
HOSPITALITY AND HOSTILITY IN JUDGES 4

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Abstract

The customs that make up the hospitality code in the ancient Middle East, as portrayed in the biblical narrative, demonstrate the intent to maintain the honor of person, household and community by offering service and protection to strangers. Analogies between the code of hospitality found in the biblical narrative and more modern communities in the Middle East are striking. A model of behavior operates, which attempts to transform the hostile stranger into a non-threatening guest. However, if the protocol of custom is violated by either the guest or host, all restraints and protections are set aside and the host may become hostile. The episode in Judges 4 is explained by the application of the hospitality model. The author/editor manipulates customary expectations by using a scheme of systematic violation of the code of hospitality in working toward the climactic and ironic end.

Hospitality in the Near East, in both ancient and more modern times, followed a set pattern of ritual fulfillment of obligation and expectation. The concept of hosting originated in the need for aid when away from home. Reciprocal actions and expectations grow out of this need allowing the stranger to be welcomed into an encampment, village, or town. This stranger was given new status as a guest, thereby removing the hostile overtones associated with the different and the unfamiliar. However, if at any point the pattern of ritual which governed the relationship between the host and guest were violated, by either party, then overt hostility could occur. The protection and comfort to which the guest was entitled and which the host was obligated to give were no longer required. Violence could be the result, just as if the stranger had become an enemy endangering the host's household or the host had attacked his guest and the latter must strike back to protect himself. This paper will examine the ritual of hospitality as it is portrayed in Judges 4. Special attention will be given to the social context of this ritual behavior and to the possible allusions to violations of the code of hospitality by the biblical narrator.

Proper Exercise of Hospitality Customs

Perhaps one of the most curious aspects of the reference to hospitality in the biblical narratives is how seldom this sacred custom follows proper protocol. The majority of instances speak of hospitality in a negative sense, with the characters either consciously or unconsciously violating its strictures or reversing roles. Only in Genesis 18 and 24 are there examples of the proper

mode of conduct within the biblical hospitality ritual. From these examples, and from instances in the law, a model can be drawn to compare with the remainder of the examples of hospitality in the First Testament, including Judges 4.

PROTOCOL OF HOSPITALITY

(1) *There is a sphere of hospitality which comprises a zone of obligation for both the individual and the village or town within which they have the responsibility to offer hospitality to strangers. The size of the zone is of course smaller for the individual than for the urban center.*

Although there are no clear examples in the biblical text of the size of this sphere of obligation, an indication can be found in the laws concerning unsolved homicides (Deut 21:1-9) and in the concept of "refuge cities" (Deut 19:4-10). The first of these texts describes the obligation laid on the city nearest to the site of an unsolved death. The elders are required to "measure the distance to the cities which are around him that is slain" (v. 2) and then the elders of the nearest city are required to engage in a ritual and give testimony which will absolve them of guilt with regard to this crime. The killing of a heifer by the Levites also atones for the blood shed in this case.

In the latter instance, the man who accidentally kills his neighbor may flee for safety from the revenge-seeking family to one of six cities of refuge, which are spaced

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throughout the country. It is interesting to note that originally provision was made for just three refuge cities, but as Israelite control of the area expanded three more were to be added. This suggests a specific grid laid over the country mapping out the regions and providing within easy access of most population centers a place of refuge—a set of zones of obligation to prevent the death of the man who “did not deserve to die” (v. 6).

The principle of spatial obligation which applies in these two cases is also relevant to the hospitality sphere of obligation. Each city and its citizens are responsible for the care of visitors who enter their population center. Each individual camp and its male head of household are responsible for the care of visitors who enter the circle of their camp.

This obligation is reciprocal. In the ancient Near East reciprocal gifting of water, food, and shelter meant the traveler had a greater chance of survival on the road. It also lessened the instances of theft, raiding, and murder which might have occurred in an inhospitable land where every person's hand was turned against another. However, where property rights (including both personal possessions as well as real estate) are respected, so too must physical well being be respected. It is the responsibility of each person to offer hospitality to strangers who enter their sphere of proprietorial control to (1) give back to God a portion of what has been given to them (Deut 16:17), (2) set up attendant obligations on others that they be properly treated should they ever play the role of guest themselves (Deut 23:24–25), and (3) protect themselves from possible violence and loss of property by transforming the stranger into a guest. This last purpose is the basis for the second principle of the hospitality protocol.

