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DISCERNMENT IN 1 KINGS 19:1-18: BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY IN WORKS OF ART

ABSTRACT

This article examines the story of 1 Kings 19:1-18 as a story of discernment. It is a story about a divine-human relational process of Elijah and his God, but also a story that draws the reader into a divine-human relational process. The article discerns a fundamental element of this relational process: a perspective change. This aspect of discernment is indicated in the text along the detour of looking at two works of visual art that refer to the biblical story.

1. INTRODUCTION

The basic meaning of discernment (*diakrisis*, *discretio*) is “separation, division, in the physical sense of the word” (Waaïjman 2002:484). Discernment is about seeing, sensing difference. To see the distinction between black and white is quite easy, but when differences are not that clear, it is more difficult to recognise, let alone to evaluate them. What is right to do in a specific situation? What will offer perspective? What not?

For spirituality, the basic difference is the difference between God and man. Whether we consider the way we live, the meaning we provide to our lives, the different positions we take in our life, or the way we are open for possibilities, underneath all these aspects of discernment the divine-human relation is fundamental: Do we follow the divine way that leads to life or the non-divine way that leads to death? Do we read our life as a mark of God’s creative work or as a blind fate? Which position do we adopt as point of orientation, to define our course in spiritual life? Is our accent on the human possible, or can we entrust ourselves to the divine possible? (cf. Waaïjman 2002:483-515) These are all questions of discernment.

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In order to improve our understanding of the fundamentals of discernment as a critical aspect of spirituality, I will look at the story of Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:1-18. Looking for discernment in this text, the main question is: *What difference is fundamental to this biblical text?* To find an answer to this question, we need to read (hear, enact) the text. In reading 1 Kgs 19:1-18, a rhetoric expression stands out: the performative utterance ‘and behold’ (*w^ahinne*). In this expression, the reader is addressed and called to attention: see, here, now. In the Elijah-story of 1 Kings 19, this word is used five times:

- and behold this, a messenger touched him (v. 5)
- he looked, and behold, at his head was a bread-cake... (v. 6)
- and behold, the word of YHWH came to him (v. 9)
- and behold, YHWH passed by (v. 11)
- and behold, a voice came to him (v. 13)

In all these clauses, the reader is alerted to behold, with the implied narrator (and with Elijah), some kind of divine presence. In this way, the performative expression “and behold” serves to draw the reader into a divine-human relational process. But what is – according to this biblical text – fundamental to the evoked divine-human relational process? In my reading of the text, I experience a perspective change that is connected with this orientation on divine presence.

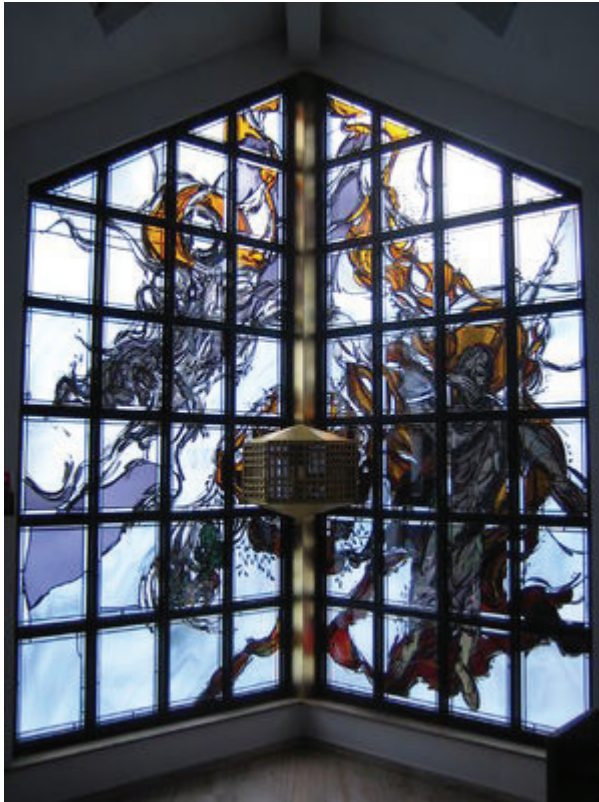
In the present article, I will clarify this perspective change along the detour of looking at two works of visual art that refer to this story. What these two works of art have in common with the text is that the attentive beholder gets involved and is guided towards a perception of divine presence. However, these paradigms enact more than that. The works of art invite beholders to perceive their lives from the perspective of God. Thus, they enact a perspective change. Also in reading Scripture, this perspective change is fundamental, however, it is easily overlooked. Therefore I present this detour along two works of art that can open our eyes to this aspect of the text.

