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The Eliatic Function

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IN an article headed *"Le `mystère' juif et la `vertu' d'Elie"*[1], Jean Reyor referred briefly to the problem of the survival of Judaism in connection with the spiritual influence of the prophet Elias. A quarter of a century later we ourselves dealt at length with the Jewish "mystery" in our article *"La Théophanie sinairique"*[2]. We propose now to examine the Eliatic function, not only with reference to Judaism but also in its universal aspect. In order to do this we will begin with the scriptural passage which tells both of Elias' ascension to heaven and of the investiture of his immediate spiritual successor, Elisha:

> And it came to pass, when *YHVH*[3] would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah 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 to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah 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 to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah 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 Elijah 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 Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, 1 pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he (Elijah) 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 Elijah 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 Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters and said, Where is *YHVH* God of Elijah? 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 Elijah 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 (Elijah) 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?"

Through the words of Elisha, the Scripture (from which we have just quoted, II *Kings* II, 1-18) shows that Elias could not be found because he had truly been raised to heaven. Now according to Judeo-Christian tradition the prophet Elias not only ascended alive to heaven, but has, since his ascension, descended many times in secret and continues mysteriously to make himself known on earth. And thus, in Judaism, he is invisibly present at every circumcision of a male infant on the eighth day after his birth, and also at every Passover meal celebrated by families; in addition, he reveals himself to certain spiritual persons in order to initiate them into the Mysteries of the Scripture. To the majority of Israel his presence signifies the blessing which descends directly from heaven, and to the elect more particularly he represents the illuminating influence. The Eliatic manifestation is destined, in a world which is moving towards its end, to revive the study and observance of the Law of Moses and, in particular, the spiritual realization of his Mysteries. This is what can be derived from an hermeneutical interpretation of the following final passage of *Malachi* (III, 22-24):

> Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgements. Behold, I will send you Elijah 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.

The scriptural passage which we have just quoted is rich in meaning: it points out, among other things, the two different missions of Moses and Elias: the former relates primarily to the "Law" or "Doctrine" (*Torah*) — the Pentateuch —, the latter to the "Prophets" (*Nebiim*) — and, in a wider sense, to the "Hagiographers" (*Ketubim*) as well, — the whole of all these revelations composing the Old Testament. The Law of Moses or the Pentateuch comprises the totality of the exoterism and the esoterism of Israel; its texts are recalled and developed — and augmented with accounts of post-Mosaic events in sacred history — by the Prophets and Hagiographers (these latter uniting the *Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Esdras, Nehemiah* and *Chronicles*). As for Elias, the Tishbite, he has left no prophetic work, but appears, as we have seen, in the *Book of Kings:* he represents, among the prophets, the type of the "hidden Master", he who initiates the elect 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 legacy of Israel which *implies esoterism,* while Elias is the animation of exoterism from the starting point of the *esoterism made explicit* to the elect and realized by them. Finally, "Elias" signifies not only esoterism and its influence on Jewish exoterism, but also esoterism in its universality which links the Mysteries of the *Torah* with those of all the authentic traditions of the East and West.

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In his universality Elias goes beyond his purely Israelitic significance and joins the unanimous Tradition which, according to a doctrine found in the majority of religions, goes back to the revelation from God made to the first man. This revelation, expressed, according to the Jewish esoteric exegesis of the Bible (*Gen.* XI, 1), in the "one language" or primordial tradition of humanity, was diversified as a result of the confusion of the spirits at Babel. It became multiplied into several initially parallel "languages" or traditions and then into those which followed, and often co-existed, throughout history. Each of these traditions simply renewed in its

own way the first and universal revelation of the One, which is destined to end in its full and definitive restoration at the time of the ultimate theophany. This will join with the revelation of the "Messiah of Glory", awaited not only by the faithful of the three Abrahamic religions but, in one way or another, by those of most of the living religions. With the Messiah or the "Lord's Anointed" (*ha-Mashîah* in Hebrew, *al-Masîh* in Arabic, *Christós* in Greek) there will descend from heaven the new unanimous Tradition of humanity that Elias is summoned to prepare for in his role as immediate precursor of the Saviour; he himself descends from heaven to "pave the way" for the Messiah, while Moses — or Mosaism — has acted above all as the "herald" of the Anointed One. This Mosaic "proclamation" and this Eliatic "preparation" were confirmed, among other things, on Mount Tabor, according to Christianity, where Jesus, at the time of his Transfiguration, revealed himself to three of his disciples in his future glory.

> …Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an 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.* XVII. 1-5).