(2) *The stranger must be transformed from being a potential threat to becoming ally by the offer of hospitality.*

No society can tolerate a hostile presence within it for long. When a stranger approaches a village or dwelling place, by definition this person is a threat to inhabitants of that place. Either hostilities or threats must result or the stranger must be neutralized as a hostile force by temporarily admitting him or her into the community. This is done through the offer of hospitality. It also seems to apply to the rule of law accorded to the “sojourner” or resident alien who is entitled to justice just like widows and orphans (Deut 24:17–18). The basis for this injunction is Israel's time in Egypt as strangers, sojourners, and slaves.

(3) *The invitation of hospitality can only be offered by the male head of household or a male citizen of a town or village.*

Despite occasional instances in which women operate in an independent and even leading role in the biblical narratives (2 Sam 20:16–22; 2 Kgs 11:1–3), their legal status is defined by their relationship to their fathers or

husbands. They may manipulate situations (Gen 27:5–17; Ruth 3:1–4; 1 Kgs 1:15–21) but the intent under the law of inheritance and marriage is always to perpetuate the male name and line (Gen 38; Num 27:1–11). This latter instance, the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, specifically deals with a situation in which a man dies without a male heir and his daughters petition to receive his property so that it will remain within their family. They are the heir of last resort for this household and function only as a generational link, not as legal owners of the property themselves.

Within this legal framework it is the prerogative of the male head of household to provide for and protect his household. It is his right and responsibility, therefore, to serve as host and make the initial invitation of hospitality. His wife and daughter(s) may serve the guest as well, but only at the behest of their husband or father. Independent action on their part would be a breach of custom.

Resident aliens or “sojourners” (*gēr*) are also not qualified to function as a host. They live within a town or village at the sufferance of the citizens, although they are protected under the law (Deut 24:17–18). They have the right of free passage, but may not represent the citizenry in a legal sense, as in the case of hospitality. That right is reserved for citizens alone.

(4) *The invitation may include a time span statement for the period of hospitality, but this can then be extended, if agreeable to both parties, on the renewed invitation of the host.*

Generally an invitation to share the hospitality of a home involves a short visit. No example in the biblical text exceeds four days, and this was an extended stay (Judg 19:4–9) agreed to by the guest. Most travelers wish to be refreshed, but not detained. In fact, keeping a guest beyond a set period, which is usually suggested at the time of the invitation (Gen 18:5; 19:2; 24:31 + 54; Judg 19:5 + 20), could be seen as an act of hostility (compare the politically motivated detention of messengers in ARM VI 19:17–22 and XIV 97:5–14).

The time limit, while probably based on the practicalities of travel and the desire to reach one's destination, also limits the liability of the host. Conceivably, a host could be impoverished by a guest who stayed too long.

(5) *The stranger has the right of refusal, but this could be considered an affront to the honor of the host and could be a cause for immediate hostilities or conflict.*

While the stranger is generally at the mercy of his host or host city, it is the visitor's right to refuse hospitality when offered. This may be based on a desire to continue one's journey (Judg 19:9–10) or, as in the case of the angels' visit to Sodom (Gen 19:2), refusal may be based on the legal inappropriateness of the one making the invitation.

(6) *Once the invitation is accepted, the roles of the host and the guest are set by the rules of custom.*

(a) The guest must not ask for anything.

To maintain the honor of the host, the guest must be careful not to ask for or even look longingly at anything in the host's house. By asking, the guest has usurped the host's right to offer everything that the guest needs and it presumes that the host is being stingy, slow, or uncooperative in providing service to the guest. Plus, if the host feels like the guest wants something because of prolonged eye contact or undue interest in an object, then the host will feel obligated to give this item to the guest. This could create feelings of hostility between the two and thus defeat the purpose of the invitation of hospitality cited in (2) above.

(b) The host provides the best he has available—despite what may be modestly offered in the initial offer of hospitality.

It is typical for the host to make a modest offer to the guest (usually water, food, shelter, and a foot washing). This does not preclude more being given to the guest, but it does protect the host who may find himself in the dangerous position of offering more than he can deliver. In any case the host will make every effort to insure his guest's comfort—including in one instance the killing of a calf from the herd (Gen 18:7) which would have involved a real financial sacrifice.