2. PARADIGM 1: ELIJAH WINDOW

The first paradigm is part of a stained-glass, leaded window in the chapel of the Carmelite retreat centre in Springiersbach (Germany), made by Jakob Schwarzkopf in 1988. This window consists of two surfaces that are placed in an obtuse angle of 100°. It forms the background of the sanctuary and surrounds the tabernacle. The window directs a beholder

to move around (to turn to the left, to turn to the right, to come closer and to step back) in order to perceive the different parts of the window. The beholder has to make these moves because of the size and composition of the window. These physical movements are a first step into a spiritual movement.

In this present article I will not treat the whole window but only the Elijah-figure at the right of the window (see: close up next page).¹ In particular looking at this part of the window illuminates fundamental dialogical aspects: firstly, the beholder becomes involved up to his soul and secondly, a perspective change that is performed.



1 For a study of the whole window see: Bos (2012:175-196, 244-272).

This particular part of the window depicts Elijah on Mount Horeb. The western iconographic tradition of this theme is limited. It is characterised by an upright Elijah covering his face. Usually, this Elijah is depicted in (front of) a cave, between the portents of wind, earthquake and fire. In this window, especially the fire is evident (yellow flames). The association with a strong wind is evoked by the wavy lines that dominate the whole window. Also the diagonally ascending flames show the presence of a strong wind. The diagonal line behind the face and back of Elijah might indicate the splitting aspect of the wind. The earthquake is possibly shown in the red coloured glass surrounding Elijah's feet, which seems to indicate "unsteady ground". The Elijah figure has a shaky pose, balancing on this "unsteady ground". He seems to be standing in the midst of divine powers.



Divine reality is not just presented in the depicted powers on the surface: Elijah is covering his lower face with his hand as a reaction to his perception of γHWH passing by. His face is partly concealed behind his right hand. His hand is placed in front of his mouth. An exact motion of this right arm is not indicated; he might be covering or uncovering (after covering) his face. The figure shows the biblical motif of Elijah covering his face as a reaction to γHWH passing by. As percipients, we face Elijah (we are looking at Elijah and not looking with him).

Elijah's raised elbow suggests a pose of defence. He seems to be unsteady, vulnerable: besides the unstable ground he is standing on, his gaze is pensive, his sensing left arm is reaching out and his tunic is wrapped around his body. All these elements suggest an unsteady balancing. The gesture of covering his face expresses awe, as a combination of fear and trust. This pose expresses the nearness and holiness of the divine: God is present. Moreover, if Elijah is supposed to be defending himself, it will not be a defence against these flames or against this splitting power: it would be a defence against something in front of him. Since nothing is depicted in front of Elijah, the possibility of something outside the window (in front of the window) appears. His pensive gaze presents γHWH in front of the window, in the chapel (on-site).

The moment depicted is when Elijah becomes aware of God passing by (v. 13). The biblical text states that Elijah heard. The window seems to show that Elijah sees. What is Elijah seeing with his black, pensive eyes? The window shows Elijah seeing what is invisible to the eyes, just as the text declares that Elijah hears the unhearable, that is, a voice of pounding silence.

