

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion

Shiur #45: Chorev Part 1: Structure of the Story (1-21)

By Rav Elchanan Samet

From the beginning of this narrative to its end, Eliyahu undertakes a long journey – going and returning, such that an almost-complete geographical circle is completed. He departs from the city of Yizre'el, which is to the west of Beit She'an (where he ended up at the end of chapter 18). Via the city of Be'er Sheva he sets off for the depths of the wilderness of Sinai, and reaches the ultimate purpose of his journey-and-its-end-at the mountain of Chorev. From there he returns along the same route, arriving – by the end of the chapter – in Avel Mechola, the city of Elisha, which is southeast of Beit She'an.

It is at Mount Chorev that most of the action of this story takes place (verses 8-18), and the events there are also central to the narrative. But the real heart of the story is the revelation at Mount Chorev, in verses 11-12. This revelation is at the very center of the story, with ten verses preceding it (1-10) and nine following (13-21); thus, it serves as a central axis. The various events of the story form a symmetrical structure around the revelation:

A1 (1-4): Eliyahu leaves Yizre'el for the wilderness of Be'er Sheva, to be alone there; at the outskirts of habitation, "He left his attendant."

B1 (5-8): *Revelation of the angel who commands Eliyahu to eat, "For THE WAY is too far for you" to Mount Chorev.*

C1 (9-10): **God speaks to Eliyahu at the cave, "WHAT DO YOU SEEK HERE, ELIYAHU?" Eliyahu answers, "I HAVE BEEN EXCEEDINGLY ZEALOUS... AND THEY SEEK MY LIFE, TO TAKE IT"**

D (11-12): Revelation: the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, and after these – the still small voice.

C2 (13-14): **God's word to Eliyahu at the entrance to the cave: "WHAT DO YOU SEEK HERE, ELIYAHU?" and his answer – 'I HAVE BEEN EXCEEDINGLY ZEALOUS... AND THEY SEEK MY LIFE, TO TAKE IT"**

B2 (15-18): *God's word commanding Eliyahu, "Go, return on YOUR WAY" from Mount Chorev back to Eretz Yisrael*

A2 (19-21): Eliyahu's return from the wilderness to Avel Mechola, where Elisha joins him as his servant.

Clearly, this structure – built around the revelation in verses 11-12 – testifies to the great importance of this revelation. Both style and content here reflect its exalted atmosphere and the fact that it is the culmination of all that has preceded it and the reason for all that follows.

The parallels between the corresponding parts of the story in its symmetrical structure are varied in nature:

- C2 is a perfect, word-for-word repetition of C1 (God's question as to what Eliyahu is doing there, and his reply);

- there is thematic parallel between B1 and B2 (command by God or by His angel for Eliyahu to set off on a journey), with a contrasting parallel in geographical terms (the direction of B1 is southward, to Mount Chorev, while B2 directs the prophet northward, from Mount Chorev back to *Eretz Yisrael*)

- a completely contrasting parallel exists between A1 and A2, both geographically and in terms of Eliyahu's actions (he departs habitation for the wilderness, leaving his attendant in Be'er Sheva, and then returns from the wilderness to habitation and takes another attendant – Elisha – to serve him).

It is of great importance to uncover the structure of the story. The parallels between the various parts of the story help us to understand the significance of various events that take place along the way, as well as clarifying the significance of the story as a whole. The structure also helps to clarify the exact boundaries of the story and wards off the various claims that are made contesting its integrity.

Translated by Kaeren Fish