



Carnegie Shul Chatter

November 18, 2020



Elisha the Prophet

Most of the time when discussing the liturgy for a particular Sabbath, it is the Torah portion for the week that we talk about.

But two Saturdays ago, on November 7, we read a haftarah about Elisha, one of the most fascinating of the prophets.

Below is an article from *chabad.org*, detailing the life, deeds and experiences of this incredible prophet.



Giving Thanks

Next week we will be celebrating Thanksgiving and, as has been the case with so many other holidays in this year of the pandemic, most of us will be celebrating it differently than usual, perhaps without most of the loved ones with whom we usually celebrate.

Americans love the Thanksgiving holiday. But as Jews, we offer Thanksgiving every single day in various prayers. My favorite, said every day in the Amidah, is the Modim.

Even in trying times like these, we should always remember the words to this prayer, "We ever thank thee, who art the Lord our God and the God of our fathers. Thou art the strength of our life and our saving shield. In every generation we will thank thee and recount thy praise — for our lives which are in thy

charge, for our souls which are in thy care, for thy miracles that are daily with us, and for thy continual wonders and favors — evening, morning, and noon. Beneficent One, whose mercies never fail, Merciful one, whose kindnesses never cease, thou hast always been

The Prophet Elisha — Elijah's Successor

By Nissan Mindel

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Elisha was the faithful disciple of the prophet Elijah, and his successor. He had followed his master from the moment they met, when Elisha was a young man, plowing his father's field near the ancient town of Abel-mecholah in northern Israel. Elisha saw his master disappear in a fiery chariot, going up to heaven, without dying first. At that moment Elisha cried: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel...!" and rent his clothes. He knew then that he was to carry on the great work of

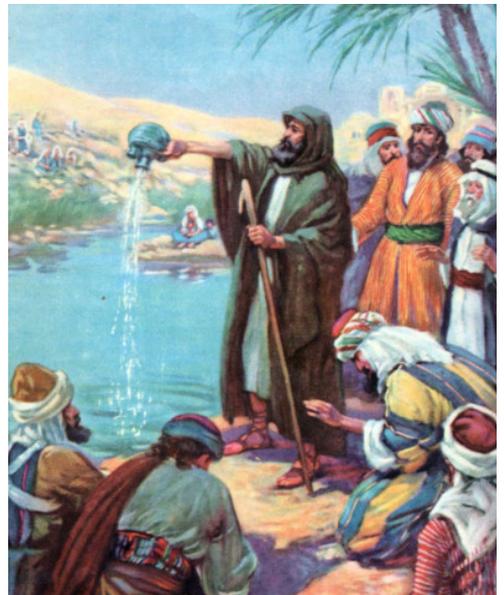
Elijah, to spread the knowledge of G-d, to bring relief and blessing to his people, and teach them to be kind and charitable.

Elisha picked up the mantle which Elijah had cast off when he went up to heaven. He felt the spirit of Elijah within him, and when he had to cross the Jordan to return home, he waved Elijah's mantle against the waters, and they parted suddenly and made a way for the divine prophet to cross the Jordan on its dry bed.

In Jericho the band of young prophets saw Elisha make his miraculous crossing of the Jordan alone. They knew Elijah disappeared and they hailed Elisha as their leader and master.

Soon Elisha was again to prove his divine powers. The people of Jericho came to him to complain of the bad water of the vicinity which caused disease to man and beast, and laid the whole land waste and barren. Elisha was ready to prove G-d's great kindness in a miraculous way. He requested a new cruse with salt. This he took to the nearest spring and there cast the salt into the water. To the assembled people he proclaimed in G-d's name that the water would now be cured, and would no longer cause death, nor make the land barren. And as the people drank of the sweet, pure and wholesome water they praised G-d and blessed the great prophet. Elisha's name grew far and wide.

Having left Jericho in the company of his disciples, the younger prophets, Elisha was approaching the town of Beth-el. Instead of greeting the prophet and his disciples with respect and honor, some young men of Beth-el came out to mock the prophet and shout abusive words in his direction. The reason for their disgraceful behavior was their great selfishness. For until Elisha cured the



water in the vicinity they had a profitable business. They used to bring water from afar and get high prices for it from the local inhabitants. But since Elisha cured the water, they lost this business, and therefore hated the prophet.

