

Eliyahu HaNavi and the Final Redemption

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If someone in *Tanach* were to herald the final redemption, who would it be? Perhaps it would be Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the leader who takes the Jewish People out of Egypt (*Shemot* 13-14) and is the catalyst for their becoming a nation at *Har Sinai* (*Shemot* 19-34). Moshe, the unparalleled prophet, about whom it is written, “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom the Lord singled out, face to face” (*Devarim* 34:10). If not Moshe, maybe the one deserving to announce the coming of the *Mashiach* would be Yechezkel, the prophet who merits to see the esoteric vision of *Maaseh Merkavah* (*Yechezkel* 1), a representation of God’s heavenly throne and His presence leaving the *Beit HaMikdash*.¹ Yechezkel, whose final prophecies detail the third *Beit HaMikdash* and the times of the final redemption (*Yechezkel* 40-48), seems like the perfect candidate to herald the redemption. Yet, it is neither Moshe *Rabbeinu* nor Yechezkel who will warn the people to return to *Hashem* before the Day of Judgement,² bring peace to the world³, and announce the coming of the *Mashiach*, but rather it will be Eliyahu *HaNavi*. As it is written in Malachi, “Behold I will send the prophet Eliyahu to you before the coming of the awesome fearful day of *Hashem*. And he shall reconcile parents with children and children with parents so that when I come I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction” (*Malachi* 3:23-24).

While Eliyahu is clearly on a high spiritual level as he is a *navi*, performs many great miracles including reviving a child (*Melachim* I 17:19-22), and is taken to heaven in a whirlwind (*Melachim* II 2:11), when looking at an overarching view of how Eliyahu is portrayed in *Tanach*, it seems odd that Eliyahu is the one who will herald the redemption. Story after story, Eliyahu is portrayed in *Tanach* as not having mercy on the Jewish People and being overly zealous. This is

¹ Radak on Yechezkel 1:1

² Rambam Hilchos Melachim 12:2

³ Mishnah Edyot 8:7, view of Chachamim. Rambam brings this down in Hilchos Melachim 12:2

illustrated when he announces a three-year drought (*Melachim I 17:1*), when he mocks the prophets of idolatry on Har Carmel and subsequently kills many of them (*Melachim I 18:21-40*), when he flees to the desert away from the people (*Melachim I 19:3-4*), and when God replaces him as *navi* (*Melachim I 19:16*). Why then is this extremely zealous, fiery prophet, who is distanced from the people, chosen to announce the coming of *Mashiach* over other *neviim*? What is it about Eliyahu that he merits this great honor of helping people return to God, heralding the redemption and bringing peace to the world? Why specifically him over anyone else?

To answer this question, we are going to delve into Eliyahu's character as it is portrayed in *Tanach* from two perspectives. One outlook depicts Eliyahu as a highly elevated prophet but one who often acts without God's command or approval, is overly zealous and does not have enough mercy on the Jewish People. The other viewpoint portrays Eliyahu as an angel-like figure who always acts with *Hashem's* approval or command and who is elevated to the point that he seems out-of-this-world. After understanding Eliyahu's character, we will then discuss three approaches that can help us understand why he is chosen to herald the redemption.

Part IA. The First Depiction of Eliyahu in Tanach

The first depiction of Eliyahu drawn from *Tanach* is an elevated prophet who is single-mindedly focused on God's honor that he often does not show enough compassion for the Jewish People and acts without God's command or consent in many situations. This image of Eliyahu can be traced through almost all of the Eliyahu-focused stories in *Tanach* beginning from the first time he is introduced in *Melachim I 17*. Eliyahu *HaNavi* first appears on the scene during the time of Achav, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, about whom the *navi* writes, "[he] d[oes] what [i]s displeasing to the Lord, more than all who preceded him" (*Melachim I*

16:30). It is during this period, when idolatry is rampant, that Eliyahu steps in as *navi* for the Northern Kingdom. With only a brief introduction to whom he is, “Eliyahu the Tishbite, an inhabitant of Gilead” (*Melachim I 17:1*), we hear of Eliyahu telling Achav there will be a drought with “no dew or rain except at my bidding” (*Melachim I 17:1*). This strange declaration of Eliyahu can shed much light on his personality.

