I will redeem you....'

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MINHAG

Rabbi Nissim Gaon

10th century

“I saw that ...my father would not close the doors of our house..at all. And until now this is our custom, and on [the night of Passover] the doors of the house are open. When Elijah comes, we will go out to greet him quickly without delay”

Rabbi Zelikman Binga

15th century

“I have seen some people on the night of Passover who pour a special cup and place it on the table, saying this is the cup for Elijah the prophet - and I don't know the reason. But it seems that the reason derives from this: If Elijah the prophet comes on the night of Passover, as we hope and expect, he too will need a cup, for even a poor person among Israel must drink no less than four cups. And if the cup is not ready, we would have to prepare it for him, which might delay the Seder.”

Rabbi Hayyim Beneviste

17th century

“It seems this is the custom I saw among a few Ashkenazim: to leave on the table one empty cup...in which to pour all the wine leftover from cups... [after they have drunk at least the required minimum from their cups]. This cup is called the Cup of Elijah the prophet...this custom pleased me”

1) Why did this custom develop?

ELIJAH IN THE BOOK OF MELACHIM

PROPHET OF FIRE



1 King 17

I Kings 18

I Kings 19

II Kings 1

2 Kings 2

Elijah proclaims a drought

Elijah faces off against the prophets of Ba'al at Har Carmel, then kills the 250 prophets

Elijah demands God remove him from his position since the nation because of his zealousness

The king sends messengers to find Elijah, Elijah kills the first two groups of officers

Elijah goes up to the heavens in a fiery chariot

- 1) Why did this custom develop?
- 2) Elijah seems like a strange “fit” for this job, based on his character in the book of Kings...Why is his midrashic identity so different?

CONCLUSION TO THE HAFTARAH- MALACHI 3

הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לְכֶם אֶת אֱלִיָּה הַנָּבִיא לְפָנַי בְּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל
וְהַנּוֹרָא:

23 Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of GOD.

וְהִשְׁיִב לֵב-אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְלֵב בָּנִים עַל-אָבוֹתָם פֶּן-אָבֹא וְהִכִּיתִי
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ חָרָם:

24 He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction.

- 1) Why did this custom develop?
- 2) Elijah seems like a strange “fit” for this job, based on his character in the book of Kings...Why is his midrashic identity so different?
- 3) Why is Malachi invoking Elijah?

	ASSYRIA		BABYLON		PERSIA	
	Jonah	Nahum				
	Obadiah (to Edom)					
ISRAEL	Amos Hosea					
	900	800	700	600	500	400
JUDAH	Joel	Micah •Isaiah	Zephania Habakkuk •Jeremiah	•Daniel •Ezekiel	Haggai Zechariah	Malachi

All dates B.C.E. The Jewish nation divided in 931, creating Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Israel fell to the Assyrians in 721, and Judah to the Babylonians in 586. The Persian King Cyrus allowed the Jews to reposses Judah in 536.