Although divine presence itself is not depicted, two – contrasting – perceptions of divine presence are evoked in looking at the window:

1. The depicted Elijah is not just an object to look at; this Elijah also draws the percipients into the work of art. He makes the beholder aware of divine presence or passing by. In his gaze, this presence or passing by is projected in front of the window – in the area between the window and the beholder or in the beholder him- or herself.² In this way, the distance between the percipient and the window diminishes: the perceiver becomes part of the reality the window represents. In the act of looking at the window, the percipient is drawn into the divine-human relational process by Elijah. Elijah himself immediately moves

2 For stylistic reasons, I will not pursue the explicit use of both male and female personal pronouns when I refer to a reader or a beholder. For stylistic reasons, I will use the male form as a gender neutral form.

out of this relational process. At least for a moment he is not standing in-between any more.

2. In looking at the window, the pensive gaze of this Elijah with the black eye-sockets attracts the attention of the beholder. If a beholder lingers in looking at this face, he will experience being seen. Perceiving the face results in a reversal of perspective; *seeing* becomes *being seen*. The beholder's gazing at the eyes is mirrored and reverted back to the beholder himself. Elijah's black eye-sockets do not just reflect the beholder's view; they also mediate the view of the Other. The beholder can experience being seen by the divine: in or through Elijah's gaze, the divine reality is watching. This mirror is broken through: the beholder is seen by the autonomous sight of the other (You). In or through Elijah's gaze, the divine reality is watching. Here God's perspective is evoked! In this breaking of the mirror, a new element of perspective change comes to the fore, since the eyes do not only reflect the beholder's view, but also mediate the view of the Other.

The window does not give any detectable signs of divine presence. Nevertheless, it evokes a divine reality: it can be felt or sensed, but hardly grasped. In the pensive gaze of this Elijah, the divine presence or passing by is – first of all – projected to a place in front of the window (in, or just in front of the beholder). But during the act of looking at this pensive gaze, divine reality can also be viewed in the black holes of Elijah's eyes: through the eyes of Elijah, a divine reality can be felt (at a distance from the beholder). Both perceptions place the beholder himself in a direct divine-human relation and perform a change of consciousness. In the first perception it is a perspective change, in the second perception it is an encounter with an unknown and invisible divine presence as a counter-interiority (Waaajman 2002:552).

Speaking about discernment, one of the questions is, who is subject and who is object. In this example a reversal is shown: subject becomes object and *vice versa*. Firstly, the window attracts attention. It appeals to a perception of the window. Secondly, it invites the beholder to perceive the chapel room and the outside world through the eyes of the window. Part of this "through the eyes of the window"- perspective is the beholder himself. Adopting this perspective, the percipient changes from a subject into the object ("I look" becomes "I am seen"). The experience of being seen is an experience of being seen by Elijah and by God.

3. PARADIGM 2: AN ELIJAH ICON

A second paradigm that illustrates a perspective change as an element of discernment is an icon of Elijah. Elijah is sitting in front of a cave, looking toward a raven with bread (the Host) in his beak. This refers to the story of Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:2-6. There are many similar icons – sometimes a small brook is visible at his feet (the wadi Cherith), sometimes a small tree is visible (referring to the broom tree of 1 Kings 19), but generally, Elijah is sitting in front of a nearly black cave: he is surrounded by the darkness of the cave, which “denotes the sacredness of that divine space” (O’Kane 2007:76). This cave calls to mind the story of Elijah on Mount Horeb.

Also in looking at this paradigm, something interesting is happening at the level of “perspective”. The icon does not show the perspective of the beholder. It shows a so-called a-natural perspective. There seems to be no natural horizon, depth or vanishing point. Neither are shadows visible; there seems no external source of light: something else is Light.