This story from the Gospel corroborates the importance attached by Malachi to Elias, next to Moses and in relation to the Messiah. In fact when God, having exhorted Israel to observe the Law of Moses, adds through the mouth of Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of *YHVH…",* He thereby reveals that Elias must return to earth, as much to give life to the Mosaic way as to prepare for the coming of the Messiah; for the "Day of *YHVH"* is the day which will see the beginning of the future Reign of the Anointed: it will set in motion, says the traditional exegesis, the passing of the current cycle of humanity to the Messianic Reign understood in its eternal fullness, — a passing which implies the end of our world, the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgement. While evil, suffering and death reign in this world, in the world to come, formed of "new heavens and a new earth" (cf. *Is.* LXV, 17; *Rev.* XXI, 1), "... There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain:" (*Rev.,* ibid. 4). In this new world which will be like a unique 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 supreme new Man, the Messiah, the living central temple of the One really present: they "shall see his face" (*ibid.,* XXII, 4) and this unanimous beatific vision, this unity, or spiritual peace, are being prepared, according to the tradition shared by Israel and Christianity, by Elias, the ever-living prophet. Judaism even states that the preparatory work of Elias will also include the resurrection of the dead, while in the Christian perspective it is the Messiah who will bring the dead to life before he judges them.

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When, towards the end of time, he returns to announce to the world the spiritual peace which the Messiah will found for ever when "the first things have disappeared", Elias will raise his voice so loud, says Jewish tradition, that it will be heard from one end of the earth to another. This means that Elias' mission is not confined to Israel, but will spread to all peoples and thereby to all religions. Such too is the universal meaning 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 that the end of the world will not come before the last men open to the truth and to grace will be saved by their respective traditions and prepared for the advent of the Messiah. In fact, the relations between "fathers" and "children" mean here the revealed and saving tradition, the authentic religions which open the door of eternal salvation to believers, and to those who long for the Absolute, for access to the ultimate spiritual deliverance, union with the One. The "heart of the fathers" is the central inward aspect, the essence of the tradition, their esoteric, spiritual and universal nucleus; it is also the doctrines, methods and influences which are derived from them. The "heart of the children" or believers, is their spiritual receptivity, their inward acceptance and reception of what is given them by their "fathers" or respective traditions. This acceptance or reception is expressed in Hebrew by the word *qabbalah,* which has become synonymous quite specifically with the esoteric tradition, in which Elias is the invisible Master, he who descends secretly to this low world, not only towards the end, but, since the ascension, each time tradition has needed reviving from within. Now, as we have just seen, as the end approaches, this descent of the Eliatic teaching and influence will spread; it will be felt in principle throughout all the "fathers", all the intrinsically orthodox religions. Elias will "proclaim peace" among them, that is to say he will reveal their *essential and transcendant unity* which will be made manifest at the time of the final coming of the Messiah, and only then, in a new *unanimous form* of affirmation of the One. "In that day shall there be one *YHVH* (the divine Essence will reveal Itself to the whole of humanity as the only real Presence), and His Name (the manner of His affirmation) one (for all the believers of the world)". (*Zacharia* XIV, 9).

One aspect peculiar to the universal function of Elias resides in the fact that this function can be exercised by others than Elias. In fact, his mission, emanating from him by means of his universal influence, may be carried out not only by Elias himself but also by delegation, with the assistance of representatives of the elect of the various religions; each of them revives his own religion — and stimulates others, if necessary — from its "heart", from the spiritual essence of the tradition. This essence is identified with the transcendent and universal reality of all religions; it manifests itself as the sole truth underlying the metaphysics, the cosmology and the doctrine of man, such as they express themselves through the various traditions; it reveals itself as the unity within their multiplicity, without merging their respective forms, which are destined, we repeat, to be maintained as they are until the ultimate coming of the Messiah. Elias, therefore, means not only a prophet sent to Israel, but also a universal function which may be exercised by several people, both within Judaism and within other traditions, and whatever be the names given by these traditions to the unique celestial source of this descent of the "Spirit which bloweth where it listeth". The possibility of his multiple personification is made evident in the Gospel, which identifies John the Baptist with him who "crieth in the wilderness and prepareth the way of the Lord" (*Matt.* 111, 3; *Luke* III, 4-6; *John* I, 23). He who is thus denoted first *by Isaiah* (XL, *3*), is — according to Jewish tradition — the precursor of the Messiah, the immortal prophet Elias. John the Baptist refused to be confused with him; however, he affirmed that he was the one of whom Isaiah spoke, and by this apparent contradiction he made it quite evident that, without being Elias in person, he exercised in his own time and orbit the Eliatic function. In fact the Gospel confirms that he is the one who precedes the Messiah in his first coming, and after the beheading of John the Baptist Jesus continues to predict the return of Elias, this time for the period preceding the parousia: "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things." (*Matt.* XVII, *2*). In addition the Eliatic function seems also to be exercised in Christianity by the apostle John,

of whom Jesus says to Peter: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (*John* XXI, 22, 23).