Seeing that these people had no fear of G-d, and no respect for the prophet, nor any consideration for their fellowmen, Elisha cursed them, and their punishment came swiftly. Ferocious bears suddenly appeared from the woods and charged into the mocking crowd. Forty-two young men were left slain, and the rest fled in terror.

Three Kings Plead for Elisha's Help

There was now hardly a man, king or slave, who hadn't heard of Elisha's miracles and divine powers. It didn't take a long time before three kings came together to Elisha to ask his help. The occasion was the war with Moab.

For many years the Moabites had been subdued by Ahab, king of Israel (of the Ten Tribes). When Ahab died, they rebelled, and again became a menace to the land of Israel. Ahab's son Jehoram who succeeded his brother Ahaziah as king of Israel then appealed to Jehoshophat, king of Judah, to come to his aid, and Jehoshophat's reply was short and sweet: "I am as thou; my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses..."

The two Jewish kings marched with their armies through Edom, and the king of Edom joined them. But when the armies were poised for battle against the Moabites, they ran out of water, and they became faint with thirst. There was not a drop of water in the whole valley, and it looked as though the vast armies of the three kings would suffer a great disaster.

The three kings then remembered Elisha, and together went to see him.

Seeing the wicked Jehoram who was following in his father's steps and continuing to spread the Baal-worship in his kingdom, Elisha rebuked him fearlessly. Elisha told him to his face that were it not for the king of Judah, he would not have even looked at him. However, this was a rare opportunity to show them G-d's kindness to His people. And so, Elisha told them, in G-d's name, to dig ditches, and though they would see neither wind nor rain, the ditches would be filled with pure drinking water for them and their horses. Moreover, Elisha promised them complete victory over the Moabites.

Every word Elisha said came true.

The Pot of Oil That Turned Into A Well

One day, the widow of the prophet Obadiah came to Elisha. In a voice full of grief she told him that her husband died in great indebtedness, and the creditors now threatened to take away her two sons as slaves, unless she paid the debts immediately.

Elisha had known the G-d-fearing and kind Obadiah, who under the very eyes of the wicked king Ahab fed and sheltered the true prophets of G-d whom the wicked queen Jezebel sought to exterminate. He sustained them at his own expense, and when his own means gave out he had to incur many debts. Now his two sons would have to serve the creditors to the full value of the debts, for such was the law in those days. Surely such a man deserves a better lot!

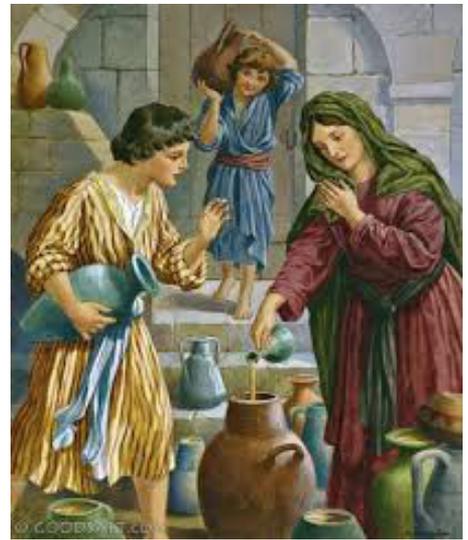
"What have you in the house?" Elisha asked her.

"I have nothing but a little pot of oil," she replied.

"Good. Now go and borrow many vessels from all your neighbors, the more the better. Then shut yourself in with your sons, and pour the oil into the vessels."

The woman followed the prophet's instructions. When she began to pour out some oil into the first vessel, the oil kept on pouring until the vessel was full. The boys passed her the next vessel, and this, too, soon became full of oil. Vessel after vessel was thus filled with oil, and the little oil that was originally in the pot never seemed to end. When all the vessels were filled, she cried to the boys to pass her another vessel, but they said there was no empty vessel left. Immediately the oil stopped.

