

”אֱלֹהֵינוּ זֶה פְּנֹחֵס”

Religious Zealotry: Good, Bad or Ugly?

*Zealotry: def: fanatical and uncompromising pursuit of religious, political, or other ideals; fanatical devotion*

1. מלכים א פרק יט

**Kings Chapter 19**

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying: 'So let the gods do [to me], and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.' 3 And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.....9 And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said unto him: 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' 10 And he said: '**I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts;** for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.' 11 And He said: 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.' And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. 13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said: 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' 14 **And he said: 'I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of**

א ויגד אחאב לאיזבל, את כל-אשר עשה אליהו, ואת כל-אשר הרג את-כל-הנביאים, בְּחֶרֶב. ב ותשלח איזבל מלאכה, אל-אליהו לאמר: כה-יעשו אלהים, וכה יוספון, כי-קצעת מחר אשים את-נפשך, כנפש אחד מהם. ג וירא, ויקם וילך אל-נפשו, ויבא, באר שבע אשר ליהודה; וינח את-נערו, שם. ....ט ויבא-שם אל-המערה, וילך שם; והנה דבר-יהוה, אליו, ויאמר לו, מה-לך פה אליהו. י ויאמר קנא קנאתי לה' אלהי צבאות, כי-עזבו בריתך בני ישראל--את-מזבחתך הרסו, ואת-נביאיך הרגו בחרב; ואותר אני לבדי, ויבקשו את-נפשי לקחתה. יא ויאמר, צא ועמדת בהר לפני יהוה, והנה יהוה עבר ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשב סלעים לפני יהוה, לא ברוח יהוה; ואחר הרוח רעש, לא ברעש יהוה. יב ואחר הרעש אש, לא באש יהוה; ואחר האש, קול דממה דקה. יג ויהי כשמע אליהו, וילט פניו באדרתו, ויצא, ויעמד פתח המערה; והנה אליו, קול, ויאמר, מה-לך פה אליהו. יד ויאמר קנא קנאתי לה' אלהי צבאות, כי-עזבו בריתך בני ישראל--את-מזבחתך הרסו, ואת-נביאיך הרגו בחרב; ואותר אני לבדי, ויבקשו את-נפשי לקחתה.

**hosts;** for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away

2. במדבר כה:א-טז

**Numbers 25:1-16**

**1** And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab. **2** And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods; and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. **3** And Israel joined himself unto the Baal of Peor; and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. **4** And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them up unto the LORD in face of the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.' **5** And Moses said unto the judges of Israel: 'Slay ye every one his men that have joined themselves unto the Baal of Peor.' **6** And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the tent of meeting. **7** And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand. **8** And he went after the man of Israel into the chamber, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. **9** And those that died by the plague were twenty and four thousand. **10** And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: **11** **'Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy.** **12**

א וישב ישראל, בשטים; ויחל העם, לזנות אל-בנות מואב. ב ותקראנן לעם, לזבחי אלהיהן; ויאכל העם, וישתחוו לאלהיהן. ג ויצמד ישראל, לבעל פעור; ויחר-אף יהוה, בישראל. ד ויאמר יהוה אל-משה, קח את-פל-ראשי העם, והוקע אותם לה', נגד השמש; וישב חרון אף-יהוה, מישראל. ה ויאמר משה, אל-שפטי ישראל: הרגו איש אנשיו, הנצמדים לבעל פעור. ו והנה איש מבני ישראל בא, ויקרב אל-אחיו את-המדוניית, לעיני משה, ולעיני כל-עדת בני-ישראל; והמה בכים, פתח אהל מועד. ז וירא, פינחס בן-אלעזר, בן-אהרן, הכהן; ויקם מתוך העדה, ויקח רמח בידו. ח ויבא אחר איש-ישראל אל-הקבה, וידקר את-שניהם--את איש ישראל, ואת-האשה אל-קבתה; ותעצר, המגפה, מעל בני ישראל. ט ויהיו, המתים במגפה--ארבעה ועשרים, אלה. {פ}