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The Moslem tradition also has a spiritual function which corresponds to that of Elias, and affirms that it is exercised by two people in particular, each of whom has his own field of activity. We do not mean Elias himself, who is mentioned in the Koran along with Jesus (VI, 85) and also in his battle against the worshippers of Baal (XXXVII, 123-132); firstly, it is Al-Khidr or *Al-Khâdir,* the "Green" or "Verdant", who, in the esoteric tradition of Islam, is invested with the same fundamental characteristics as Elias, or at least with those of his function as spiritual Master, "ever-living" and descending suddenly from a supra-terrestrial world to manifest himself in secret to anyone eager for the Absolute. He is, above all, Master of the spiritual solitaries, of those elect beings to whom he reveals himself as an ocean of initiating and universal wisdom, an inexhaustible source of enlightenment, a witholder and giver of the "water of life". As for the other person who reflects Elias in Islam, he is the one who will come at the end to establish what the Judeo-Christian tradition calls the "Glorious Reign of the Messiah", he is *Al-Mahdî,* the one "Guided" by God. Shi„ite Islam identifies him with the twelfth Imam, living hidden for centuries and due to re-appear to fulfill his eschatalogical work. According to a Moslem tradition the Mahdî will reveal and realize in detail what Jesus "the Messiah, son of Mary", will have caused to descend in a synthetic way from heaven; it calls this revelation and realization the "Book of the Parchment and of the Sum of all things" (*Kitâbu-l-Jafri wa-l-Jâmi„ah*). According to the esoteric exegesis of the Koran attributed to Al-Qâshânî, this "Book will be read (its content will be made manifest) such as it is in reality (and not only simply by word of mouth), by him (the Mahdî) alone". This Book "includes what has been (in all eternity, that is to say the "eternal Decree" or the eternal Archetypes of things) and what will be (manifest of this "Decree"; that is the "Destiny allotted" to things). (It is the) Book whose advent was promised (and whose manifestation would on the one hand reveal the Archetypes or Metaphysics, and on the other hand operate the eschatalogical or Messianic event). This is in accord with the word of Jesus, on whom be Peace: "We bring you the Descent (*at-Tanzil*) *of* the Word, but it is the Mahdî who will come with its Interpretation (*at-Tawwîl:* the "real" Interpretation or the earthly realization of that Descent) at the end of time."[4]

And so it is in this that we find the role of Elias insofar as he "must come to restore all things" at the time of the transition of the present world to the future world. According to the Judaic point of view he will restore all things, spiritually to begin with, and in the first place within Israel. He will begin by explaining to the children of Israel all that has become obscure to them in the Law of Moses because of their transgressions of that Law, which brought in their train the destruction of their Temples and their dispersion and persecution throughout the world. Even their traditional exegesis of the Law has been permeated by this growing obscurity, by this uncertainty of spirit, particularly as shown in the Babylonian Talmud, where one finds numerous inconclusive interpretations of the Scripture which end with the enigmatic term *Teiqu,* written *TeIQuV.* Now this term is merely a joining up of the initial letters of the four words which make up the phrase: *Tishbi Ietarets Qushioth Veyabaoth,* "The Tishbite (Elias) will resolve difficulties and problems" that is to say that all the traditional or spiritual questions which have remained in suspense for want of valid explanations, will find their solution through the prophet Elias when he comes to prepare for the advent of the Messiah. Elias will not only resolve the problems

relating to the incomplete passages of Talmudic exegesis already mentioned but he will also teach Israel the perfect and definitive interpretation of the divine Word revealed by the Torah of Moses; in addition he will unlock the ultimate revelation of the content of the Torah, so that everyone will "see" and "live" the eschatalogical prophecies of Scripture. This revelation of the eternal Truth and this actualization of the Messianic prophecies form the content of the "Book of Justice" (*Sepher ha-Yashar*) that Elias is to bring and which corresponds to the Book of the Mahdî. According to Jewish tradition, the whole of the Torah of Moses represents proportionally but one line of the *Sepher ha-Yashar,* which means that this "Book", by virtue not only of its "scriptural" but also its "operative" character, will be the ultimate fulfillment of Scripture, the "realization" which, by definition, goes far beyond the "letter". At the same time Judaism tacitly puts the other "lines" of this "Book" at the disposal of all divine revelations, whatever they are, each one formulating or announcing in its own way 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 eschatalogical Manifestation of the unique Principle. Elias represents to the Jews the passage from their traditional exclusivism to the universality that 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 world to another; and the Doctors of the Law teach that "the just of all nations have their part in the future life", and moreover that all "the men, who are not idolaters can be considered as „Israelites"".