In an act of zealotry for God, Eliyahu declares a three year drought, causing much devastation to the people and land. *Chazal*⁴ explain that Eliyahu declares a drought in response to a conversation he has with Achav after paying a *shiva* call to Chiel. Chiel loses two sons in fulfillment of the vow Yehoshua has made, that anyone who rebuilds *Yericho*, his oldest and youngest sons will die (*Yehoshua 6:26*). Achav tells Eliyahu,⁵ ‘Is it possible that the word of the student, Yehoshua, is fulfilled, and not the word of the teacher, Moshe? Moshe says in *Devarim* (11:17) that if *Bnei Yisrael* do idolatry, there won’t be rain! And yet,’ Achav continues, ‘the Jewish People are worshipping idols and there is still rain!’ Therein, Eliyahu immediately declares a drought. Based on the immediacy of Eliyahu’s vow in response to Achav’s statement, it seems that Eliyahu declares the drought merely as a punishment and not as a means for the Jewish People to repent. Eliyahu’s primary focus of concern in this case is God’s honor and not the benefit of the Jewish People, supporting the *Mechilta*’s statement⁶ that “Eliyahu [i]s zealous for the honor of the Father [God] but not the son [the Jewish People].” We further see Eliyahu’s zealotry for God’s honor at the expense of the people’s, from the fact that not only does Eliyahu want to stop the rain but also the dew, a life force, going beyond *Hashem*’s promise in *Devarim* to withhold just the rain (*Devarim 11:17*).

⁴ Sanhedrin 113a

⁵ Rashi Melachim I 17:1 quoting Chazal (Sanhedrin 113a)

⁶ Mechilta Shemot 12:1

According to *Chazal* Eliyahu may be acting with God's approval, though possibly for the wrong intention and too harshly. The Abarbanel and Metzudat David, however, view Eliyahu's actions as even more extreme. The Abarbanel⁷ argues that Eliyahu stops the rain without *Hashem's* command or approval, merely out of zealousness for God, and in fact, *Hashem* is angry at Eliyahu for this. According to the Abarbanel's understanding of the vision Eliyahu receives at *Chorev* before he is replaced as *navi* (*Melachim* I 19:11-12), *Hashem* is recounting Eliyahu's sins. In the vision, God passes before Eliyahu in a wind, earthquake and fire, but is ultimately only found in a still, small voice. Each of these three forces symbolize Eliyahu's sins, the three times he acts without *Hashem's* directive or support.⁸ The Metzudat David⁹ also views Eliyahu's declaration of stopping the rain as a sin. When Eliyahu is at the home of the *Tzarfatit* widow and her son dies, Eliyahu prays to God saying, "O Lord my God, will You bring calamity upon this widow whose guest I am, and let her son die?" (*Melachim* I 17:20). According to the Metzudat David, Eliyahu is saying, 'God, you already punished me for stopping the rain by making me wander the land. Is my sin so bad that you are going to punish the widow because of me also?' The Metzudat David and Abarbanel both make it clear that Eliyahu sins by declaring the rain and dew to be stopped.

Eliyahu's zealousness for God and lack of compassion for the people can be seen further in the aftermath of Eliyahu's oath of stopping the rain. Immediately following Eliyahu's declaration of a drought (*Melachim* I 17:1), God tells him to hide in *Nachal Krit*, Wadi Cherith, where his source of nourishment will be from the brook and through ravens (*Melachim* I 2-4). Many commentators remark on the symbolism specifically of the ravens as the messengers to

⁷ Abarbanel *Melachim* I 17:1

⁸ Abarbanel *Melachim* I 19:9

⁹ Metzudat David on *Melachim* I 17:20

feed Eliyahu. The Metzudat David,¹⁰ based on the *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* 113a, explains that the ravens, known to be cruel animals, are meant to awaken Eliyahu's mercy and remind him not to be cruel to the Jewish People. Rashi,¹¹ too, interprets this episode as a way to instill more compassion in Eliyahu. Soon after Eliyahu is told to go to *Nachal Krit*, the river dries up (*Melachim* I 17:7). This, according to Rashi, is a sign from *Hashem* to Eliyahu that God is pained knowing His people are starving. Having the river dry up forces Eliyahu into exile, with the hope that Eliyahu will realize the necessity of rain and understand the plight of God's people. A fascinating *midrash* brought by Rashi on *Parshat Noach* furthers this point. Rashi¹² states that the raven Noach sends from the ark (*Bereshit* 8:7) is the same raven that feeds Eliyahu at *Nachal Krit*. A second *midrash*¹³ broadens the connection between Eliyahu and Noach; in both stories what comes after the raven is a dove. With Noach, the dove is the next bird he sends from the ark (*Bereshit* 8:8). Regarding Eliyahu, after *Nachal Krit* with the ravens, Eliyahu heads to a widow's home and during that period he revives her son (*Melachim* I 17:19-22). This boy whom Eliyahu revives is, according to *Chazal*,¹⁴ none other than Yonah and *yonah* means dove in Hebrew. Thus, both Noach and Eliyahu interact with ravens followed by a dove. What is the significance of the connection between Noach and Eliyahu? Both Noach and Eliyahu are certainly *tzaddikim*, righteous people, yet interestingly, the term used to describe Noach as a *tzaddik* is "righteous in his generation" (*Bereshit* 6:9). Rabbi Yochanan¹⁵ says that this means that while Noach is righteous for his corrupt generation, had he been in another generation, he would not be

