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The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion

Shiur #99: The Storm Part 7: Eliyahu Lives On (Continued)

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The *Tikkun* of Eliyahu

We conclude this series with an illustration of the idea (set forth explicitly in the aggada) of the *tikkun* (repair) effected through Eliyahu's appearance in later generations,

In Eliyahu's criticism of *Am Yisrael*, the Jewish people, at Mount Chorev – "I have been exceedingly zealous for Lord God of Hosts, for *Benei Yisrael* have forsaken Your covenant... and I alone remain, and they seek my life, to take it" (I *Melakhim* 19:10, 14) – the prophet gives voice to his sense of doom: *Benei Yisrael* (the Israelites) have forsaken God's covenant, and there is no other prophet who can bring them back to the proper path. Even Eliyahu himself is no longer able to do this! The situation is hopeless; it cannot be fixed.

The Midrashic literature reveals the *tikkun* for this pessimism: Eliyahu's continued activity and his frequent appearances on earth after his ascent to heaven. In *Seder Olam Rabba*, Chapter 17, Eliyahu is depicted as follows, after his ascent: "He inscribes the matter of all the generations (*ma'aseh ha-dorot kullam*)."

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. Of course, the source of this concept (of Eliyahu's responsibility for the connection between the generations) is to be found in the prophecy of *Malakhi* (3:23-24) "Behold, I shall send to you Eliyahu the Prophet... He shall restore the hearts of fathers to children, and the hearts of children to their fathers."

Thus, Eliyahu – who formerly accuses *Benei Yisrael* of forsaking the covenant with God, causing a rift in the course of the generations – is responsible for the

healing of this very rift. It is he who connects the generations together and unifies them, with a single heart, to return to God.

Eliyahu's criticism of Israel is given clear expression in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer*, at the end of Chapter 28:

And this is how *Benei Yisrael* would practice circumcision, until they split into two kingdoms, and the rulers of Efrayim (the Northern Kingdom) prevented them from performing *berit mila* (the covenant of circumcision). Eliyahu, of blessed memory, arose and was exceedingly zealous, swearing that the heavens would not drop "dew or rain" upon the earth (I *Melakhim* 17:1)...

The Holy One, Blessed be He, appeared to him and said (ibid, 19:9): "What are you doing here, Eliyahu?"

He answered (ibid, v. 10) "I have been exceedingly zealous..."

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Will you be zealous forever... By your life, *Benei Yisrael* will (henceforth) perform no circumcision without you seeing it with your own eyes."

On this basis, the Sages ruled that a place of honor should be set aside for the "messenger of the covenant (*berit*)," as it is written (*Malakhi* 3:1), "And the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight – behold, he shall come..."

May the God of Israel bring the Messiah speedily in our days to comfort us, and may he renew our hearts, as it is written, "He shall restore the hearts of fathers to children."

A similar theme is echoed in the *Zohar, Lekh Lekha* (Part I, 93a):

Behold – first it is written, "What are you doing here, Eliyahu?" and it is written, "I have been exceedingly zealous... for *Benei Yisrael* have forsaken Your covenant..."

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Eliyahu: "By your life, wherever My children will engrave this holy impression – the covenant of circumcision – upon their flesh, you will be there. And the mouth that testified that Israel had forsaken the covenant will testify in the future that Israel observes this covenant. As we have learned: "Why was Eliyahu punished by God? For having slandered His children."

All that we have said is included in the above words, which are also the source for the customs of having a "chair for Eliyahu" at a circumcision and of addressing Eliyahu as a participant in the ceremony. God rebukes Eliyahu, "Will you remain zealous forever?" – and the *tikkun* of this attribute of the prophet is his future constant appearance at every circumcision. On the one hand, his appearance at each *berit mila* and his personal witnessing of the event is a negation of his accusation (and thus a continuation of God's 'argument' with him). On the other hand, Eliyahu is a guest of honor; he certainly "will recall this merit before God," and this will be a "rectification of his accusation" (quoting the language of Rabbi David Luria, a commentator on *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer*). As the *Zohar* asserts, "The mouth that testified that Israel had forsaken the covenant will testify in the future that Israel observes this covenant." Eliyahu's accusation of "they have forsaken Your *berit*" is interpreted here in relation to *berit mila*, which connects fathers to their sons; therefore, it is Eliyahu who must be present and testify that the covenant is alive and healthy and being maintained from generation to generation. His presence at every circumcision (as well as at every Seder table, where fathers fulfill the commandment to recount the events of the Exodus to their children, *Shemot* 13:8) is in preparation for and anticipation of his great mission of restoring the hearts of fathers to children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Translated by Kaeren Fish