

Barekh

Contributed by [Pardes](#)

Source: Rabbi Dr. Howard Markose in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

Immediately following birkat hamazon (grace after meals) we drink the third of four cups of wine. We pour the fourth cup which will be for the upcoming completion of Hallel. We also pour a fifth cup that is situated in the middle of the table called Kos Shel Eliyahu (Elijah's Cup).

This cup is left undrunk until such time as the halakhic question is answered: Do the Jews in Israel drink the fifth cup which corresponds to the fifth redemptive expression in Exodus, "And I will bring you into the land..." (Exodus 6:8), or must every Jew be in Israel before that fifth cup may be drunk? There is a belief in the talmudic world that Elijah, who did not die in the manner of all human beings, will return to this world and will be the one to settle this kind of halakhic conundrum. We then open the door and recite a series of Biblical verses which all contain one theme: The hope that God manifest His anger towards those who reject the Divine, such as Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the villains of the Pesach story. We begin by proclaiming, "Pour out your fury on the nations that do not know You, upon the kingdoms that do not invoke Your name. For they have devoured Jacob and desolated his home" (Psalms 79:6-).

Why do we open the door at this point in the seder? Have we been sitting too long, and could we use a bit of fresh air to enable us to continue the proceedings? Is it to offer our hospitality to Elijah who is invited at that moment to resolve a halakhic dispute, and if he can be enticed to come, will it mean that he is heralding the coming of the Messianic era and a better world? Is it to declare to those inside our home and outside it, that with our faith in God who, as described by the verses will protect us, we are not afraid to implore God to defeat our enemies – enemies who in the past were known to be standing outside, listening, intending to find reasons to turn us over to the authorities? Or, as we recite these vindictive verses, do we simply wish to make sure that 'the coast is clear'? Perhaps, like so much of Judaism, it is a combination of reasons which have come together over time, responding to historical, psychological and sociological factors that create both custom and the complicated rationale behind those customs.

What do you think?

Rabbi Dr. Howard Markose teaches Bible and Biblical Hebrew Grammar.