ד וְעֲרָבָה, לַיהוָה, מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה, וִירוּשָׁלַם--כִּימֵי עוֹלָם, וְכִשְׁנַיִם קִדְמֹנִית. ה וְקִרְבְּתִי אֵלֵיכֶם, לַמִּשְׁפָּט, וְהָיִיתִי עִד מְמַהֵר בְּמִכְשָׁפִים
 וּבְמִנְאָפִים, וּבְנִשְׁבָּעִים לְשֹׁקֵר; וּבְעֹשְׂקֵי שְׂכָר-שְׂכִיר אֲלֻמָּנָה וְיִתּוֹם וּמִטִּי-גֵר, וְלֹא יִרְאוּנִי--אָמַר, יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. ו כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה, לֹא שָׁנִיתִי; וְאַתֶּם
 בְּנֵי-יַעֲקֹב, לֹא כִלִּיתֶם. ז לְמִימֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם סִרְתֶּם מִחֻקֵּי, וְלֹא שָׁמַרְתֶּם--**שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי וְאֲשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם**, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת; וְאַמַּרְתֶּם, **בְּמָה**
נִשְׁוֵב. ח הִיקָבַע אָדָם אֱלֹהִים, כִּי אַתֶּם קִבְּעִים אֹתִי, וְאַמַּרְתֶּם, בְּמָה קִבְּעֵנוּךְ: הַמַּעֲשֵׂר, וְהַתְּרוּמָה. ט בַּמֶּאֲרָה אַתֶּם נֹאֲרִים, וְאֹתִי אַתֶּם
 קִבְּעִים--הַגּוֹי, כָּלוּ. י הֵבִיאוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל-בֵּית הָאוֹצָר, וְיִהְיֶה טָרֶף בְּבֵיתִי, וּבְחֻנּוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: אִם-לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם,
 אֵת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְהִרִיקוֹתִי לָכֶם בְּרָכָה, עַד-בְּלִי-דִי. יא וְגַעַרְתִּי לָכֶם בְּאֵכֶל, וְלֹא-יִשְׁחַת לָכֶם אֶת-פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה; וְלֹא-תִשְׁכַּל לָכֶם הַגֶּפֶן
 בַּשָּׂדֶה, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. יב וְאַשְׁרוּ אֶתְכֶם, כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם: כִּי-תִהְיוּ אַתֶּם אֶרֶץ חֶפְץ, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. {פ}

Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to GOD as in the days of yore and in the years of old. But [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan, and stranger, said GOD of Hosts. For I am GOD —I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be. From the very days of your ancestors you have turned away from My laws and have not observed them. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said GOD of Hosts. But you ask, “How shall we turn back?” Ought mortals to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, “How have we been defrauding You?” In tithe and contribution. You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me—the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said GOD of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you; and I will banish the locusts from you, so that they will not destroy the yield of your soil; and your vines in the field shall no longer miscarry—said GOD of Hosts. And all the nations shall account you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands—said GOD of Hosts.

יג חֲזַקוּ עָלַי דְּבָרֵיכֶם, אָמַר יְהוָה; וְאִמַּרְתֶּם, מִה-נִדְבַרְנוּ עֲלֵיךְ. יד אִמַּרְתֶּם, שׁוֹא עֲבַד אֱלֹהִים; וּמִה-בִּצַע, כִּי שָׁמַרְנוּ מִשְׁמֶרֶתוֹ, וְכִי הִלְכְנוּ קְדֻרָנִית, מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. טו וְעַתָּה, אֲנַחְנוּ מֵאֲשֵׁרִים זָדִים; גַּם-נִבְנוּ עֲשֵׂי רָשָׁעָה, גַּם בָּחֲנוּ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּמְלִטוּ. טז אַז נִדְבַרוּ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה, אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ; וַיִּקְשַׁב יְהוָה, וַיִּשְׁמַע, וַיִּכְתֹּב סֵפֶר זְכוֹרֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְהוָה, וּלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ. יז וְהָיוּ לִי, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, לַיּוֹם, אֲשֶׁר אָנִי עֹשֶׂה סִגְלָה; וְחִמַּלְתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם--כַּאֲשֶׁר יַחְמֵל אִישׁ, עַל-בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֹתוֹ. יח וְשַׁבְתֶּם, וּרְאִיתֶם, בֵּין צְדִיק, לְרָשָׁע--בֵּין עֶבֶד אֱלֹהִים, לְאֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבָדוֹ. {פ} יט כִּי-הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בָּא, בְּעֵר כְּתָנוּר; וְהָיוּ כָל-זָדִים וְכָל-עֹשֵׂה רָשָׁעָה, קָשׁ, וְלֹהֵט אֹתָם הַיּוֹם הַבֹּא אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲזֹב לָהֶם שָׁרֵשׁ וְעֵנָף. כ וְזָרְחָה לָכֶם יִרְאֵי שְׁמִי, שְׁמֵשׁ צְדָקָה, וּמִרְפָּא, בְּכִנְפֵיהֶ; וַיִּצְאֹתֶם וּפְשָׁתֶם, כְּעֶגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק. כא וְעִסוֹתֶם רְשָׁעִים--כִּי-יְהִיוּ אֶפְרַיִם, תַּחַת כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֵיכֶם: בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָנִי עֹשֶׂה, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת. {פ}