¹⁰ Metzudat David on *Melachim* I 17:4

¹¹ Rashi on *Melachim* I 17:7

¹² Rashi on *Bereshit* 8:7

¹³ *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 33:2

¹⁴ *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 33:2

¹⁵ *Sanhedrin* 108a

considered righteous. While Noah himself follows in God's ways, there is no evidence from the literal reading of *Bereshit* that indicates Noah reaches out to the people of his generation and helps them repent. Perhaps the similarity between Noah and Eliyahu comes to show that while they are both holy individuals, they need reminders to think more about others and to have compassion for the general public.¹⁶

For Eliyahu to learn compassion, God understands it will have to be a process, slowly expanding outward. It is for this reason, says Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein,¹⁷ that God commands Eliyahu to live with the *Tzarfatit* widow (*Melachim I* 17:8-9). While there Eliyahu performs two miracles for the widow and her son, indicating his growing level of investment for her family. First, he declares there will be an unending flow of oil and flour for the widow until the drought is over (*Melachim I* 17:13-15). Second, when the widow's son dies, Eliyahu cries out to God and begs Him to revive this child (*Melachim I* 17:19-22). These two miracles reflect a shift in Eliyahu's persona; he is slowly developing more compassion for others.

While Eliyahu is successful in garnering mercy on a small scale, for the widow and her son, Eliyahu is not successful in developing compassion for the Jewish People as a whole. In large part, this could be attributed to Eliyahu's fiery zealotry for God and his firm belief in strict justice. In stark contrast to Ovadiah, Eliyahu distances himself from evil rather than confront it.¹⁸ Ovadiah, described as a "very God-fearing man" (*Melachim I* 18:3), works under the guise of a devoted official in the palace to save one hundred prophets from Achav's wife, Izevel (*Melachim I* 18:3, 18:13). On the other hand, Eliyahu is seldom found among the people. After declaring a drought, the next time Eliyahu confronts Achav is three years later, only at God's urging

¹⁶ I heard this idea, explaining the connection between Noah and Eliyahu, from my friend Danielle Sitt

¹⁷ Mosheh Lichtenstein, "Ki Tisa- Eliyahu on Mount Carmel," <https://www.etzion.org.il>

¹⁸ Mosheh Lichtenstein, "Ki Tisa- Eliyahu on Mount Carmel," <https://www.etzion.org.il>

(*Melachim I 18:1*). During that three year gap, Eliyahu is not found helping the people or saving prophets as Ovadiah is doing; rather Eliyahu is hiding, first at a brook (*Melachim I 17:5*) and then with a widow and her son (*Melachim I 17:10*). When finally forced to make a public appearance, Eliyahu orchestrates a dramatic showdown of his own accord out of zealotry for God, which is only a partial success. Eliyahu gathers Achav, the prophets of idolatry, and the Jewish People on *Har Carmel* where he challenges the prophets of idolatry to a face-off to determine whose God is the true God (*Melachim I 18:19-40*). Both the prophets of idolatry and Eliyahu prepare their own altar and sacrifice. The test lies in whose sacrifice is consumed by fire from above. The prophets of idolatry call out to their gods, cut themselves, dance around their altar but to no avail. Eliyahu then calls out to God, and the entire sacrifice, as well as the water poured around it, is consumed. The people are finally convinced, prostrating and declaring, “*Hashem* is the one true God” (*Melachim I 18:39*). Yet how long this repentance lasts is a question, as there is no indication in the verses that the Jewish People destroy their idols, wear sackcloth or take any initiative other than this declaration in a moment of overwhelming awe and inspiration. One can conclude that their repentance is only temporary, indicating that the burst of inspiration Eliyahu provides is perhaps not the best way to bring lasting change. The *Har Carmel* episode culminates with yet another act of zealotry by Eliyahu killing the prophets of idolatry at *Nachal Kishon*, Wadi Kishon (*Melachim I 18:40*).