The woman ran to Elisha and told him what happened. Elisha was not surprised. He told her to sell all the oil and repay her husband's debts, and use the rest to support herself and her children.



Elisha And The Shunammite

It was Elisha's custom to travel about all over the land of Israel in order to observe how his people lived, to help them where necessary and to teach them the knowledge of G-d.

One day, he visited the town of Shunem. There lived an aged couple there, and both of them were very kind and pious. The woman of Shunem was particularly hospitable, and she saw to it that the prophet ate bread at her house. The aged couple were so pleased with the great privilege and mitzvah of "hachnosas orchim" (hospitality), that they built a special chamber for him, and put a bed there, with a table and a stool and a candle-stick, so that whenever the prophet passed through Shunem, he would find a ready little resting-room.

One day when he was enjoying the comfort of his little room at the Shunemmites' house, he sent his servant Gehazi to call the hostess. When she appeared before him, Elisha asked her how he could reward her for her kindness. Elisha offered to speak for her to the king or governor, if there was any special favor she required of them. But the good woman said she really needed nothing. "I dwell among my own people," she said, for she was one of those rare folk who were contented and happy with their lot. As she walked out, Gehazi said to the prophet, "But she has no son! Could there be a greater gift than a nice little boy at their old age?"

Elisha had her called before him again. "About this time next year, thou shalt embrace a son!" Elisha promised her solemnly.

Exactly at the time predicted by the prophet Elisha, a son was born to the aged couple. This was a miracle very much like the one that happened to Abraham and Sarah, and the aged Shunemmite couple were not less happy with their son than were the aged Abraham and Sarah of old with theirs.

One day, when the boy was a few years old and went with the reapers into the field, he complained of a headache. His father sent him back to his mother. She hugged him until noon, but he died in her lap.

The poor mother took the lifeless body of her beloved son and laid him on the bed upon which the prophet used to rest. She left him there and shut the door. Then without telling anybody of the death of the boy, she obtained a donkey from her husband, and one of the servants to accompany her, and hurried to Mt. Carmel, where the prophet was. There she flung herself at the prophet's feet, and gave vent to her deep grief. When Elisha heard the sad news, he at once sent his servant Gehazi with his staff, and told him to place the staff upon the dead child and thus restore him to life. He bade him sternly to make haste and not stop on his way, nor tell anyone the reason for his haste. Gehazi, however, could not keep back the great news. Whomever he met on the way, he told that he was going to restore life to a dead child with the prophet's staff. But when Gehazi finally reached the Shunemmite's house and placed the staff on the child it did not help, because Gehazi had not obeyed the prophet.



Elisha himself then went to the house of the Shunemmite and shut himself up with the dead child. Uttering a prayer to G-d, he restored the child to life. (This very child was later to become the prophet Habakkuk).

The Seven Years of Famine

Time and again, Elisha warned his people to mend their ways or suffer famine and war. The people did not mend their ways and the famine came just as Elisha had foretold it.

At that time Elisha and the young prophets following him, went to Gilgal, near Jericho. They were hard pressed for a meal, and one of the young prophets went out to gather some herbs in the field. He came back with some wild gourds, and no one knew that they were poisonous. When they ate of the pottage, they cried, "Oh, man of G-d, there's death in the pot!"

Elisha at once requested a handful of meal, and he poured it into the pot. Then he invited the young prophets to eat some more. They did, and suffered no ill-effects!

Some time later, a man came from Baal-Shalisha in Mount Ephraim, bringing a present to the prophet, bread of the first fruit, 20 barley loaves, and some ears of corn. Said Elisha to his attendant, "Give it to all the people gathered here!"

"There are two thousand of your disciples here," the man exclaimed in amazement, "shall I set one loaf before hundreds of men?"

"Give it to them" said the holy man again, "For this is the word of G-d: they will eat, and leave thereof!"

And so it was; they all ate and had enough, and some of the bread was left over!

The miracles that the holy prophet Elisha so frequently performed to ease the suffering of his dear ones, became known far and wide. Everybody knew that Elisha was kind and generous to all, even to men who did not belong to his own people. Thus he cured of leprosy a great Syrian prince, Naaman, who next to the king was the greatest man in Syria).