Traditionally, before Byzantine icon painters started to paint the icon, they used to paint a so-called “Great Eye” on the working wooden base and write the word “God” underneath it (Andreopoulos 1966:75). This eye provides the basis of an inverted perspective: a gaze that is coming from the other side of the icon. In this way we have a double perspective in the work of art: the beholder who looks at Elijah (and beyond), and God who is looking at Elijah (and beyond) from the opposite view point. In painting the icon itself, the icon painters place multiple layers of colour – from dark to light – upon each other. Those layers of paint penetrate each other. While the darkness of the cave “denotes the sacredness of that divine space” (O’Kane 2007:76), the light in icons is regarded as an expression of the divine reality. The shown light is not light that is emitted by the sun or the moon (which give shadow) but by the light of Christ.

As a result of the a-natural perspective, the beholder is prevented from observing the icon as a distant object. The beholder is drawn into the perspective of the icon. This perspective is not our well-established perspective, the visible world, but another, deeper reality that is hidden in the visual world. Thus, icons accomplish a continual transition from the visible to the invisible.

A specific layer of meaning arises if we take seriously that we are looking at an icon (of course, what we see above is the picture of an icon –and not the icon itself). The word “icon” originates in the Greek term *eikoon*, which means “picture”, “likeness”, “portrait”. In the New Testament, the word *eikoon* is first of all used for Christ. Paul writes about “Christ, who is the image – *eikoon* – of God” (2 Cor 4:4). The early Christians questioned how this visibility could be brought into agreement with the biblical prohibition of images of God (Exod 20:4-5; see also: Exod 34:17; Lev 19:4; 26:1; Deut 4:16,23; 27:15). Icons should be understood in this perspective. Icons are pictures of divine reality as far as it can appear in visual form. Picturing divine reality is possible since God revealed himself on earth in Jesus Christ. This visual form of the One God is worth to be honoured.

In Christian spirituality, the incarnation of the Son is the ultimate way in which God meets humankind in Creation and becomes visible. But the encounter with the Son is not the only way divine reality can be perceived; not only Christ is *eikoon* of God, every human being is an *eikoon*. Humankind is created in God’s image (Gen 1:27) and is therefore also *eikoon*, or *imago Dei*. Divinity, therefore, is not just visible in the incarnation of the Son but also in Creation, especially in humankind. Divine presence can be perceived in the face of man who (again and again) is created in the image of God. This is not a characteristic that we have or possess, but

a mark that only exists *in* the relation with God. As Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians:

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image (*eikoon*) of its creator (Col 3:9-10).

In this way, divine reality is not just visible in the incarnation of Christ. Also in the face of the human person who (again and again) is created in the image of God. We can perceive divine presence upon us. As *eikoon* of God (thus, in the divine-human relation) humankind is worthy of honour. That is why in the Eastern Orthodox Church not just Christ but also Saints are depicted in icons, and that is why in the liturgy also the congregation is incensed, for the sake of the *eikoon* they are.

Perception depends on the perceiver. The person of the perceiver (his interests, his contemplative sensitivity) has a decisive part in the perception of an image. But, although the percipient is significant as an interpreter, he is not the key principle: that is the divine-human relation. The percipient as *eikoon* (thus, in relation to the divine) perceives the icon. Perceiving an icon in this manner is taking part in a continues movement of love between God and humankind, that origins in the love between the Father and the Son. The percipient takes part in this love. It is just as we saw at the first paradigm, the Elijah window: a beholder of an icon of Christ can *perceive to be seen* by the One God.

Perceiving an icon as *eikoon* reveals that the icon does not refer to an absent original, but that it renders the original present. Icons not only remind people of a bygone history, they also convert this history into an actual presence (Maas 2008:5). This is a specific form of performativity. The icon of Elijah, for instance, not only calls the prophet to mind, it also enables a percipient to enter into a relation with Elijah and – in this relation – to contact divine reality. This encounter with the icon is a real encounter (Moyaert 2007:101). Following that, icons can be truly sacramental. It depends on the involvement of the percipient, his pre-understanding, attitude and openness towards the work of art, whether the icon (or – as in the first paradigm – window) is enabled to be truly sacramental.