After appearing for the dramatic showdown at *Har Carmel*, Eliyahu retreats into hiding. Rather than returning to the people and guiding them how to repent, as most prophets do, Eliyahu withdraws to the desert after Izevel threatens to kill him (*Melachim I 19: 3-4*). While there, Eliyahu asks God to take his life (*Melachim I 19:4*) as he has lost faith in his ability to be a

prophet.¹⁹ With no will to continue his mission as prophet, Eliyahu sits dejectedly under a tree in the desert and only eats at the urging of an angel (*Melachim* I 19:4-7). Forty days later, Eliyahu is at *Chorev, Har Sinai*, in the exact location Moshe had stood hundreds of years prior. It is here, after a vision of wind, an earthquake, fire and a still small voice and God's questioning Eliyahu why he is at *Chorev*, that Eliyahu is told by God that he will be replaced as a prophet (*Melachim* I 19:9-18). By delving into why Eliyahu is replaced as prophet, the picture of Eliyahu is further developed, depicting Eliyahu as holy but overly zealous for God and not merciful enough for the people.

When Eliyahu comes to *Chorev*, God asks him "Why are you here, Eliyahu?" to which Eliyahu answers, "I am moved by zeal for the LORD, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life" (*Melachim* I 19:9-10). This answer does not satisfy God, so He shows Eliyahu a vision to teach him a lesson. God brings a great wind, an earthquake and then a fire, and with each of these phenomena, the verses relate that God is not in them (*Melachim* I 19:11-12). Rather God is found in the small, still voice that passes by right after the three natural forces. Hoping that Eliyahu has internalized the message of this vision, God asks him once again, "Why are you here, Eliyahu?" (*Melachim* I 19:13). Yet Eliyahu answers with the exact same words as earlier (*Melachim* I 19:14). It is then that God tells Eliyahu he will be replaced as prophet (*Melachim* I 19:16). What message is Eliyahu meant to internalize from the vision and what is dissatisfactory with Eliyahu's answer?

¹⁹ Malbim on *Melachim* I 19:3

Rashi and Radak both explain that Eliyahu is wrong because he pleads for the persecution of the Jewish People.²⁰ Rather than defend the people even when they sin, as Moshe does after the sin of the golden calf (*Shemot* 32:11-13 and 31-32), Eliyahu twice highlights the sins of the Jewish People saying, “they have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword” (*Melachim* I 19:10 and 19:14). Furthermore, in these statements, Eliyahu is speaking *lashon hara*, gossip, about the Jewish People, a sin for which both Yeshayahu and Moshe are punished.²¹ Eliyahu goes above and beyond Moshe’s and Yeshayahu’s sin of *lashon hara*, however, as he not only speaks negatively about the people but also loses faith in them when he says, “I alone am left” (*Melachim* I 19:10 and 19:14). More than that, in contrast to Moshe and Yeshayahu, Eliyahu does not pray to God on their behalf.

Aside from the implications of Eliyahu’s answer to God, his identical response after the vision shows that Eliyahu does not internalize the message of the still, small voice. What is this integral message? According to the Ralbag,²² through the vision, God is trying to show Eliyahu the importance of having mercy on the Jewish People and God’s desire for Eliyahu to pray on their behalf. God shows Eliyahu three destructive forces that can all potentially be used to punish the people but with all of them concludes that God is not in them. God does not want to punish the people; He withholds His anger to give the people time to repent. Eliyahu should likewise withhold his anger and help the people repent, not through acts of zealotry which are ineffective, but with a still, small voice, a voice of mercy and compassion. Even after this vision, Eliyahu holds steadfast to his ways and remains ever zealous for God while still not showing mercy for

²⁰ Rashi on *Melachim* I 19:16 and Radak on *Melachim* I 19:16 (second answer)

²¹ Rashi on *Shemot* 4:6 and Rashi on *Yeshayahu* 6:7

²² Ralbag on *Melachim* I 19:9,11, 12

the Jewish People. The Malbim,²³ too, interprets the message of the vision to be teaching Eliyahu the proper manner to approach the people. God wants his prophets to rebuke the people when necessary but only out of love and compassion, not out of zealousness or rage symbolized by the wind, earthquake and fire. Eliyahu desists change, however, as his rage over the people's sins and his passion and zealotry for God push through.

