

# The Mission of Elias

by

Leo Schaya

Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 14, Nos. 3 and 4. (Summer-Autumn, 1980).  
© World Wisdom, Inc.

[www.studiesincomparativereligion.com](http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com)

## Elias' Ascension

And it came to pass, when YHVH would take up Elias into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elias went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elias said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for YHVH hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him. As YHVH liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that YHVH will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elias said unto him. Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for YHVH hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, as YHVH liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that YHVH will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elias said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for YHVH hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As YHVH liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elias took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elias said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elias went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elias that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And

he took the mantle of Elias that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is YHVH God of Elias? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elias doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of YHVH hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not? (2 Kings 2:1-18.)

With these words of Elisha, the Scriptures show that Elias could no longer be found because he had in fact been taken up into Heaven.

### **Elias Comes Down Again from Heaven**

But according to Judaeo-Christian tradition the Prophet Elias (or Elijah)—whose immediate spiritual successor was thus Elisha—was not only raised alive into Heaven but has since come down again many times in secret and continues to reveal himself on earth in mysterious fashion. Thus it is that in Judaism he is invisibly present at the circumcision of every male child eight days after his birth and at every Passover meal celebrated by families; moreover he manifests himself visibly to certain spiritual persons in order to initiate them into the Mysteries of Scripture. For the majority of Israel his presence signifies the blessing which comes down directly from heaven and, for the elite, more particularly an influence that brings enlightenment. His manifestation is destined, in a world approaching its end, to vivify the study and observance of the Law of Moses and, in particular the spiritual realization of his Mysteries. This is touched upon hermeneutically in the closing passage of Malachi (4:4-6): “Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elias the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of YHVH: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

### **Moses and Elias**

The scriptural passage quoted above is rich in significance; it indicates the respective missions of Moses and Elias: that of Moses refers above all to the “Law” or “Doctrine” (Torah)—the Pentateuch—; that of Elias concerns the “Prophet” (*Nebim*)—and, by extension, the “Hagiographies” (*Ketubim*) as well—; these revelations as a whole constitute the Old Testament.

The Law of Moses embraces the entirety of Israel's exoterism and esoterism; its texts are recalled and elaborated—and augmented with accounts of sacred history after Moses—by the Prophets and Hagiographies (these latter consisting of the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles). As for Elias, the Tishbite, he bequeathed no prophetic writing but he appears, as we have just seen, in the book of Kings: among the prophets he represents the type of the “Hidden Master” who initiates the elite of Israel into the esoteric and universal wisdom of the Torah. In other words, in the passage from Malachi quoted above, “Moses” signifies the exoteric law of Israel *which implies esoterism*, whereas “Elias” is the enlivening of exoterism by *esoterism explained* to the elite and realized by them. Finally, “Elias” means not only esoterism and its influence upon Jewish exoterism but also esoterism in its universality, which links the Mysteries of the Torah to those of all the genuine traditions of East and West.

### **Elias, Forerunner of the Messiah**

By his universality, Elias goes beyond his significance for Israel alone and joins that unanimous Tradition which, according to a doctrine found in most religions, goes back to the revelation made by God to the first man. This revelation, which is expressed in the Jewish esoteric exegesis of the Bible (Gen. 11:1) as the “one language”, or the primordial tradition of mankind, was diversified as a result of the confusion of spirits at Babel; it was made manifold in various parallel “tongues” or traditions, and then in those which succeeded one another down through history and which then frequently came to exist side by side. Each of these traditions served, in its own fashion, simply to renew the first and universal revelation of the One, being destined to come together in that revelation's full and final restoration with the ultimate theophany. This will be none other than the “Messiah of Glory”, awaited not only by the faithful of the three Abrahamic religions but also, in one way or another, by those of the majority of living religions. With the Messiah, or “Anointed” of God (*ha-Mashiach* in Hebrew, *al-Masih* in Arabic, *Christós* in Greek) there will come down from heaven the new, unanimous Tradition of mankind which Elias is destined to prepare as the direct forerunner of the Savior; he himself comes down from heaven to “pave the way” for the Messiah, whereas Moses—or Mosaicism—made more particularly the “announcement” of the Anointed one's coming. This “announcement” and this “preparation” respectively were confirmed, for Christianity, among other things on Mount Tabor where Jesus in his Transfiguration revealed himself in his future glory to three of his disciples: “And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” (Matt. 17:1-4).