4. TRANSFORMATIVE INVOLVEMENT

The two paradigms show that perceiving works of visual art within a divine-human relation is a dialogical phenomenon. Both the window and the icon point away from themselves and channel the relational process

between the percipient and the divine reality. In looking at the works of art, the percipient experiences what it is to be seen, more specifically, to be seen by the Holy One. There is a continual transition of “perceiving” into “being perceived” and *vice versa*. In this way, perceiving these works has a sanctifying effect on a beholder. Thus, perceiving is a process of transformation of the percipient. Especially in the awareness of the *eikoon* that we originally are, the gaze of God touches and transforms us. In this way, we are image of God: as we are seen by God.

Actively entering into a relation with a work of visual art involves not only providing meaning to the work, but also the reverse: what does the work say to me? Are you the one that is looking at the work of art or can you also see how the work is looking at you? How does the work of art give shape to you? Perceiving implies a transformation of the percipient. It is an encounter with a work of art, in which the percipient is immediately touched. A key aspect is “being involved”. This mutual involvement is beautifully described by Kepnes, who reads Buber:

Interpreting a form of spirit [read: work of art, AMB] requires us to face the work as we face another being. We open our senses to it, to its particularities and to its total gestalt [sic]. We allow it to move us, to confront us, to speak to us. We try to perceive its special message and disclosure of reality. And we also respond to it. We present our reactions, we mirror-back our reading and look to see if the work confirms it (Kepnes 1992:25).

This kind of perceiving is embedded in prayer. It is about: “I, here, now”, being present, on site. To perceive presence, a percipient has to place himself (or perhaps better described: has to be placed) in relation. This act of perceiving exposes the divine-human relation as a mutual relation of “seeing” and “being seen”, as a direct relation of I and You. The gaze of God (You) is addressed to the beholder (I), touches him and makes him shine.

The two paradigms evoke the biblical text of 1 Kings 19, recall it, comment upon it, actualise it, embody it. It will be clear that they are not just referential. The paradigms do not just signify something beyond themselves, but they are also expressive in themselves. In looking at these paradigms we also encounter a formative power. The paradigms show that works of art that refer to biblical texts are not just surfaces that are presented for contemplation, but that they are also performative. They present something that is beyond depiction. In this specific case the works of art guide the percipient into a perspective-change: “seeing” becomes “to be seen”, as a continual transition of “perceiving” into “being perceived” and *vice versa*.

5. THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Now we turn to the biblical text of 1 Kgs 19:1-18. First I will give a translation of the text, then I will focus on two fundamental aspects of the text that correspond to the transformative involvement that came into view above.

- 1 Ahab told Jezebel
all about what Elijah had done,
and all about how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.
- 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger
to Elijah, saying:

“So may the gods do, and more also,
if, by this time tomorrow, I do not make your soul
like the soul of one of them.”
- 3 He saw it³ – got up and went because of his soul
and came to Beer-Sheba, which belongs to Judah,
and left his servant there.
- 4 He himself went into the wilderness, a day’s journey,
and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree,
and asked that his soul might die
he said:

“Much⁴ now, יהוה take my soul,
for I am no better than my fathers.”
- 5 He lay down and went to sleep
under the solitary broom tree,
and behold this, a messenger touched him
and said to him:

“Get up and eat.”
- 6 He looked, and behold, at his head was a bread-cake baked on hot
stones, and a jar of water,
he ate and drank
and went back to lie down.
- 7 The messenger of יהוה came a second time, touched him
and said:

3 Read: “he was frightened” (cf. critical apparatus *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*).

4 *rab* – much/abundant/arduous; an indication of accumulation (growing, increasing, expanding). Cf. Blum & Fabry (1993).

“Get up and eat,
for arduous⁵ is the journey for you.”