י וינדבר יהוה, אל-משה לאמר. יא פינחס בן-אלעזר בן-אהרן הכהן, השיב את-חמתי מעל בני-ישראל, בקנאו את-קנאתי, בתוכם; ולא-כליתי את-בני-ישראל, בקנאתי. יב לכן, אומר: הנני נתן לך את-בריתי, שלום. יג והיתה לו וליזרעו אחריו, ברית קהנת עולם--תחת, אשר קנא לאלהיו, וכפר, על-בני ישראל. יד ושם איש ישראל המכה, אשר הכה את-המדוניית--זמרי, בן-סלוא: נשיא בית-אב, לשמעוני. טו ושם האשה המכה המדוניית, כזבי בת-צור: ראש אמות בית-אב במדין, הוא. טז וינדבר יהוה, אל-משה לאמר

Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace; **13** and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.' **14** Now the name of the man of Israel that was slain, who was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a fathers' house among the Simeonites. **15** And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head of the people of a fathers' house in Midian. **16** And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

### 3. ספורנו - את בריתי שלום.

ממלאך המות... שהאריה ימים הרבה מאד מכל שאר אנשי דורו, עד שהיה הוא משמש במשכן שילה בזמן פלגש בגבעה, שהיה בלי ספק אחרי מות יהושע ושאר "הזקנים אשר האריכו ימים אחרי יהושע" (שופטים ב, ז)... וכל שכן לדברי האומר אליהו זה פנחס, והוא עדין חי וקיים.

#### Seforno

From the angel of death... that I will lengthen his days by more than any man of his generation....

- *Is God happy with the actions Pinchas has taken? Why?*

### 4. במדבר יא-כט

וינץ הנער ויגד למשה ויאמר אלעד ומידד מתנבאים במחנה: ויען יהושע בן-נון משרת משה מבחריו ויאמר אדני משה כלאים: ויאמר לו משה המקנא אתה לי ומי יתן כל-עם יהנה נביאים כיי-יתן יהנה את-רוחו עליהם:

#### Numbers 11:29

A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!" And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!" But Moses said to him, "Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD put His spirit upon them!"

- *Why is Moshe unhappy with Yehoshua's zealotry?*

## The Connection between Eliyahu and Pinchas

### 5. Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 47 (midrash)

ר' אליעזר אומ' קרא שמו של פנחס בשמו אליהו אליהו מתושבי הגלעד שעשת תשובה ישראל בהר גלעד

## 6. Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz - "Zealotry, Good and Bad"

In declaring that Pinhas is Eliyahu HaNavi, the sages of Israel teach us about the essence of zealotry. Zealotry for God is a good thing but it must lead to a positive and constructive goal. The zealotry of Pinhas is blessed because he is given a "covenant of peace"... Only zealotry such as this can be blessed. While zealotry too often leads to destructive ends, Shmuel Avidor HaCohen reminds us that such consequences are not preordained. "Healthy" zealotry can and must lead to positive ends. Pinehas, who demonstrates both justice and violence, must learn to balance his behavior with a divine dose of peace. God does not reward Pinehas arbitrarily. His reward is the antidote to his earlier behavior, and the hope is that he will learn from his past.

## 7. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

"Yet their treatment in both the written and oral Torah is deeply ambivalent. God gives Pinhas "my covenant of peace," meaning that he will never again have to act the part of a zealot. Indeed, in Judaism, the shedding of human blood is incompatible with service at the Sanctuary (King David was forbidden to build the Temple for this reason: see I Chronicles 22:8, 28:3). As for Elijah, he was implicitly rebuked by God in one of the great scenes of the Bible. Standing at Horeb, God shows him a whirlwind, an earthquake and a fire, but God is not in any of these. Then He comes to Elijah in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19). He then asks Elijah, for the second time, "What are you doing here?" and Elijah replies in exactly the same words as he had used before: "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty." He has not understood that God has been trying to tell him that He is not to be found in violent confrontation, but in gentleness and the word softly spoken. God then tells him to appoint Elisha as his successor."

