

Elijah is Coming

By Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas
(Temple of Aaron, St. Paul, Minn.)

Soon we will all be gathered at our Seder tables to celebrate the great Passover holiday. As part of the ritual, when it comes to the fourth cup of wine, we will place an additional cup in the center of the table and fill it for Elijah the Prophet. At that point we will open the door and our legendary guest, Elijah, will take a sip and then leave to go to the next Seder. The question that often occurs to us is why of all the characters in the length and breadth of Jewish history is it only Elijah for whom we pour a cup of wine and set a place at our Seder table.

The explanation is fascinating. Elijah is

known as the 11shbite and he was active in the 9th century before the regular calendar in the political, social and moral climate of Israel. The following are some interesting experiences that are recorded in the Bible.

The first is that he gathered all of Israel upon Mount Carmel and he challenged them in a confrontation. The worship of the idol Baal began to grow in Israel and this disturbed Elijah greatly for it implied abandoning the traditional Jewish belief in God and turning to idolatry. So Elijah placed 850 priests of Baal on one side of the mountain and he stood on the other side of the mountain. Then he turned to the people and he said: "How long will you keep hopping between two opinions? Choose between God and the idols" (I Kings 18:21). Then the people shouted as one: "The Lord, He Alone is God!" (I Kings 18:39). It is this very phrase that we repeat seven times at the conclusion of the great Yom Kippur Service. What this really emphasizes is the Jewish belief in monotheism. So Elijah symbolizes the concept of the unity of God.

Another episode with reference to Elijah is very revealing about the nature of Jewish thinking about God. Elijah sits alone in a cave and he yearns for communication with God as he prays for His presence. "And the voice of God came to him saying, 'Stand in front of the cave.' Suddenly a great and strong wind came rending mountains and shattering rocks before him, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice and God was in the quiet" (I Kings 19:11, 12).

Here we learn from Elijah that the presence of God does not come to us through violence or fire or even shattering moments but rather in quietness, in calmness and in thoughtfulness.

But the real reason Elijah is invited to the Seder is that there are mystic associations with him. This originates in a passage of the Bible in the Second Book of Kings. Elijah is walking with his disciple Elisha. They sense that soon Elijah is going to pass from this earth. As they are walking and talking, suddenly there appears a chariot of fire and horses of fire. Elijah steps into the fiery chariot and suddenly disappears from view and ascends to heaven.

This episode left a deep impression on Jewish history. Hence, he became associated with mysticism and with legend. As time develops, Elijah becomes the forerunner of the Messiah. Before the Messiah will actually come, Elijah will appear and he will announce the time and the place of the Messiah's appearance.

Then in the Talmud Elijah becomes a defender of the Jewish people when they are in trouble. He is concerned with Israel's safety and appears when they are in dire distress. Moreover, there are many legends both written and oral about Elijah being the defender of the

poor, the wretched and the unfortunate. He is always concerned that people not be hurt.

In fact, there is one legend about Elijah that is really very contemporary. Elijah is walking across a crowded street with a certain rabbi. The rabbi asks, "Who among these people are destined to go to heaven?" The rabbi thought it surely would be a pious person, a scholar or someone like that. Suddenly Elijah points to two clowns and he said, "They are destined for an eternal reward." The rabbi is very puzzled and asks, "Why is that?" And Elijah answers, "For when people are sad, they cheer them up; when they are depressed, they make them feel good; and when they are anxious, they relax them."

Now we begin to understand why Elijah is such a welcome guest to the Seder table. Passover is the first festival of our people and it contains the great miracle of the exodus. Elijah himself is a miraculous person. Since Elijah will announce the Messiah, since Elijah is the symbol of the belief of a One God, since Elijah is filled with compassion for the unfortunate, it is appropriate that he appears at our Seder table. He stands for the many values of Judaism which include faith and hope and charity.

JERUSALEM -- A research team in the Department of Social Medicine of the Hadassah Hebrew University Medical Center is conducting studies on nutritional and socio-cultural factors in infant retardation at its Family and Community Health Center in Kiryat Hayovel.

Passover Greetings



MR. AND MRS.
JOE DELANEY AND FAMILY

BEST WISHES FOR THE



HOLIDAY SEASON

GUS GUIFFRE AND FAMILY



A Happy Passover



MR. AND MRS. FORREST DUKE

A Happy Passover



CHARLES AND PEGGY TURNER

Best Wishes for a Joyous Passover

To The Jewish Community



MICKEY WICHINSKY
AND FAMILY

A Happy Passover



Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Joseph
and Family



HENNY

"THE BIGGEST, BEST, NICEST,
HEALTHIEST, MOST PROSPEROUS
PASSOVER TO EVERYONE."

HENNY & SADIE YOUNGMAN