

Be Your Own Elijah – from Mosaic Magazine, March 2008

When I was a kid at the Passover seder, I actually held my breath when it came time to for Elijah to show up. My brother would open the door and race back to his seat where he and I would stare intensely at Elijah's cup, waiting. A few distractions later and one of us would swear that the cup had less wine than before. My father would take those moments to teach us about what Elijah meant to the Jews. He taught us that we were supposed to be waiting for redemption with a capital "R." I had no idea what that meant. I was just waiting for something exciting to happen. I was waiting for magic.

As a child there is not a lot that you can do to change your world. So I was waiting for Elijah to do it for me. Now I watch my own children stare at Elijah's cup just as intently as I did. How do I teach them the delicate balance between having faith and doing something in the meantime?

I want them to believe that eventually the prophet Elijah will come and announce the coming of the messiah. He will, as the Torah says, "Turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the heart of the children to their parents." I want them to believe that he will change the world. But as much as I want them to have that faith, I want them to know that while they wait, it is up to them to change their own world.

Ask not what Elijah can do for you, but what you can do for Elijah.

Every time we retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt we remind ourselves that our ancestors had to free themselves. Pharaoh was not just going to let them go. Even though Moses was the first one to confront Pharaoh, the Haggadah never mentions him. The rabbis teach us that this is to ensure that we give the credit to God (not Moses). Perhaps it is also to teach us that the true heroes were each and every Israelite who took an uncharted step into the desert. Sure they were afraid but they kept going. Each one of them took charge to change their own lives. That is the true message of Passover -each of us is responsible for changing our own life.

This Passover, when you open the door for Elijah ask yourself, "What am I waiting for?" While I am waiting for prince charming to show up on my doorstep, am I willing to go look for him? While I am waiting for other people to notice I deserve a promotion, am I willing to go ask for it? While I am waiting for pro-environmental legislation, am I recycling? While I am waiting for peace in the Middle East, am I doing my utmost to support our homeland? Or in the words of the singer John Mayer, am I just "waiting on the world to change?"

This year, before you come to the Seder, take a small step. Make this Seder different from all the others. The story may be the same; but this year, make sure you come to it slightly changed. Passover is considered one of four Jewish new years. This year- in honor of the holiday, make a resolution. Change your own world. Make it a resolution you can keep. If you want to keep kosher, you may feel overwhelmed and discouraged if you begin by trying to follow every law commanded, instead, decide to eat vegetarian when dining out. If you want to become a *tzaddik*, a righteous individual, start with a small act of kindness.

This year make yourself the hero of your haggadah.