- 8 He got up, ate and drank,
and he went in the strength of that food – for forty days and forty nights
to the mount of God, Horeb.
- 9 And there he came to a cave, and he spent the night there,
and behold, the word of YHWH came to him
and said to him:
“What is for you here, Elijah?”
- 10 And he said:
“I have been zealously zealous for YHWH, the God of hosts –
they have forsaken Your covenant, the sons of Israel
Your altars, they have thrown them down
and Your prophets, they have slain them with the sword;
and I am left, I alone,
and they are seeking my soul, to take it away.”
- 11 And He said –
“Go out and stand on the mountain before the face of YHWH”
and behold, YHWH passed by –
and a wind, great and strong,
was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces
before the face of YHWH
not in the wind was YHWH
and after the wind an earthquake
not in the earthquake was YHWH.
- 12 And after the earthquake a fire
not in the fire was YHWH,
and after the fire
a voice of pounding silence.⁶
- 13 When Elijah heard – he wrapped his face in his mantle
he went out and he stood at the entrance of the cave,
and behold, a voice came to him
and said:

5 *rab*. The same word – indicating accumulation – is used by Elijah in his prayer (v. 4). It is almost impossible to translate this word in both verses equally. Therefore now I use “arduous”, whereas before I translated with “much”.

6 The translation of “pounding” is a result of the notion that the adjective *daqah* derives from the verb *dqq*, to crush, to pulverise, to beat small (Fuhs 1977). On this subject see also Lust (1975), Robinson (1991) and Waaijman (1985:68-69).

“What is for you here, Elijah?”

14 And he said:

“I have been zealously zealous for YHWH, the God of hosts –
they have forsaken Your covenant, the sons of Israel
Your altars, they have thrown them down
and Your prophets, they have slain them with the sword;
and I am left, I alone,
and they are seeking my soul, to take it away.”

15 And YHWH said to him:

“Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus,
when you arrive – you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.

16 And Jehu, son of Nimshi,
you shall anoint as king over Israel,
and Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah,
you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

17 It will be so – whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu
shall kill him,
and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill him.

18 I shall spare seven thousand in Israel,
all the knees – that have not bowed to Baal
and every mouth
that has not kissed him.”

5.1 Involved up to his soul

A central word in this biblical text is the word soul.⁷ Elijah is involved at the level of his soul. His soul is threatened (v. 2; cf. vv. 10,14) and this threat drives him away, out of the situation (v. 3). “Because of his soul”, he enters an area in which human constructions are absent. Completely alone and outside the covenant-land, Elijah directs himself towards his God, YHWH. He expresses his feeling of “much now” and – as an ultimate conclusion – he offers YHWH his soul: “take my soul” (v. 4). Thus, in contrast with Jezebel (who does not put herself at stake in relation to her gods)⁸ Elijah is involved up to his soul, and addresses himself to YHWH, to take his soul from him.

7 *nephesh* – self/life/throat/desire/vitality. Cf. Wolff (1973: 25-48), Seebass (1986) and Waaijman (2002:435-446).

8 Jezebel utters an oath “So may the gods do”, but normally an oath formula has an indirect object that is under the oath (often “to me”). Such a person that is under the oath is lacking in this case (although many manuscripts and versions have the additional object “to me”, in BHS this is not part of the main text). See also Ziegler (2007); Merecz (2009).

Most translations speak about “life” instead of “soul”. This is not so strange, for this story is about life and death. However, the noun “soul” provides our reading a specific accent. In this biblical story Elijah’s soul is connected to his relation with his God. He is threatened for his zeal for God (v. 2); he protects his soul against this threatening (v. 3) and at the same time asks his God that his soul might die (v. 4). Finally, he says to his God, after stating that all Israelites have left YHWH: “I am left, I alone, and they are seeking my soul, to take it away” (vv. 10.14). The question is what this word “soul” means in this story.

In Scripture, the soul is a phenomenon with various dimensions. It comes to the fore in an abundance of images and stories. In these images and stories, the soul is made conceivable as a highly mobile phenomenon (Waaijman 2002:436). Waaijman’s *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods* includes in the midst of this handbook a beautiful exploration of the biblical phenomenon “soul” (together with an exploration of the divine name “Yahweh” and the Imago-Dei motif) (Waaijman 2002:435-446).