(c) The guest is expected to reciprocate immediately with news, predictions of good fortune, or expressions of gratitude for what he has been given, and praise of the host's generosity and honor.

This expectation accords with the sense of reciprocity which is at the heart of the hospitality ritual. While the guest may not have anything else to give the host, a smile or some other expression of appreciation pays back the host for his efforts in behalf of his guest. In the ancient world, travelers were not overly common and communication was sporadic at best. Thus one excellent reason for offering the hospitality of one's home to a stranger was to obtain news which served both as entertainment and sometimes as a clue to changing political or economic trends.

(d) The host must not ask personal questions of the guest. These matters can only be volunteered by the guest.

Just as it is inappropriate for the guest to ask for something from the host, it is equally inappropriate for the host to pry into the private affairs of his guest. It does not matter whether these people are natural enemies, what matters is the proper adherence to custom and ritual which maintains or adds to the honor of both host and guest. It is certainly all right for the guest to volunteer information about him/herself, but this is not part of the expectation noted in (6c) above.

(7) The guest remains under the protection of the host until he/she has left the zone of obligation of the host.

The sphere or zone of obligation which the guest enters and leaves has its limits. There will be spaces between these zones which are uninhabited in the sparsely populated area of ancient Canaan. In those areas travelers are truly on their own and are subject to the dangers of the road—brigands, wild animals, hostile climate. This then magnifies the importance of the hospitality ritual when a traveler enters the zone of obligation of an individual household or population center. The potential hosts know the dangers faced by travelers and the level of responsibility they have to protect their guest as long as he/she is within their defined area of obligation. This zone must end, however, since no one person or city can be held responsible for lands too far distant from their home.

The Portrayal of Hospitality Customs in Judges 4

The story of Sisera and Jael chronicled in Judges 4:17–22 contains so many violations of the hospitality code that it can only be concluded that a conscious attempt was made by the writer to justify Sisera's murder by Jael. This cold-blooded attack, which might otherwise be condemned, is telegraphed throughout the account by one violation after another of the proper rituals of hospitality by both Jael and Sisera. Thus hospitality becomes hostility and the host a hostile foe.

To demonstrate the pattern of violation, I will provide a commentary on each of the eight segments of the narrative, first quoting the passage and then making appropriate comments on it. By this means I will show how from the beginning Sisera is portrayed as making incorrect decisions and usurping his proper role as guest.

(1) Judg 4:17: "But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite."

It is logical that Sisera would seek refuge in the encampment of a neutral party like Heber the Kenite (Soggin: 67; Halpern: 85). The logic breaks down, however, when he approaches the tent of Jael, not Heber's tent. If he were seeking sanctuary or shelter, he should have approached the tent of the head of the household, not that of his wife. By doing so, Sisera robs Heber of his rights as head of the household (Van Nieuwenhuijze: 701) to offer hospitality and to represent his household and its authority before a stranger. This clearly dishonors Heber.

An argument could be made that Sisera in fact did approach the tent of the head of the household. However, the text clearly says it is "Jael's tent." In Middle Eastern pastoral encampments of our own era, a wife may share the tent of her husband, but a man with multiple wives

was expected to provide each one with a tent which he alternated in visiting (Ahmed: 79). Thus it is completely possible that Jael had a tent to herself.

This may have even been part of a strategy created for Sisera by the narrator. It is logical to assume that Sisera did not want to be found by pursuers and thus would choose the tent least likely to be searched. Of course, Heber would have been obligated to protect him (cf. Gen 19:8 and Judg 19:23–24) once he had come under his protection, but Sisera may have faced later pursuit after he left Heber's hospitality zone or he may have needed to escape more quickly and could not wait for Barak's men to give up the chase.

For whatever reason, Sisera dishonors his potential host (Heber) by not coming directly to him, and he dishonors Jael simply by approaching her tent. By law and custom the one obligation a woman had to her husband, other than providing him with an heir, was remaining chaste to him. This is absolutely necessary for the lineage of the clan to remain pure (Abou-Zeid: 253). Sisera's approach to Jael's tent put them both in danger of an adultery charge.