This Gospel story reinforces the importance attributed by Malachi to Elias, side by side with Moses and with regard to the Messiah. In fact when God, after exhorting Israel to observe the Law of Moses, adds through the mouth of Malachi: “Behold I will send you Elias the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of YHVH”. He reveals thereby that Elias must come down again to the earth both to revivify the Path of Moses and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah; for the “day of YHVH” will inaugurate the future Reign of the Messiah; according to the traditional exegesis he will open up the transition of the present cycle of humanity into the Messianic Reign understood in its perpetual fullness—a passing that implies the end of our world, the resurrection of the dead and the last Judgment. Whereas evil, suffering and death reign in this world, in the world to come, which will be “a new heaven and a new earth,” (cf. Is. 65: 17; Rev. 21:1.), “and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev. 21:4). In this new world, which will be like a single city of spiritual peace and union—called the “New Jerusalem” (ibid., 2)—, every man will be an incorruptible sanctuary in the image of him who is the New Man *par excellence*, The Messiah, the living and midmost Temple of the One who will be truly present; they “shall see His Face” (ibid., 22:4) and this unanimous beatific vision, that is unity or spiritual peace, will be prepared by Elias the ever-living prophet, according to the common tradition of Israel and Christianity. Judaism even affirms that Elias’ preparatory task will include the resurrection of the dead whereas, according to the Christian perspective, it is the Messiah who will not only judge the dead but also bring them to life.

### **The Universal Role of Elias**

In order to announce to the world the spiritual peace which the Messiah will establish forever when “the first things shall have passed away”, Elias will raise his voice so loud, as the end of time draws close, that it will be heard, according to Jewish tradition, from one end of the world to the other. This means that Elias’ mission will not be confined to Israel, but will extend to all peoples and thus to all religions. Such is, moreover, the sense of the words of Scripture quoted above: “And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”, that is to say, the end will not come without the last men that are open to truth and grace being saved by their respective traditions and prepared for the advent of the Messiah. In fact the relationships between “fathers” and “children” here signify the revealed and salvational traditions, the authentic religions, which open up the door of eternal salvation to believers and to such of them as have a thirst for the absolute, give access to the ultimate spiritual deliverance of union with the One. The “*heart*” of the fathers” is the inward, central, essential aspect of the traditions,—their esoteric, spiritual, universe kernel—as well as the teachings, methods and influences that flow out from them. The “*heart* of the children” is their spiritual receptivity,—their inward acceptance and reception of what is given them by their “fathers” or their respective traditions. This acceptance and reception is translated in Hebrew by the term *qabbalah*, which has become synonymous quite specifically

with the esoteric tradition of which the prophet Elias is the invisible Master, who comes down by secret into this world, not only towards the end but each time since his ascension that tradition needs to be brought alive again from within. But towards the end as we have just seen, this descent of Eliatic instruction and influence will become general; it will become so, in principal, through all the “fathers”, all the intrinsically orthodox religions. Elias “will proclaim peace” between them, that is, he will reveal their *essential and transcendent unity* which, on the final advent of the Messiah, and only then, will make itself manifest in a new, *unanimous form of affirmation of the One*. “On that day, YHVH shall be one (the Divine Essence will reveal itself to all mankind as the only real Presence) and His Name (the mode of His affirmation) shall be one (for all the believers in the world)” (Zechariah 14:9).

### **The Function of Elias Delegated to Others**

A particular aspect of the universal function of Elias is the fact that it can be exercised by persons other than himself. His mission, emanating from him by way of his universal influence, can in fact be performed not only by himself but also by delegation, with the concurrence of elite representatives of the various religions; each of them comes to revivify his own religion—whilst, it may be, also stimulating the others—from the “heart”, the spiritual essence of the tradition. This essence is to be identified with the transcendent and universal reality of all religions; it shows itself as the unique truth underlying metaphysics, cosmology and the doctrine of man as these are explained throughout the various religions; it reveals itself as the unity within their multiplicity without however confusing their forms which are, let us insist, destined to be maintained as they stand until the ultimate advent of the Messiah. Thus, Elias signifies not only a particular prophet sent to Israel but a universal function susceptible of being exercised by several persons both within Judaism and within the other traditions whatever names be given them to the unique heavenly source of the “Spirit that bloweth where it listeth”. The possibility of his manifold personification emerges, among other things, from the Gospels which identify John the Baptist with him who “crieth in the desert and prepareth the way of the Lord” (Matt 3:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23). He who is first thus designated by Isaiah (40:3) is—according to Jewish tradition—the forerunner of the Messiah, the prophet Elias. John the Baptist refused to be identified with Elias; however he declared himself to be the one of whom Isaiah spoke and, by this seeming contradiction, he made it precisely clear that, without being Elias in person, he exercised the Eliatic function for his own period and in his own orbit. The Gospel confirms, in fact, that it is he who goes before the Messiah on his first coming; and Jesus, after the beheading of John the Baptist, continues to prophecy the return of Elias, this time for the period preceding the *parousia* (the Second Coming of Christ): “Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things” (Matt 17:11).

