

# If Only Elijah the Prophet Would Have Visited...

***At the outset of the Seder and the Haggadah we declare, "Whoever is hungry, come and eat with us. Whoever is needy, come and join our Seder."***

**I once heard a story**, not sure from where, about Elijah the Prophet. Disguised as a beggar in tattered shmatas, Elijah knocked on the door of a wedding banquet. The host took one look at the beggar and brusquely shoed him away. Riffraff!

**Shortly thereafter**, Elijah returned to the same door, this time dressed in a regal suit—prim, proper, a picture right out of a wedding magazine (you know, the kind with a perfectly polished model on the glossy cover).

This time the host graciously ushered in his guest and escorted him to the head table with the bride and groom. Everyone vied to shower the newcomer with honor. The waitstaff rushed to serve him first: salads, fish, meats, wine, on and on.

**Then, something peculiar** began to happen. This guest (a.k.a. Elijah) proceeded to shove food into every pocket of his clothing until the pockets were bursting and oozing with delicacies. This strange behavior attracted the attention of everyone at the party. Then, the guest began to pour wine all over himself, starting with his top hat and then soaking his entire suit!

**Someone finally mustered** enough courage to ask the guest why he was behaving so oddly. The guest explained, "When I came dressed in shmatas, I was turned away. When I was dressed in fine clothes, I was afforded highest honors. You didn't invite me, you invited my clothes. So my clothes deserve the food."

**And with that ... poof!** Elijah disappeared.

**It's too bad Elijah** didn't visit one of my Chabad rabbis. I am fortunate to belong to a synagogue with a contingent of Chabad rabbis whose homes have been open to my family for Shabbat and holiday meals (and any other time we need them) One of these Shabbat meals in particular brought the above story to mind.

**My wife, son and I** were the first guests to arrive for a Friday evening meal. The host and hostess and their adorable children invited us in warmly. Soon after, another couple arrived, and they were also greeted with love and smiles. This couple, the man in particular, was dressed in ripped, sweat-drenched exercise gear, in shmatas. Even if someone is unaccustomed to partaking in a Shabbat meal, I thought, wouldn't that person at least wear nice clothing to a dinner engagement? Later, the

guest mentioned what he did for a living, and I discovered that he had attained a very high position in his field. Certainly he wouldn't dress this way for a business meeting?

**Two additional couples** (whom I had not met before this) arrived and, of course, were made to feel at home. The meal began without a hitch, and before long all of us felt as if we were old friends. As the meal progressed some side conversations got started. One guest mentioned to another that he had seen an incredible video recently, and promptly took out his phone to show it. Then the other person retrieved his phone to show a different video.

**Handling electronic devices** is not permitted on Shabbat, so I would have expected the rabbi to gently and respectfully ask his guests to refrain from using their phones. Not this rabbi. What did he do instead?

**"Who knows a Jewish song?!"** the rabbi asked enthusiastically. Everyone looked at him and shrugged their shoulders, myself included.

With a broad smile, the rabbi began singing, "Dav-eeeeed, melech Yisrael, chai chai vi-kayam, Dav-eeeeed, melech Yisrael ... " until the phones were out of sight. And as it turns out, everyone's spirits were lifted much higher from singing than from watching videos.

**Why couldn't Elijah** the Prophet have visited this rabbi, or any of the other rabbis in our community? Choose any one of them, or all of them. Clearly, Chabad families that serve their communities aren't interested in their guests' clothing. They are genuinely interested in the person. When they meet a new guest, they aren't interested in how he or she might further their career. There are no ulterior motives. There's only the person. You. Me. A connection.

**As I reflect on this** today, I realize that the most judgmental person at the meal was... me. The first thing I noticed about the man dressed in exercise gear was his clothing. When guests took out their phones, I smugly knew better. The rabbi and his equally down-to-earth wife didn't seem conscious of ripped clothes or interested in dishing out rebukes. For a true Chabadnik, there's ahavat yisrael, love of a fellow Jew. It isn't a mantra. It's real.

**Elijah the Prophet** is supposed to usher in the coming of the Messiah. If only Elijah the Prophet would visit a Chabad rabbi, he'd see all the good Chabad does across the world. If only Elijah would visit the rabbis in my synagogue, where rabbis vie for guests, not honor, Elijah would see that we're ready for the Messiah. Now!

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