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Having said this, the "Book of Elias", in comparison with which the *"Torah* of Moses" only represents proportionally a single line, is itself no more than a prefiguration of the *"Torah* of the Messiah" of which the spiritual reality is that of the "New Covenant" in the full sense of the word, namely the future state of perpetual union of humanity and God. Elias must restore all things in the name of and in view of this spiritual "peace" that 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.* Over and over again across the centuries Elias has descended to prepare, with the assistance of those he inspires, this final state of humanity. Gradually and, towards the end, in a more intensified and general manner, he reveals the spiritual and universal essence, the transcendent unity of all authentic religions. It is as if someone were patiently constructing a radiant city, placing one luminous stone upon another. The motivating force of this work can be called the "Eliatic current", at least within the orbit of Judeo-Christian tradition, while other traditions have their own terms to describe this universal current. According to the terminology of the Kabbalah this current belongs to the "river of the supreme Eden", to the "river of the *Yobel"* or "great Jubilee", which is the final Deliverance. *Revelation* calls it "the river of water of life, clear as crystal" (XXII, 1): it will "crystallize" into the "precious stones", the inextinguishable lights of the New Jerusalem. The new City of God and of men will indeed be like a single great crystal, whose myriad facets will shine — forever according to *Revelation* (XXI, 18-21)—like jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysophrasus, jacinth, amethyst and pearl. Bathed in a light of "pure gold", all these stones will be as aspects of the one "fundamental Stone" of the world, of the single divine Presence revealing itself to all future humanity.

Confronted with this eschatological doctrine in which Elias or the spiritual current bearing his name plays a leading role, one might inquire as to what extent this concerns contemporary

man. Now the traditions affirm that we are in the final epoch. But to go into the details of the traditional criteria relating to the cycles of humanity would mean going far beyond the framework of this article. In any case, we do not intend to concern ourselves with the duration of the final epoch: it is sufficient for us to look at things as they unmistakably are nowadays. What we see, amongst other things, is that humanity is courting its own total destruction, by the monstrous material means that it has made for itself with the help of so-called scientific progress; it has virtually brought the world close to its end. Even if, according to the traditions, it is God, and not man, who will put an end to the world, this destruction will be His response to the Prometheanism or Luciferianism which has brought humanity to its present predicament and which will never cease to increase its provocation of Heaven:

The present situation shows to him who has eyes to see that the "carapace" created by materialism, and which is tending to imprison our world more and more to the point of suffocating all life in it, is beginning to "crack". It is as if fissures have formed in the foundations of the earth by means of which infra-human and chaotic elements have infiltrated. These malefic influences appear to be multiplying, not only as bestial forces overthrowing all that modern civilization believed it had installed forever to replace the old traditional cultures, but also as pseudo-traditional or pseudo-spiritual currents which lead astray above all a youth thirsting for the true nature of things, for the True and the Real. Happily a world, by the fact that it exists, implies by definition a certain equilibrium, however precarious this equilibrium may be. When the terrestrial globe — to pick up once more the thread of our symbolism — begins to crack, according to the traditional teachings, fissures occur not only "below", but also "above". Through the upper fissures, which represent openings of Good and of Grace in the face of the evil arising from the abysses, there penetrates a spiritual light which can enlighten the "hearts of the children" of Adam and bring them back to the "hearts of the fathers", to the spirituality of the traditions.

This spirituality, despite the many counter-currents unleashed by the "Adversary", seems to be clearing a way for itself, as witness on the outward level, amongst other things, the growing interest in comparative religion, in the metaphysics of East and West, and in the various authentic ways leading man to the Absolute. But one must take great care, as regards contemporary literature relating to this unanimous spirituality, to distinguish between what really expresses the truth revealed by the traditions and what only represents an imperfect, or indeed utterly distorted, approach. The true "Eliatic current" will intensify, according to Scripture, in direct proportion to the progressive darkening of the world, and it will continue to do so to the very last 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 terrible day of YHVH come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of YHVH shall be delivered". (*Joel,* III, 1-5).

[1] Etudes Traditionelles No. 280; Dec. 1949.
[2] E.T., nos. 442-445, 1974.
[3] In conformity with Jewish practice, we transcribe the Tetragram *YHVH* without vocalization.
[4] Cf. *Etudes Traditionelles*, No. 380: Abdu-r-Razzâq Al-Qâshâni "The Esoteric Interpretations of the Koran: On the Isolated Letters" (translated and annotated by M. Vâlsan. On the subject of Elias and Al-Khidr, cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy's article "Khwâjâ Khadir and the Fountain of Life" in *Etudes Traditionelles* No. 224-225, a special number devoted to Sufism.