



## Welcoming the Stranger - A story for the New Year

We all remember Elijah the Prophet. He is the guy we open the door for at our Passover seder. He is the guy we set an extra glass of wine for. Elijah will come to announce the coming of the Messianic Age when all people will be kind to each other and there will be no war or hunger.

But let's get to our story. Elijah is also known to put on disguises and visit different towns and villages. "What does he do on these visits?" you ask. Sometimes he just observes the behavior of the inhabitants. Are the children being respectful of the parents and neighbors? Are people giving *tzedakah* to help others who are poor and hungry? Sometimes Elijah helps people by leaving the food and money if they are in need. In other words, Elijah tests us to see if we are fulfilling our obligations.

It was nearing Rosh Hashanah, the season when we begin the school year, and Elijah wanted to see if the children were fulfilling their obligation to welcome the stranger. Were the children nice to their classmates? To do this, he dressed as a poor boy with tattered clothing, a slight limp, and with poor eyesight. He was not cute or likeable with his greasy hair matted to his little head and dirt on his hands and under his fingernails.

In this disguise he visited the towns and villages. In the first town Elijah went to school and was teased by the children. He was called Gimpy Limpy and Dirty Gerty. They teased him about his clothing, his lack of cleanliness, his physical disabilities, and his poverty. At the end of the day he was very sad. Elijah left that town and moved on thinking the children were not fulfilling their obligation to welcome the stranger. He called the town Nastynville.

Elijah reached a second town and found an abandoned cottage to sleep in. In the morning he put on the same disguise and he set off for school. Here he was not teased or taunted. He was just ignored. On the playground he was not asked to join a game, he just walked around alone. In group activities no one wanted Elijah in their group. At lunch, he sat alone. Elijah waited there several days to see if things would get better. It did not get better. After several days he left the



town calling it Coldville. The children there certainly did not welcome the stranger.

Elijah found a third town where after finding a place to spend the night, he headed off to school to make friends and learn. In this school he was welcomed by the children and the teacher. He played and studied. One boy shared his lunch with the stranger and one boy shared his book with his new friend. One student gave him a pencil and a piece of paper. This kindness went on for an entire week with each person reaching out to Elijah.

At the end of the week Elijah packed a special treat for each student and for the teacher. The gift was a bag of honey candy for the new year. It was not every-day sticky sweet stuff, but a special candy. After eating one little piece the children felt warm and happy inside. The children were rewarded by Elijah for fulfilling the obligation of welcoming the stranger just as we are rewarded for fulfilling our obligations with a warm and good feeling inside of us.

And so, Elijah continued his journey from town to town knowing that children are not of value because they are smart, beautiful or athletic but because they are kind and good and remember their obligations.

Who is the stranger? Not necessarily the new kid in town. A boy or girl may feel like a stranger because he or she feels alone and different. Learning to fulfill our obligations is what Judaism is all about.

Alan J. Levin