One final point to be made here is whether Jael was alone. The text is silent on this point; no witnesses are mentioned who could have spied on this affair. Yet, it is extremely unlikely that Jael would have been left alone without other members of the household to protect her. Pehrson, in his study of the Marri Baluch (85), notes that men are "available at all times to protect the women and animals." Thus whether Heber was present or not, someone would certainly have been within the precincts of the encampment. The fact that no one else is mentioned speaks both to the stealth with which Sisera approached the tent and to the breach of custom of the entire scene.

(2) Judg 4:18a: "And Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, 'Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; have no fear.'"

It is a violation of the hospitality code for a woman to offer hospitality. Only the male head of household had this right (Van Lieuwenhuijze: 287). Murphy, I think correctly, notes that Jael's appearance is a "surprise" to the reader, who had assumed that Deborah was the *'iššâ* of 4:9aB. Her unexpected invitation thus "forces on the listener or reader the realization of the horrible outcome of the meeting of Jael and Sisera, and holds him fascinated to the end" (182). It also helps discern "the puzzle as to the chief hero, or savior, or person who is to overcome Sisera" (Amit: 89).

Bal (62) correctly points out the fact that the invitation is missing in the lyric version of Judges 5. Her suggestion is that this reflects a conflict of gender codes between the two versions. While I am not entirely prepared to accept that interpretation, some stigma may have been attached to Jael for usurping her husband's right in making an invitation to a stranger. This stigma is not present in the lyric version where the invitation

is omitted. Halpern (83) suggests the prose writer added the invitation as a logical necessity to the plot. Taking the cue from the poetic version, this step provides Sisera with a hiding place and it also places him in the prone position in which he will later be slain by Jael.

Jael's assurance to Sisera that he should "have no fear" has no basis in fact or custom. It actually functions as part of the deception and another piece of literary irony. The phrase "fear not" appears elsewhere in the context of theophanies where fear is justified, but it is set aside under the assurance of the divine being (Gen 15:1; Judg 6:23).

By approaching her tent, Sisera has shown himself in violation of custom and Jael's invitation can then be taken as a subterfuge to lead him to his death, using the hospitality code as a cover for her actions. Thus both of them are in violation of custom and the question then arises whether there is a relation to the law which allows a woman to deceive a man in order to preserve her life and her honor.

I disagree with Bal (60) that Jael has "relative freedom . . . in political and religious matters" and is thus not bound by her husband's political ties. As a member of his household she is obligated to honor his alliances and do what she can to strengthen them when possible. This does not apply, however, when the ally proves to be a threat to the household. Sisera places himself at risk, not by trusting the political loyalty of Jael, but by violating the hospitality code. One further danger here may be Sisera's trust in Heber. Halpern (86) makes a case for Barak trapping Sisera by feeding him false "intelligence" through Heber. If that is the case, Jael's deception matches that of her husband and can still be seen as a defense of her household.

Examples of the proper exercise of the invitation of hospitality are found in Gen 18:2–3 and 24:30–31 and other examples of improper invitation are found in Gen 19:2 and Judg 19:20. In the former the heads of households invite strangers to share the comforts of their homes and thereby to remove their status as strangers (Pitt-Rivers: 23), while in the latter two examples resident aliens improperly offer hospitality to a stranger.

The difference lies in the location. Abraham and Laban are both within their rights as heads of households within their own encampments. However, Lot and the Ephraimite of Judges 19 live in towns. Only citizens have the right to offer hospitality when strangers enter their community. By making their offers, Lot and the Ephraimite have violated the communal rights of the citizens of Sodom and Gibeah respectively. Thus it is not unusual that these citizens should be indignant with the usurpers of their rights (Gen 19:4–10 and Judg 19:22–25). Admittedly, their desire to harm the strangers is extreme behavior, as is the offer of the host's daughters, but technically the townsmen were within their legal

rights since the strangers had not been officially offered the protection of the town.