You have spoken hard words against Me—said GOD. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?” You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping God’s charge and walking in abject awe of GOD of Hosts? And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.” In this vein have those who revere GOD been talking to one another. GOD has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at God’s behest concerning those who revere GOD and esteem the holy name. And on the day that I am preparing, said GOD of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession; I will be tender toward them as a man is tender toward a son who ministers to him. And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who have served God and those who have not. For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers of evil shall be straw, and the day that is coming—said GOD of Hosts—shall burn them to ashes and leave of them neither stock nor boughs. But for you who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing. You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves, and you shall trample the wicked to a pulp, for they shall be dust beneath your feet on the day that I am preparing—said GOD of Hosts.

כב זְכוֹרוּ, תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי, אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּחֹרֵב עַל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל, חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים. כַּג הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ
 לָכֶם, אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא--לְפָנַי, בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה, הַגָּדוֹל, וְהַנּוֹרָא. כַּד וְהִשִּׁיב לֵב-אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים, וְלֵב בָּנִים
 עַל-אָבוֹתָם--פֶּן-אָבּוֹא, וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ חָרָם. {ש}

Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel.

Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of GOD.

He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction.

- 1) Why did this custom develop?
- 2) Elijah seems like a strange “fit” for this job, based on his character in the book of Kings...Why is his midrashic identity so different?
- 3) Why is Malachi invoking Elijah?
- 4) How is this a suitable haftarah for pre-Passover???

תנ"ך

כתובים

ECCLESIASTES קהלת	PSALMS תהלים
ESTHER אסתר	PROVERBS משלי
DANIEL דניאל	JOB איוב
EZRA עזרא	SONG OF SONGS שיר השירים
NEHEMIAH נחמיה	RUTH רות
CHRONICLES דברי הימים	LAMENTATIONS איכה

נביאים

MICHA מיכה	EZEKIEL יחזקאל
NAHUM נחום	HOSEA הושע
HABAKUK חבקוק	JOEL יואל
ZEPHANIAH צפניה	AMOS עמוס
HAGGAI חגי	OVADIAH עבדיה
ZACHARIAH זכריה	JONAH יונה
MALACHAI מלאכי	

תורה

GENESIS בראשית
EXODUS שמות
LEVITICUS ויקרא
NUMBERS במדבר
DEUTERONOMY דברים

ELIJAH AT MOUNT CARMEL | KINGS CHAPTER 18

וַיִּגַשׁ אֵלֵיהֶם אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר עַד-מַתִּי אַתֶּם פּוֹסְחִים עַל-נַשְׁתֵּי
הַסְּעָפִים אִם-יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים לְכֹן אַחֲרָיו וְאִם-הַבַּעַל לְכֹן אַחֲרָיו
וְלֹא-עָנָו הָעָם אֹתוֹ דָּבָר:

21 Elijah approached all the people and said, “How long will you keep **hopping** between two opinions? If the ETERNAL is God, then follow [the ETERNAL]; and if Baal, follow [Baal]!” But the people answered him not a word.

ELIJAH AT MOUNT CARMEL | KINGS CHAPTER 18

וַתִּפֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל אֶת־הָעֵלָה וְאֶת־הָעֵצִים וְאֶת־הָאֲבָנִים
וְאֶת־הָעֶפֶר וְאֶת־הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר־בַּתְּעֵלָה לַחֲכָה:

38 Then fire from GOD descended and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth; and it licked up the water that was in the trench.

וַיֵּרְאוּ כָּל־הָעָם וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה הוּא
הָאֱלֹהִים:

39 When they saw this, all the people flung themselves on their faces and cried out: “the ETERNAL One alone is God, the ETERNAL One alone is God!”

SUGGESTED READING

Becoming Elijah: Prophet of Transformation

Daniel C. Matt

The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot

Michael Fishbane

Chag Sameach!

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