### **Elias, Al-Khidr and the Mahdī**

Islamic tradition recognizes, for its part, a spiritual tradition corresponding to that of Elias and affirms that it is exercised notably by two personages each having his own sphere of activity. We are not speaking here of Elias himself, who is mentioned in the Koran by the side of Jesus (6:85) and in the struggle against the worshippers of Baal (37:123-132); it concerns in the first place *al-Khidr* or *al-Khādir*, the “green one” or the “verdant”, who bears in the esoteric tradition of Islam the same fundamental characteristics as Elias, at least those that bear upon his function as the “ever-living” spiritual Master who comes down suddenly from a world above the earth in order to manifest himself in secret to him who thirsts for the Absolute. He is above all the Master of the spiritual solitaries, the elite beings to whom he reveals himself as an ocean of initiatic and universal wisdom, an inexhaustible source of enlightenment, a conserver and giver of eternal “water of life”. As for the other personage who reflects Elias in Islam, he it is who will come at the end to establish once and for all what the Judeo-Christian tradition calls the “Reign of the Glorified Messiah”: this is *al-Mahdī*, the “guided by God”. He resembles Elias not insofar as he “prepares” the advent of the Messiah, but in so far as he “accompanies” him in his eschatological task. In fact, according to Muslim tradition, the *Mahdī* will reveal and realize in detail everything that Jesus “the Messiah, Son of Mary” will cause to come down from heaven; it names this revelation and realization the “Book of Divination and of the Sum of all Things” (*Kitābu’l-Jafri wa’l-Jāmi’ah*). According to the esoteric exegesis of the Koran attributed to al-Qāshānī, this “Book will be read (its contents will be manifested) as it is in reality (and not by a simple verbal exposition), by him (the *Mahdī*) alone”. This Book “embraces that which has been (from all eternity, that is, the ‘Eternal Decree’ or the eternal archetypes of things) and that which shall be (manifested from this ‘Decree’, that is, the ‘assigned Destiny’ of things)—the Book that was pledged—as surely coming (and whose manifestation will, on the one hand, reveal the Archetypes or Metaphysics and, on the other unroll the eschatological or Messianic events)—This is in accord with the saying of Jesus—on Whom be Peace: ‘We bring you the Descent (*at-Tanzīl*) of the Word, but its Interpreting (*at-Ta’wīl*: the “real” Interpretation or the earthly realization of This Descent) is the *Mahdī* who, at the end of time, shall come with it’”.

### **The Book of Elias**

Here, then, we find again the role of Elias inasmuch as he “must come to re-establish all things” when the present world passes over to the future world. According to the Judaic perspective, he will re-establish all things, spiritually to begin with and, in the first place, within Israel. He will begin by explaining to the children of Israel everything in the Law of Moses that has become unclear to them because of their transgressing that Law, with the result that their Temples were destroyed and they have been dispersed and persecuted throughout the world. Even their traditional exegesis of the Law has been impregnated by this lack of clarity, this uncertainty of spirit, as emerges notably from the Babylonian Talmud where many interpretations of the Scriptures are found to be without any conclusion and to end with the enigmatic word *Teiqu*, written *TeIQuV*. This word is composed from the initial letters of four words forming the

sentence: *Tishbi letarets Qushioth Veyabaoth*, meaning “The Tishbite (Elias) will resolve the difficulties and problems”; that is to say, all traditional and spiritual problems that remain pending for lack of valid explanation will receive an answer through Elias when he comes to prepare the advent of the Messiah. Elias will resolve not only the problems arising from these incomplete passages in the Talmudic exegesis, but will cause Israel to know the perfect and definitive interpretation of the Divine Word revealed by the Torah of Moses; moreover, he will set the ultimate revelation of the Torah’s content into such an unfolding that all the world shall “see” and “live” the eschatological prophecies of Scripture. This revelation of Eternal Truth and this actualization of the Messianic prophecies constitute the contents of the “Book of Justice” (*Sefer ha-Yashar*) which Elias must bring with him and which corresponds to the Book of the *Mahdī*. According to Jewish tradition, the entire Torah of Moses amounts to no more than a single line of the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which means that this Book, by virtue of its being not “scriptural” but “operative” in nature, will be the veritable final accomplishment of Scripture, the “realization” which by definition goes immeasurably beyond the “letter”. At the same time, Judaism tacitly places the remaining “lines” of this “Book” at the disposal of all the Divine revelations, whatever they may be, each one formulating or announcing in its fashion the same Eternal Truth and the same Destiny of man and the world. The “Book” of Elias is the integral Wisdom of the unanimous Tradition and the eschatological Manifestation of the one and only Principle. For the Jews, Elias represents the transition from their traditional exclusiveness to the universality which they too possess, since they affirm that the Tishbite will raise his voice so loud to announce spiritual peace that it will be heard from one end of the earth to the other; and the Doctors of the Law teach that “the righteous of all nations have a portion in the life to come” or, again, that “all men who are not idolaters can be considered Israelites”.