Returning to Jael's action, in at least one other context when a woman left the confines of the tent alone she put herself at risk. In Gen 34:1–2, Dinah the daughter of Jacob "went out to visit the women of the land." In so doing, she left the protection afforded by her brothers and other members of the household and was raped by Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite. Jael is also placing herself in a dangerous situation by coming out to speak to Sisera. Her courage is demonstrated and her intent to protect the household from attracting the hostility of the Israelites by harboring Sisera may thus have outweighed her own safety (see Soggin: 78 for a discussion of the political conflicts involved). This demonstrates loyalty to her group and is not a violation of her conscience or common decency. Jael operates within her rights against a violator of the customs of hospitality.

There are of course instances in which a man can freely approach and speak to a woman who is not of his kin or household. For instance, in Gen 24:17 Abraham's servant approaches Rebekah at a well and asks for a drink of water (see also Jesus and the Samaritan woman in Jn 4:6–9). This is based on a well understood need and does not lie within the ritual pattern of hospitality. Rather, it involves access to a communal resource owned by the tribe or community (Matthews: 121). Rebekah's response in giving him a drink and watering his camels is not the offering or granting of hospitality, only the extension of temporary water rights. The fact that the servant's test to find Isaac a proper bride included the proviso that the woman would also water his camels (Gen 24:14) suggests that Rebekah's generous action was an unexpected one—thus not part of any ritual expectation or obligation.

(3) Judg 4:18b: "So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug."

It was improper for Sisera to accept Jael's invitation of hospitality, just as it was improper for Jael to make this invitation. In doing so, the narrator shows that Sisera does not merit the protection generally accorded to the guest and thus from this point on Sisera is in mortal danger. Jael's murder of Sisera is therefore to be understood (contra Bal: 60) not as a woman's free political act, but rather as a proper reaction to the violation of the code of hospitality and perhaps an extension of her husband's service as "double agent" (Halpern: 86). Sisera's action, freely taken, marks him as a danger which must be dealt with by any means at hand.

Accepting the comfort and assumed protection of her tent does not have to represent a shaming of Sisera. Certainly, he has been shamed by the loss in battle, and his flight. He has lost his former status and is reduced to the role of a supplicant (Bal: 120). However, the act of accepting something offered by a woman is not in and of itself a shameful thing (see Gen 24:17–20 and 1 Sam 25:18–35). His shame in this scene derives from his

dishonoring of Jael by approaching her tent and in his deprivation of Heber's rights as head of the household.

The placing of the rug may simply represent a comfort given to an exhausted man, who is probably wet from sweat and perhaps the mud in which his chariots had foundered. It is possible, as Soggin (67) and Bal (122) have suggested, that this is a "curtain [which] separates the woman's chamber [room] in the tents." If my reconstruction is correct, however, and this is Jael's personal tent, a curtain could have simply been one which separated the public from the private section of the tent. If Jael had drawn Sisera within this private area, then it would further hide his presence and might, as Bal suggests, give Sisera another false indication of safety, or even of welcomed sexual advance.

I am intrigued by Bal's further suggestion (123) that Sisera's entrance into this feminine precinct deprived him of his gender role. This certainly makes his statement in Judg 4:20 that "no [man]" is present highly ironic. I am not prepared, however, to say that this provides justification for Jael's act of murder. The narrator is not just using her action to provide a literary fulfillment of Sisera's "prophetic" statement that no man (alive, male) is present. There is also a level of understanding within the narrative which deals with customary practice. Thus Sisera's death can also be seen as the result of Jael's need to protect her honor and that of Heber against a stranger who had repeatedly violated the code of hospitality.

The literary aspects of the drama, of course, allow for comparison between the ultimate victory of Jael over both Barak and Sisera (Murray: 178 & 183; Webb: 135; Amit: 93). But this does not supersede the legal factors involved here. It merely highlights the literary artistry initiated by Deborah's prophecy in Judg 4:9 that "the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." For this reason then Barak and Sisera can be paired by their failure to control the situation themselves.

In this scene, one other oddity is evident. Every other example of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible contains the offer or the act of footwashing. Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32, and Judg 19:21 all contain this custom, which is replaced here by the placing of the rug/curtain. Hot pursuit may have negated the possibility for this leisurely and relaxing task. Its omission, however, could also represent another blatant violation of the hospitality code, thereby hinting that Sisera has not been granted true guest status. Sisera's failure to notice this omission could also be taken, along with other violations of custom, as an indicator by the narrator of the general's agitated mental state after the failed battle or Sisera's further disdain for the woman he simply plans to use to aid his escape.