So numerous did Elisha's disciples become, that their quarters in Samaria became too small. At the request of the young prophets, Elisha graciously agreed to accompany them to the Jordan, where they intended to build spacious quarters to house all the young prophets who were anxious to be near him.

Once again Elisha amazed the young prophets by a wonderful miracle. It happened that the iron head of an axe used by one of the builders in cutting down a tree, fell into the waters of the Jordan. The young prophet was greatly distressed because the axe was borrowed. Seeing how dear the young prophet held the property of his friend, Elisha came to his rescue. He cut a wooden stick, and threw it into the water, and the next moment all the young prophets gazed at a wonderful sight: the wooden stick slowly sank to the bottom, and up came the iron to the surface, and was retrieved by the young prophet!

War and Siege

Taking advantage of the famine that ravaged the Land of Israel, the Syrian people continually harassed them in the hope of conquering and enslaving them altogether. In those difficult years of famine and siege, the great prophet was the sole support of his people, continually assuring them of G-d's protection and delivery, if only they would return to G-d with all their heart. It was at this fateful time that the siege of Samaria was broken, and the enemy fled in terror leaving so much food in their wake, that it became as plentiful and as cheap as in the years of plenty, and once again, the words of the prophet were fulfilled to "the letter."

One day, Elisha went to Damascus, the capital of Syria. The news of his arrival in the Syrian capital reached king BenHaddad, who was lying critically ill in his palace. The king sent his most trusted statesman Hazael to enquire of the Hebrew prophet whether he would recover from his illness.

Elisha told Hazael that the king would not die of his illness, but die he would nevertheless, without recovering first. Then turning his head to the wall, the prophet wept bitterly.

"O, man of G-d, why are you weeping?" Hazael asked in surprise.

"G-d has revealed to me that you will be the next king of Syria, and that you will cause unspeakable misery and suffering to my people; you will pull down our fortified cities, you will slay our best sons, and massacre our women and children..."

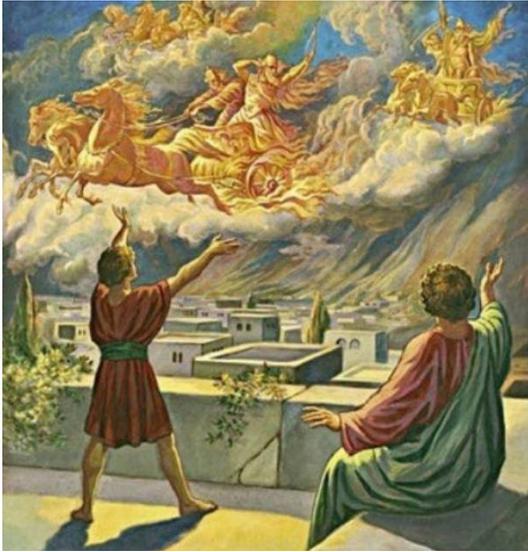
"Am I a dog that I should do such a thing?" Hazael cried indignantly.

"Alas, G d has willed it, for my people have sinned..."

Hazael returned to his king and told him only that the prophet had said the king would not die of his illness. The next morning however, when he was alone with the sick king, he smothered him, and proclaimed himself king of Syria.

Hazael; the new king of Syria, began a series of successful wars against the people of Israel, spreading destruction and death wherever his savage troops moved.

"The Chariot and Horsemen of Israel"



For over 65 years, Elisha stood at the head of the prophets of his time, among whom was also the prophet Jonah. He saw many kings reign and fall in Judah and Israel. Fearlessly, like his master the prophet Elijah, he fulfilled his divine mission, until his last day came.

As he was lying ill, king Joash of Israel came to his bedside and wept.

"My father, my father, the chariot and horsemen of Israel!" he cried.

Indeed, the people of Israel came to rely upon their great and beloved prophet more than they ever relied upon their chariots and horsemen.

Elisha's last prophecy was an encouraging one. He told the king that he would defeat Syria three times, and that the people of Israel would then see better and happier days.