The biblical image of the soul is two-dimensional: interior (focused inward) and exterior (focused outward). Perhaps Elijah’s battle in the outwardness of his soul, took so much energy (1 Kings 17-18), that his interior soul breaks down. What is left is a “dead soul”, the soul of a dead person. As he says: “Much now, YHWH, take my soul”.

The divine answer to Elijah’s request is significant for the biblical understanding of the soul: Elijah is ordered to get up and to eat: food is available. The soul is so much physical, so much connected to breath, blood, heart, bones and flesh, that the soul is strengthened by eating.

Soul refers to what is living, the personal life of man, life’s core. It is exactly this part of man which an enemy is looking for: if someone is looking for someone’s soul, he is after what is peculiarly and intimately one’s own. (cf. vv. 10.14). Thus, in 1 Kings 19, the soul is characterised by vulnerability. Apparently, we are able to threaten, to go after one’s soul, to destroy it, to restrict it, to fix it, to oppress it, to seek for it with evil intents.

In verse 10 (and 14) it is clarified how Elijah delimits himself against the community: he – as a soul – has an own identity (human being as an individual, that also has a name) and a personal perspective to that community. There is “they” and “I”: They are looking for my soul... In this way 1 Kings 19 gives clues for the way in which Elijah’s soul is bound up with the I, with the other, with God. He is involved up to his soul.

5.2 Perspective change

Being involved up to his soul, Elijah addresses himself to ΥHWH , to take his soul from him. The result of this involvement – what happens to him – is a perspective change.

A crucial moment for spirituality is letting-go the own perspective, or better: being drawn out of the own perspective, into the soul of the Other. In my opinion, that is what is happening at Mount Horeb, when Elijah hears. He is drawn out of his own perspective, his own evaluation of the situation, and receives a new perspective, one that is “a voice of pounding silence”.

A first perspective change comes about in the encounter with the messenger. After his prayer, when Elijah lies down and goes to sleep, a messenger touches him. The messenger has a life-giving message: get up and eat (v. 5). Food is present. When Elijah lies down again, the messenger returns (v. 7). The messenger renews his life-giving message and adds a motivation: An arduous journey is in front of Elijah. The messenger is not at once identified as belonging to ΥHWH . To the reader, the divine sender is revealed only the second time. The text points out that ΥHWH is directed towards Elijah. ΥHWH is present at a distance (mediated), but simultaneously he is near in the touching of the messenger. ΥHWH heard Elijah’s prayer and answered him. Elijah’s lament “much now” (v. 4), is answered with “arduous” (v. 7); an arduous journey to go. His “much” receives another perspective. The twofold encounter with the messenger of ΥHWH makes Elijah rise. Being touched twice, ordered to get up and provided with food, Elijah gets up physically (v. 8). His inner soul also starts to rise. The food that is provided (bread-cake and water) is sufficient to sustain Elijah for forty days and nights, and he moves towards the mount of God, Mount Horeb.

On Mount Horeb, this perspective change is intensified; Elijah is ordered to place himself in front of the face of ΥHWH , to place himself in the perspective of his God (v. 11). ΥHWH questions Elijah (vv. 9,13), listens to him and answers him (vv. 11-12,15-18). First, Elijah is welcomed and invited to speak out for himself: “what is for you here?” In his answer, Elijah presents himself with a reference to his zealous zeal. In this way, he expresses his unity with his God, not just now, but as an already existing long-lasting alliance. Elijah’s zealous zeal also recalls the zeal of ΥHWH , his jealousy. It shows how Elijah has put on a characteristic of ΥHWH himself. Moreover, Elijah addresses his God with the title “God of hosts”, in which he appeals to the covenant. Thus, Elijah starts what he has to say by underlining their relationship. And then Elijah clarifies his feeling of “much now”; he experiences being the only one left and now they are seeking his soul (v. 10). Then, ΥHWH passes by. In succession, a mighty wind, an earthquake and a fire appear, but ΥHWH was in none of these phenomena.