(4) Judg 4:19a: "And he said to her, 'Pray, give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.'"

Although Jael had no right to offer hospitality to Sisera, he has accepted the invitation to enter her tent. Sisera then compounds his flaunting of custom by requesting

a drink of water. Ritual demands, however, that once hospitality has been accepted, it is improper for the guest to request anything of the host. It infringes on the honor of the host, implying through this request that all needs of the guest have not been met. Special care is even to be taken by the guest not to overly admire the furnishings or property of the host in order to prevent the embarrassment of the host feeling obligated to give these objects to the guest. Thus to ask for anything breaks both ritual protocol and custom by reversing the roles of guest and host (Pitt-Rivers: 27). This could explain why no other example of hospitality ritual in the Hebrew Bible contains a request by the guest for anything from his host.

Comparison can be made with Gen 24:17 where Abraham's servant makes basically the same request: "Pray, give me a little water to drink from your jar." This is not an improper request, however, because: (a) no stranger may have access to a water source without asking permission; (b) hospitality has not been offered or accepted at this point; (c) the well functions as communal property and thus any member of the community may be approached for access to the water.

(5) Judg 4:19b: "So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him."

Jael's reaction of giving him "milk" (probably fermented goat's milk) may be part of the one-upmanship of the hospitality ritual which requires the host to offer simple necessities while delivering much more. For instance, see Gen 18:4-5 and 18:6-8 in which a "morsel of bread" becomes "3 measures of fine meal" made into cakes, a calf, curds and milk. In the same way Gen 19:2 can be compared to 19:3. This action by the host of first offering little and then providing even more than he offered serves two functions. First, it prevents the guest from feeling the necessity to decline an overly generous offer, one which the host obviously can not afford (Cole: 67). Secondly, it allows the host to fulfill his role by bringing out the best he has to offer to his guest (Pitt-Rivers: 28). Both parties are then honored by this act of generosity and no hint of rivalry can spoil the moment.

The difference here is that Sisera requested the drink. Jael may be following correct ritual procedure, but Sisera is not. Her action can then be construed as a further step in her use of hospitality to trap and kill Sisera (Cundall: 95). It may also have added to the drowsiness he felt (see Boling: 98) after his previous exertions. It does not, however, function as a part of a "ceremonial selection of wives" or some initiatory ritual in preparation for sexual intercourse as Bal (62-63) suggests. No censorship of the text would have been necessary to hide sexual relations between Jael and Sisera (cf. Zakovitch: 370-371). Sisera may have been aroused to sexual desire as he entered the otherwise forbidden area of Jael's tent and Jael may have encouraged this to draw him into her trap. However, it is unlikely he would have been able to

perform any further exertion, including intercourse. The milk, plus his own exhaustion, sealed his fate as he fell into a deep sleep.

The repetition of her "covering him" serves the same function as the milk. Jael's act of "covering" him before and after serving Sisera a drink provides an enclosing framework to the narrative. It also furthers the sense of literary technique which went into the creation of this sophisticated narrative. Both of Jael's acts elicit images of "maternal" care and the expansion upon his request beyond a simple drink of water restores her position as hostess, which had been threatened by Sisera's request. Williams (73) compares Jael's "motherly" attention to Sisera's needs with the identification of Deborah as "a mother in Israel" (Judg 5:7). This paralleled identification could then function as empowerment in the narrative of Jael as a surrogate for Deborah in the fulfillment of the prophecy that a woman would gain the victory (4:9).

Bal (64) also makes a good point in comparing the maternal concern of Sisera's mother in Judg 5:28-30 with these maternal acts by Jael. This proves a good parallel in tone, attitude and characterization, and both acts suggest a degree of concern, although Jael's act is in fact for herself and her group, and not for Sisera. At this point comparisons could also be drawn with the preparations and actions taken by Judith (chap. 12-13) against Holofernes and Pughat against Yatpan in the Ugaritic legend of Aqhat (CTA 19.205-221). Like Jael, both serve their enemy drink and both provide an alluring and beguiling picture to further cloud their victim's mind. The principal difference is that neither attempts to function as hostess. Judith is Holofernes' guest and Pughat is impersonating a barmaid. Their deception, leading to murder, however, like Jael's, frees them and their group from an enemy (Hendel: 90-94; Gaster: 260). Thus what men (Barak, Danil, Uziah) could not do, women accomplished on their own.