## **The Return of Eliyahu in Jewish Life: Teaching Us or Teaching Eliyahu?**

### 8. מלאכי ג

(כג) הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לְכֶם אֶת אֱלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא לִפְנֵי בֹא יוֹם ה' הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא: (כד) וְהָשִׁיב לְבָ-אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְלֵב בָּנִים עַל-אָבוֹתָם פְּדֹאֲבוֹא וְהִפִּיתִי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ חֲרָם:

### **Malachi 3:23**

23 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 24 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers; lest I come and smite the land with utter destruction.

### **מצודת ציון**

והשיב – מלשון תשובה.  
על בנים – ר"ל על ידי בנים, או על הוא כמו עם.

### **רד"ק**

הנה אנכי שולח לכם – אע"פ שאני מזהירכם על תורת משה בכל דור ודור, אעפ"כ לטובתכם אשלח לכם את אליהו הנביא... והוא יזהיר האבות והבנים יחדיו לשוב בכל לב אל השם, והשבים ינצלו (will be saved) מיום המשפט...

## 9. Pinchas and Eliyahu - Rabbi Alex Israel.

“Pinchas entered the national stage in a frenzy of mixed Israelite-Midyanite relationships, unions that lead directly to worship of foreign gods (see Bamidbar 25:1-9). His decisive, if violent, action stopped God's plagues and saved Israel. Pinchas killed an Israelite prince who was consorting with a Midyanite woman, and this zealotry is praised emphatically by God.

Back to the other "zealot," Eliyahu. Sefer Melakhi talks about Eliyahu's appearance in future times - (מלאכי ג:כג):

What is Eliyahu's role in preparing Israel for that day, a day that is depicted in harsh terms, "burning as an oven; ... all the wicked will burn like straw"? One of the problems depicted in Sefer Malachi, labelled as a "violation of the covenant of our forefathers" (2:11), is this:

Yehuda has broken faith; abhorrent things have been done in Israel and Jerusalem. For Yehuda has profaned that which is holy to the Lord – he has married the daughter of foreign gods. (Malakhi 2:11)

The abrogation of the covenant, the "betrayal of Yehuda," is the marriage to non-Jewish women who follow alien gods. What is Eliyahu to do about this? What will he do to prepare for God's awesome day? He shall reconcile fathers with their sons and sons with their fathers. (3:24) In other words, the children who were born to mixed marriages, in which the children have been raised in the tradition of the pagan mothers, shall be restored to their fathers, who will teach them to follow God (See Rambam's Laws of Kings 12:2, where he discusses Eliyahu's role in establishing the correct lineage of children born to mixed marriages. I heard this explanation from R. Yaakov Medan)!

What was Eliyahu seeking from Achav? What was he hoping for? He was looking to detach Achav from Izevel. He was hoping to separate this king who had "married the daughter of alien gods" from his idolatrous wife. That is Pinchas and Eliyahu's legacy. Eliyahu led Achav all the way to Yizrael in the hope that Achav would take the next logical step and distance (or possibly kill) Izevel! But that didn't happen. Eliyahu's failure in his mission of obstructing Izevel's hold on her husband, meant that the infrastructure of the Baal was still in place, the government had not changed, and now the spectacle of Mt. Carmel was likely to be a fleeting episode. The change was insubstantial. It was this which caused Eliyahu's sense of frustration and despair.

### Why is Eliyahu Chosen for this Task?

#### 10. שפוך חמתך

שִׁפְךָ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּךָ וְעַל מַמְלָכוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קָרְאוּ. כִּי אָכַל אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת-גְּוֵהוּ הִשְׁמִי.

שִׁפְךָ-עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַמְּךָ וְחַרְוֹן אִפְּךָ יִשְׁיגְם. תִּרְדֹּף בְּאֵף וְתִשְׁמַדִּם מִתַּחַת שָׁמַי ה'.

Pour your wrath upon the nations that did not know You and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon Your Name! Since they have consumed Ya'akov and laid waste his habitation. Pour out Your fury upon them and the fierceness of Your anger shall reach them! You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of the Lord.

## שו"ת שתי הלחם סימן מו

על הכנת הכוס לאלוהו זכרו לטוב ... שהוא אליהו מלאך הברית... והפה שאסור לדבר על ישראל שהפרו את הברית הוא הפה שמאשר ומעיד על ישראל ונעשה עצמו סניגור בהיותו עד הרואה שישראל מקיימין את הברית.