And after that, there is “a voice of pounding silence”. YHWH is presented in a new way that provides a tension between hearing and not-hearing, between voice and silence. God-conscious, Elijah realizes with trembling awe that God is – or was – passing by. YHWH is present and His presence evokes awe. Elijah’s answer to the question “what is for you here?” (vv. 9.13), his complaint (vv. 10.14) seems to be answered in two stages. First, YHWH answers with passing by (vv. 11-12), then, YHWH gives a new provision in which Elijah continues his prophetic job (vv. 15-18).

However, in the dialogical space of the relation, not just Elijah is the subject of a perspective change. YHWH is too. This is indicated by the description, YHWH “passes by”. In this way, YHWH – as a literary character – presents “himself” in the perspective of Elijah. Thus, both Elijah and YHWH present themselves in the perspective of the other.

In a way, this reciprocal perspective change on Mount Horeb seems to have no implications. Not a thing has changed; the dialogue between YHWH and Elijah is repeated with exactly the same words. Again, YHWH asks: “What is for you here, Elijah?” (v. 13). And again, Elijah justifies himself by underlining his own zeal for YHWH opposite to the sons of Israel who have forsaken the covenant with YHWH and who threaten to kill Elijah, who is the only one left (v. 14). But then it becomes clear that a change has occurred: the divine utterance (vv. 15-18) places Elijah’s prophetic work into a new perspective. It starts with an order to move: “Go, return on your way”. In what follows, the new perspective becomes clear: instead of persuading the Israelites and their king (like Elijah tried in 1 Kgs 18:17-40), all will be judged: all who worshipped Baal will be eliminated, King Ahab will be replaced. This new perspective seems to expose a transformation of YHWH’s contact with the Israelites: judgment. Although the main relation in the narrative is the YHWH-Elijah relation, their encounter is inextricably bound up with the people. The Israelites are object (It) of the communication between Elijah and YHWH and Elijah’s new assignment is a task of intermediating between YHWH and the people. So, the YHWH-Elijah relation is personal, yet exceeds individual life. In contrast to Elijah, who seems to have given up on the people, YHWH is concerned for them. In his concern, YHWH foresees life and death. Not the death of Elijah’s soul (which Elijah asked for), but the death of all who have worshipped Baal. The actions of the people will have consequences like a mirror, in which YHWH presents life and Baal presents death. YHWH is not forsaking the covenant with the Israelites: “he” will spare the lives of those who have not forsaken “him” (v. 18). In my reading of this story, these prophetic words (vv. 15-18) are firmly based on the preceding reciprocal perspective change of Elijah and YHWH.

6. GAINED INSIGHTS ON DISCERNMENT

Looking at the works of art and searching for a difference that is fundamental to 1 Kgs 19:1-18, brought out a new reading of this Elijah story and a further understanding of what discernment is. While the biblical text with its performative expression *w^ehinne* directed us toward a perception of divine presence, the paradigms opened up a perception of “being perceived”. In looking through the surface of the paradigms (fathoming, cf. Waaijman 2002:509), a perspective change occurred. It showed that we are object of God’s fathoming work: in looking at the paradigms we can know/feel/see that we are seen/known/fathomed. Returning to the biblical text, this perspective change appeared to be a decisive element. Remarkably, not just Elijah is subject of a perspective change, *יְהוָה* is too. Both present themselves in the perspective of the other. This opens up an area of reciprocity. This area of reciprocity enables true discernment. It shows that discernment is about finding a truth that originates in divine-human reciprocity. The biblical text and the works of art invite us to get intimately involved in such a divine-human relation. In this way, a space is opened in which discernment can take place.

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Discernment in 1 Kgs 19:1-18

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