(6) Judg 4:20: "And he said to her, 'Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is any one [man] here?' Say, no.'"

This is Sisera's second improper request. Once again he is questioning the intentions of the hostess to deliver protection to her guest. Protection and the granting of sanctuary was a sacred duty (Abou-Zeid: 252), and failure to carry out this duty brought shame upon both the host and his entire group. Sisera therefore shames Jael by insisting that she "stand at the door" and turn all potential enemies away (compare Rahab's offer to do this in Josh 2:4-6 and the actions of the maid in 2 Sam 17:17-21).

Sisera's insistence is both an unnecessary statement (given the host's obligation to protect him anyway) and is in fact an implied threat against his hostess. At that point, if previous blunders had not already released Jael from any obligation to him, she "is liberated of all moral duty" (Pitt-Rivers: 21). No honor derives from taking

Sisera's orders since the one cardinal rule of the hospitality ritual is free will for both host and guest. By pressing his point, and asserting a status other than guest, Sisera "falls back into the role of hostile stranger" (Pitt-Rivers: 21-22).

One possible explanation for Sisera's continual failure to follow custom may be his assumption that a woman was not familiar with the role of host. By asking for a drink and directing her in her duties as protector, he may be coaching someone he believes to be ignorant of the ritual. By opening this point to question, there is also the possibility implied here that from the beginning Sisera knew that Jael had usurped her rights by offering him hospitality. He may simply be taking advantage of what appears to be a woman unfamiliar with the hospitality customs.

Such blatant disdain for Jael further dishonors her and her household, all of whom would of course have been instructed in proper behavior patterns. It also suggests a political disdain for "inferior" peoples forced to make alliance with more powerful groups and states to survive (see Soggin: 77). His underestimation of them and of Jael in particular could be another ironic factor utilized by the narrator. The use of irony in Sisera's admonition to Jael is also commented on by Bal. She asserts (92) that Sisera had ceased to be a man: from the moment he entered the tent, bereft of his chariots and army, shirking the battle of men against men, giving himself up "into the hand of a woman."

Certainly there is irony when he tells her to say that "no [man]" is present when we consider his eventual fate. He will in fact cease to exist, thereby relieving Jael of being forced to tell a lie (Webb: 135). However, the central issue here is not his gender identification but rather his improper request which relieves Jael of any further obligation as host and allows her to choose the means of protecting herself.

(7) Judg 4:21: "But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, till it went down into the ground, as he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died."

Having been lulled into a false sense of security by Jael's actions (milk and covering), Sisera went to sleep (cf. Samson sleeping in Judg 16:14, 19 in Delilah's care and perhaps Yatpan's falling into a drunken stupor before Pughat in the Aqhat legend: CTA 19.213-224). His sleep, fed by "weariness," Jael's ministrations, and perhaps his disdain for his hostess' ability to harm him or defend herself (Williams: 74, Soggin: 78), simply laid him open to elimination.

The tent peg and hammer are, of course, common tools used by women in pitching their tents. Jael's strength is shown in being able to quickly drive the peg entirely through Sisera's skull into the ground (Bal: 65 notes the ironic parallel in Judg 5:30 of spoil for the "neck" expected

by Sisera's mother). If sexual overtones are part of the narrative, this act strikes an ironic note in which the male is the one penetrated. I do not agree with Brenner (119) that Jael actually committed adultery as part of her deception of Sisera, although I would imagine she was prepared to do so (note Brenner's use of the principle of "survival" as the key to the superseding of legal stricture on p. 120). When, as the lyric version states (Judg 5:27), Sisera "fell between her legs" that merely underscores his sexual intentions toward Jael (as Bal: 120 suggests, the hoped for "good lay"), and magnifies the irony of his own penetration.

Jael's strength, in comparison to Sisera's weakness in sleep and as an ineffective leader, is also a piece of irony. Furthermore, the irony of his statement that "no [man]" is here is once again brought out. Sisera had treated Jael as if she were without "personhood"—a servant to be ordered around rather than his hostess (compare Yatpan's boasting in front of an invisible [to him] Pughat: CTA 19.220-221). Jael completes the drama by asserting her existence by depriving Sisera of his.

