**Stories of Elijah’s Revelations in Talmudic Literature**

**Masters Thesis Abstract**

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In Talmudic literature, we find fifty-one stories describing encounters between various individuals and the prophet Elijah.

An encounter with a biblical personality is a unique and curious phenomenon. But what was unique about Elijah that cast him in the role of meeting these Sages? What is the connection between the biblical Elijah and the Talmudic Elijah? What takes place in these stories and what are their messages?

The purpose of this study is to provide answers to these questions, to characterize the nature of each of these narratives, and to employ philological and literary tools to examine these complex stories.

In my opinion, Elijah was “chosen” to be the personality who serves as a mediator between the Sages and the higher spiritual world because of his unusual disappearance "in a heavenly whirlwind," and due to his mission, which was assigned to him by the prophet Malachi: “Behold I am sending you the prophet Elijah.”

In the Bible, Elijah is a prophet who fights against idol worship and who metes out a severe drought that lasts for a period of three years.

According to the Mekhilta, Elijah was a zealous prophet. He defended the honor of God, but not of the Jewish people. For this reason, the gift of prophecy was taken from him and Elisha was appointed as a prophet in his stead.

In Talmudic literature, Elijah has a more nuanced character, and the stories in which he appears suggest that his role is to repair the fractures caused by the Biblical Elijah.

In these encounters, Elijah informs the Sages that God shares in the sorrow of the Jewish people’s exile, and that the Messiah is waiting daily for the moment when the Jewish people will be worthy of redemption which is a long process that continues to be mysteriously woven.

In some cases, Elijah reveals himself to a Sage only once, and in others he frequently visits the same Sage. However, meriting his revelation requires a tremendous level of moral behavior that goes far beyond what *halacha* (Jewish law) refers to as *mishnat hassidim* (the teachings of the pious).

What is particularly surprising is the fact that Elijah does not only appear to outstanding rabbinic Sages, but also to nameless individuals who display, through their actions, concern and sensitivity towards society.

At times, Elijah miraculously appears in order to save a Sage from physical assault or from economic disaster, but at other times he appears in order to help a Sage accept a decision that enables him to achieve further spiritual growth.

Elijah invites Sages to join him in the *metivta d’rakia* (the Heavenly Academy), the study hall where Sages continue learning after they die. Particularly surprising is the fact that behavior there is identical to what occurs in our own world, where tolerance is shown towards a range of views and where Elijah, and even God, endeavor to accept the decisions of the majority.

There are instances where we encounter Elijah serving as an ongoing study-partner to one of the Sages, and there are incidents where he spontaneously meets one of the Sages and initiates a midrashic or halachic conversation.

Elijah appears in a broad range of contexts, depending on the situation and the atmosphere of each story. In some cases, the hero of the story identifies Elijah, and in others it is left to the narrator of the story to identify Elijah.

Similarly, he sometimes appears as a simple guest, other times as one of the Sages, and on occasion even as a member of the ruling elite, as a bear, or as a prostitute.

I have found that in some stories, Elijah does not appear in the original version. Instead, over the course of its retelling, the story took on a dramatic and supernatural dimension that includes interweaving the personality of Elijah.