

HAFTORAH OF SIDRA : פינחס

*This week's Haftorah is from the first Book of Melochim,
from Chapter 18, verse 46 till Chapter 19 verse 21.*

1. It is rather unusual for this Haftorah to be read at all because in most years the Sidra Pinchos is read after the Seventeenth of Tammuz. In those years, the two Sidras of Mattos and Massay are combined and are read on the Shabbos after Sidra Pinchos, the Haftorah of Sidra Pinchos is then omitted and is replaced with the first of the special Haftoras of Rebuke. When this Haftorah *is* read, however, we have the opportunity to focus on some of the lessons to be learned from this chapter in our history.
2. The connexion between the events of the Sidra and the Haftorah is pretty clear. In the Sidra, Pinchos disregarded his own safety and acted with brave zeal to defend the honour of HaShem. In the Haftorah it is Eliyohu who single-handedly destroys the priests of the Baal who, under the patronage and protection of King Achov and his Phoenician queen Izzevel had spread idolworship throughout the land, fearfully persecuting the Torah-true Jews and deliberately misleading the nation away from HaShem and His Torah. This same zeal for HaShem which was the characteristic of Pinchos showed itself in Eliyohu, also a Kohen like Pinchos, and our Chachommim, of blessed memory, tell us that, "Pinchos — that is Eliyohu."
3. Our Haftorah opens just after that momentous confrontation at Mount Carmel (the report of that event itself is the **HAFTORAH OF SIDRA KI SISOH : כי תשא**) which culminated in the people loudly reasserting their allegiance to HaShem with the great shout, "HaShem — He is G-d! HaShem — He is G-d!" and the destruction by Eliyohu of the four hundred assembled priests of the idol Baal — all in the very presence of King Achov. Immediately after this, the King makes his way back to his palace to report to Izzevel what had happened. But he rides back alone, for the people have turned away from him. Eliyohu at this time is already an old man and in addition to the stress of this clash, Eliyohu has himself just killed those hateful priests of Baal. He is tired. But he had not made his stand as a challenge the King's authority. It was solely to re-establish the pure worship of HaShem. So when he sees how King Achov is making his way back to his palace without his usual retinue, Eliyohu acts to save the King's dignity. At his request, HaShem grants Eliyohu the supernatural strength to run ahead of the king's chariot as if he was his servant, all the way till his palace, as a mark of respect — for King he is.
4. When the wicked Izzevel hears the details of what happened, she refuses to acknowledge the miracles and how it was HaShem Who had worked all these things through Eliyohu. She is determined to destroy Torah life in the Kingdom of Israel and re-establish idolatry. Cold and calculating, she knows, too, that the people are fickle. The effects of these miraculous happenings, however impressive at the time, will soon wear off. She sends a chilling message to Eliyohu: "I swear it by the gods — tomorrow, I will have you killed!"
5. Eliyohu, not wanting to rely on miracles to save his life, flees initially to Be'er Shevah in the neighbouring Kingdom of Yehuda (the old strife between the two Kingdoms has

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- abated) but he feels unsafe even there. The wife of King Yehoshofot of Yehuda is Assalia, a sister of King Achov and Achov has his agents in all places. He has stooped to murder before and would do so again. Eliyohu flees into the wilderness, towards Sinai. He is weary and exhausted and emotionally drained. As he falls into a deep sleep, he begs HaShem that He should let him die. But HaShem has other plans.
6. HaShem sends an angel to revive Eliyohu. He bids him eat from a simple dough cake to give him strength, for he has a long journey ahead of him. During the next forty days and forty nights (symbolic of the forty days and forty nights that Mosheh our Teacher was on Mount Sinai) Eliyohu makes his way to Mount Sinai. Then, standing on the very same spot as Mosheh had stood when HaShem appeared to him, HaShem asks him, “What are you doing here, Eliyohu?” In answer, Eliyohu complains that because of his actions to defend the honour of HaShem, he has had to flee and that he feels his life is not safe — even amongst the Jewish People.
 7. Eliyohu is then shown a great storm and tempest which shatters mountains and smashes rocks and he thinks that this is a vision of the Power of HaShem. But a voice tells him: “Not in the storm is HaShem.” Then he is made to experience a great noise and tumult, as if in an earthquake and he thinks that this is the Power of HaShem. But a voice tells him: “Not in the earthquake is HaShem.” He is shown another vision, this time of fire that destroys all before it and he thinks that this then is the Power of HaShem. But he is told yet again: “Not in the fire is HaShem.” Finally, he becomes aware of a still, almost inaudible sound and he is told: “In the quiet and the calm — that is where the Shechinah is.” And Eliyohu hides his face in his mantle. He understands that gentle teaching rather than great force or anger is the method that HaShem prefers His emissaries to use.
 8. Again Eliyohu is asked, “What are you doing here, Eliyohu?” as if to reprimand him for not being among the people and instead cutting himself off in the wilderness. And he repeats his complaint that the Jewish People have forsaken the covenant of HaShem and His Torah and that he, Eliyohu, all alone, has publicly stood up to defend the honour of HaShem and that his life is now in danger. In reply, he is told that his efforts have not been in vain. His zealousness and sternness were necessary to bring the Jewish People back to HaShem and he has not failed. But now the time has come to appoint Elisha ben Shofot as his disciple and eventual successor.
 9. Eliyohu, one of our greatest prophets, is one of the five people who never experienced death but went up to Heaven alive. But HaShem was not pleased with his accusation against the Jewish People that they have forsaken their Covenant. For that reason, say our Chachommim, the spirit of Eliyohu is present at every *Bris Mi'lah*, and he is made to witness how the Jewish People indeed **are** loyal to the Covenant with HaShem. And so Eliyohu HaNovvi, once so strict and angry at the *Chillul HaShem*, has become the great defender of the Jewish People before HaShem. Indeed, he is often HaShem’s messenger of rescue and many times is attributed with intervening in times of danger and saving worthy individuals — and even the Jewish People as a whole — from mortal danger.
 10. As in the past it was Eliyohu’s honest rebuke that brought the Jewish People to return to HaShem and His Torah so will it be in the future. Whether it is the wayward children who will return to the Torah-true life of their fathers or, conversely, whether it will be the lapsed parents who will be brought back to Torah through their G-d-fearing children, Eliyohu will be the one to turn the hearts of the Jewish People back to HaShem and be the herald of the coming of Moshi’ach and that new age, may it come speedily, in our own days.