Sisera was unknowingly a dead man from the moment he entered the area of Jael's tent and accepted her improper offer of hospitality. He had systematically violated every covenant of the code governing the actions of host and guest. He had brought shame upon Jael and her household and now must suffer the shame of death at a woman's hand (see Abimelech's death in Judg 9:53). His death (foretold by Deborah in Judg 4:9) was not only inevitable, but expected. All that was required to complete the narrative was to develop the means of his deception and demise.

8) Judg 4:22: "And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said to him, 'Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.' So he went in to her tent; and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple."

This verse forms an *inclusio*, paralleled with 4:16, describing Barak's pursuit of the fleeing army of Sisera, and with 4:18 in which Jael "came out to meet Sisera" and invited him into her tent (Bal: 92). The fabric of the narrative is thus woven together resuming the story of the aftermath of the battle and providing a sense of *deja vu* in which once again a man is approached by a woman and invited into her tent. The difference arises, however, in that she is not offering him hospitality, merely information and evidence. The fact that Barak also enters Jael's tent is not based on an offer of hospitality, but simply on the fact that is where Sisera's body lay. This reiterates her proper role since only her husband could offer hospitality.

Jael's action is not treacherous. She has not betrayed the alliance between Jabin and Heber. She cannot be placed in the same league with the men of Judah (Judg 15:10-13) who turned Samson over to the Philistines or with the people of Keilah who informed Saul of David's

whereabouts (1 Sam 23:12). The steps that Jael had taken against Sisera had political repercussions, but were not based on a conscious political decision on her part. The narrator has taken great pains to justify Sisera's death based on a series of violations of custom. Sisera had completed this series by telling Jael to stand at the tent door and tell all who came that "no [man]" was there. Now that he was indeed no longer a living man, his remains could be disposed of at the first opportunity. At the same time, Barak had been deprived of the object of his hunt by the actions of a woman. There is shame in this, but he had been forewarned by Deborah (4:9) that this would be the ultimate result of his actions that day (Bal: 120). What is curious in the narrative in chapter 4 is that no description is given of Barak's reaction to finding Sisera's impaled body, nor is there any statement explicitly condemning or glorifying Jael here. This is found only in the lyric version. Judges 5:24 provides the only superlative, "most blessed of women be Jael." In the lyric poem, however, her actions are removed from the realm of law and custom and laid out simply as the proper steps taken by a "friend" of the Lord (5:31).

Conclusion

The principles of reciprocity upon which the hospitality code is based make it clear that the extension of protection and service to strangers is a necessary qualification for maintenance of honor in the ancient Near East. In the biblical narratives, correct adherence to this ideal is best exemplified in the episodes in Genesis 18 and 24. In these cases there is no attempt by the writer to manipulate the social customs. However, in the course of the above discussion of Judges 4 it has been demonstrated that one of the keys to its interpretation is a series of violations of the code of hospitality.

Jael's actions do contain conscious misuse of this ritual to lure Sisera to his death. However, Sisera is more culpable than Jael in his systematic violation of every step in the customary ritual. He brought shame on himself and on the household of Heber by disregarding the proper roles of guest and host. It is the contention of this writer that a conscious effort has been made on the part of the writers/editors of this material to use the strictures of the hospitality code to further heighten the literary character of the story. Each violation provides further assurance to the audience that violence, when it comes, as it surely must, is justified.

Furthermore, on a literary level there is a pairing of the roles of Deborah and Jael and of Barak and Sisera. Both women function as leaders, mothers, and heroines while both men function as disgraced leaders, dependent on women and ultimately defeated by them. What is also evident is that the narrative in Judges 4 is developed from the perspective and the use of the hospitality code while

that in Judges 5 relies on a religious perspective.

Future examination of the use of hospitality customs within the biblical narrative should demonstrate, especially in the case of Genesis 19 and Judges 19, that one way to drive a story to a set end is to manipulate well-known traditions and customs. Thus when characters begin acting in an anti-social or aberrant manner, one explanation the researcher should take into account is the possibility that the writer is trying to make a point about the topsy-turvy nature of the story's setting or is preparing the audience to accept an ending which might otherwise be unacceptable.

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