### 11. Shut Shtei HaLechem

Regarding preparing a cup for אליהו of blessed memory: for he is the “angel of the covenant,” and the **mouth that was forbidden to speak about the Jews who broke the covenant will now be the mouth who praises and testifies about Israel, and becomes their defender, when he witnesses Israel keeping the ברית**

- *Why do you think Eliyahu is called the “angel of the covenant?”*

### 12. Professor Neil Gillman

“Some Jews prefer to view God as gentle and compassionate and find this prayer inappropriate. Other Jews who have personally experienced the hostility of other nations find no difficulty reciting it.

But if we put these words into their ritual context in the Seder itself, they acquire a different tone. It is customary for us to stand as these verses are recited, open the front door of our home, and pour a cup of wine to welcome אליהו into our homes. What does this complex ritual signify? First, following a verse in the book of the prophet (מלאכי ג:כג) Elijah’s role in the Jewish tradition is to herald the coming of משיח. More generally, אליהו is the personalization of redemption because he never really died. According to 2 Kings 2:11, אליהו was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot. He is the ultimate liminal personality who has mastered the threshold between life and death. As such, he returns to earth at various liminal (transitional) moments, at every circumcision ritual, for example, at הדבלה at the end of שבת, and at this climax of the פסח seder. **אליהו’s “appearance” in our homes at this moment celebrates our achievement of redemption. But we understand, at the same time, that redemption is not complete, the world is not yet redeemed. We remind ourselves of that unfinished work by opening our doors and looking out into the world at large.**

Part of that unfinished work is the hostility of the nations toward the people of Israel. It is on these nations that we ask God to “Pour out Your wrath”, not indiscriminately, but on those nations that have opposed Israel’s redemptive vision of a just and charitable world”

- *According to these sources, why is Eliyahu chosen for his role?*
- *Is it to teach Bnei Yisrael a lesson or to teach Eliyahu a lesson?*

**Eliyahu: A Mix of אש מן השמים and קול דממה דקה**

### 13. Rabbi Aryeh Klapper

“The last verses of Malachi, however, seem to present a very different view of Eliyahu. “Behold I am sending you Eliyah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord. He will return the hearts of fathers to sons, and the hearts of sons to fathers, lest I come and smite the land utterly”. **Here Eliyahu is presented as a figure of peace, almost an anti-zealot. In midrash, Eliyahu’s post-Biblical career is almost always described in terms compatible with that verse. Eliyahu brings peace and comfort.** [In the Tanach] Eliyahu was deeply offended by the arbitrary nature of mercy. He demands consistency of G-d; “if You require these things, You must enforce them, or our choices are not meaningful and dignified”.

In midrash, however, Eliyahu **becomes the reconciler of opposites**. He is, first of all, the person who lives in Heaven, who is simultaneously an inhabitant of the Upper and Lower worlds. The verse in Malachi tells us that he will reconcile the generations; he also appears at circumcisions, a moment of great generational tension, and immediately after Shabbat, when the borders between sacred and profane blur. Finally, at the seder we open the door to shout out against murderous pagans, but meanwhile Eliyahu comes in, underscoring that to attack requires leaving our fortifications, and thus makes us vulnerable. This is even more true when the battleground is spiritual or intellectual.

Perhaps the midrash understands that only Eliyahu could play this role. When the idealistic among us are counseled to moderate, we – often correctly - suspect that the messengers of moderation have no understanding of idealism. But the world cannot survive strict justice, and so Eliyahu comes to tell us that, while he of all people understands the powerful attraction of consistent idealism, *he has learned that mercy and ambiguity have legitimate roles to play*. May we successfully learn that lesson without in the process forgetting our ideals”

#### **14. Rabbi Elchanan Samet**

“Eliyahu’s criticism of Am Yisrael, the Jewish people, reflects the perspective of a prophet living in a very specific generation. However, the prophet in his lifetime views only a very small portion of the historical reality. ... **Eliyahu testifies to the continuity of the generations of Israel. The chain of the generations is not broken, and Eliyahu himself is responsible for documenting this fact.**”