### **Elias, Builder of the New Jerusalem**

This said, the “Book of Elias”, in comparison with which the “Torah of Moses” amounts to no more than a single line, is itself no more than a foretoken of the “Torah of the Messiah”, the spiritual reality of which is that of the “New Alliance” in the full sense of the term, namely the future state of perpetual union between mankind and God. Elias must re-establish all things in the name of, and for the sake of, that spiritual “peace” which the Messiah will bring once and for all: it will be crystallized forever in the New Jerusalem “founded by—or for—peace”, according to the etymology of *Yerushalem* or *Yerushalaim*. Elias came down, and has come down for centuries, to the world below to prepare, with the concurrence of those he inspires, this final state of humanity. He reveals, little by little and more intensively and generally towards the end, the spiritual and universal essence, the transcendent unity of all the authentic religions. It is as if the radiant city were being patiently built by putting one luminous stone after another into place. The motivating power of this task can be called the “Eliatic flow”, at least in the orbit of Judeo-Christian Tradition, whereas other traditions will each use their own terms to describe this same universal flow. According to the terminology of Jewish esoterism, this flow belongs to the “river

of highest Eden”, the “river of Yobel” or “great Jubilee”, which is final Deliverance. Revelations calls it the “river of water of life, clear as crystal” (Rev. 22:1); it will be crystallized in “precious stones”, the unquenchable lights of the New Jerusalem. The new City of God and men will be in fact like a single immense crystal, whose myriad faces will blaze—as Revelation says (21:18-21)—like jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, amethyst and pearl, bathed in the light of “pure gold”, all these “stones” will be so many aspects of the single “foundation Stone” of the World, the single Divine Presence revealing itself to all future humanity.

### **The Eliatic Flow in Our Own Age**

Faced with this eschatological doctrine, in which Elias and the spiritual flow that bears his name play a leading role, one may well ask how much this has to do with humanity in our own day. The traditions declare that we are now in the last age. But it would go far beyond the framework of this present article to go into the details of traditional criteriology concerning the cycles of mankind. In any case we do not intend to concern ourselves with the duration of this last age; it suffices us to look at things as they present themselves unambiguously to us today. We can perceive, among other things, that mankind is facing its own total destruction by monstrous material means that it has forged for itself with the concurrence of its vaunted scientific progress: it has virtually brought the world close to its end. Even if, according to the traditions, it is not man but God who will bring our world to its close, this destruction will be, according to the Scriptures, His response to the very Promethianism or “Satanism” that has led mankind to its present situation and which will not cease to add further to its provocations against Heaven.

The present situation shows to anyone who can see, that the “hard shell” created by materialism, and which is tending to imprison our world more and more to the point of stifling all life, is beginning to “crack”. It is as if fissures were opening up in the earth’s foundation, through which infra-human and chaotic influences were seeping out. These malefic influences seem to be spreading not only as bestial forces overturning everything that modern civilization thought it had set up once and for all to replace ancient traditional cultures, but also as pseudo-traditional or pseudo-spiritual currents misleading a younger generation that is starved of the real nature of things—the True and the Real. Fortunately, any world that continues to exist implies a certain balance by definition, no matter how precarious; when the terrestrial globe—to take up the thread of our symbolism—begins to crack, it brings about, according to traditional teachings, not only fissures “below” but “above” as well. From the upper fissures which represent so many apertures of the Good and of Grace opposing the evil surging up from the depths, there streams down a spiritual light that is able to illuminate the “hearts of the children” of Adam and lead them to the “hearts of the fathers”, the spirituality of the traditions.

This spirituality appears, despite the contrary currents launched by the “Adversary”, to be making headway; one notes at the outward level, among other things, the growing interest in

comparative religion, in the metaphysics of East and West and the various authentic paths leading man to the absolute. But it is important, as far as contemporary literature on this unanimous spirituality is concerned, to distinguish very carefully between what really expresses the truth revealed by the traditions—such as the works of Frithjof Schuon—and what is only a very inadequate, or even completely false, approach to it. The true “Eliatic flow” will grow stronger, according to the Scriptures, as the world’s darkness grows deeper, until the final moment. Then “... your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of YHVH come. And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of YHVH shall be saved”. (Joel 2:28-32).