Looking at the vision from a different angle, the Abarbanel²⁴ argues that through each of the symbols, the wind, fire and earthquake, God is hinting to Eliyahu of times when Eliyahu has acted of his own volition. God is indicating His anger at Eliyahu for acting without His command. The Abarbanel explains that God only responds to Eliyahu in those instances not because He approves, but because He wishes to make a *kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of His name. After this vision, rather than submitting himself before God and admitting his guilt, Eliyahu continues to make excuses for his actions, stating that he alone is left and he has acted out of zealousness for God (*Melachim I 19:14*). As evidenced by God's reaction, Eliyahu's great zealotry for God is not always in line with what God wants and may not have been warranted in many situations.

What can be drawn from the examples and episodes above is Eliyahu's great concern for God's honor at the expense of the honor of, and concern for, the Jewish People. This depiction of Eliyahu can be seen further beyond the text by analyzing parallel characters to Eliyahu in *Tanach*, specifically parallels to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Yonah and Pinchas. Eliyahu and Moshe are unbelievably similar as reflected by the following chart:²⁵

²³ Malbim on *Melachim I 19:11, 13*

²⁴ Abarbanel on *Melachim I 19:12*

²⁵ Some of these parallels can be found in Rabbi Alex Israel's book *I Kings: Torn in Two*

Moshe Rabbeinu	Eliyahu HaNavi
<i>Navi</i> (Prophet)	<i>Navi</i>
Runs away and comes to a <i>be'er</i> (well) (<i>Shemot</i> 2:15)	Runs away and comes to <i>Be'er Sheva</i> (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:3)
Given food by women (<i>Shemot</i> 2:20- Reuel tells his daughters to go back to the man who has helped them (Moshe) and ask him in to eat bread with them)	Sustained by a woman (<i>Melachim</i> I 17:9- <i>Hashem</i> tells Eliyahu that a widow in <i>Tzarfat</i> will give him food).
Vision of angel in the desert (at the burning bush- <i>Shemot</i> 3)	Vision of angel in the desert (<i>Melachim</i> I 19, when angel wakes him and tells him to eat).
Speaks negatively about <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> (see Rashi on <i>Shemot</i> 4:1, also ' <i>morim</i> ')	Speaks negatively about <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:10 and 19:14)
Performs many great miracles (10 plagues in <i>Shemot</i> 7:20-12:30, splitting of the sea in <i>Shemot</i> 14:21-29, miracles in the desert (ex: <i>Shemot</i> 15: 25, <i>Bamidbar</i> 20:11, etc.)	Performs many great miracles (stops the rain and dew for many years in <i>Melachim</i> I 17:1, extends supply of oil and flour for widow and son in <i>Melachim</i> I 17:13-16, revives a dead child in <i>Melachim</i> I 17:19-22, <i>Har Carmel</i> in <i>Melachim</i> I 18:19-40, splits the Jordan river in <i>Melachim</i> II 2:8, etc.)
Redeems <i>Bnei Yisrael</i> (<i>Shemot</i> 3:10- where Moshe is told he will redeem the Jewish People)	Will redeem the Jewish People in the future (<i>Malachi</i> 3:23)
Gathers the people at <i>Har Sinai</i> (<i>Shemot</i> 19:1-20)	Gathers the people at <i>Har Carmel</i> (<i>Melachim</i> I 18:19-21)
" <i>Alah el haElokim</i> "- "went up to God" (<i>Shemot</i> 19:3)	" <i>v'yehi b'haalot Hashem et Eliyahu</i> "- "And it was when God [was about] to take Eliyahu up to heaven" (<i>Melachim</i> II 2:1)
40 days and 40 nights (without eating) (<i>Shemot</i> 24:18)	40 days and 40 nights (without eating) (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:8)
Speaks to <i>Hashem</i> at <i>Har Sinai</i> in a nook/rock/cave (<i>Shemot</i> 33:21-23) and <i>Hashem</i> passes through	Speaks to <i>Hashem</i> at <i>Har Sinai</i> in (and near) a cave and <i>Hashem</i> passes through (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:9-18)

Walks through the desert (<i>Shemot</i> 16- <i>Devarim</i>)	Walks through the desert (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:4)
Asks to die (<i>Bamidbar</i> 11:15)	Asks to die (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:4)
Is called <i>Ish HaElokim</i> (Man of God) (<i>Devarim</i> 33:1)	Is called <i>Ish HaElokim</i> (<i>Melachim</i> I 17:24, <i>Melachim</i> II 1:10, 1:11, 1:12, 1:13)
Is replaced by younger, much different leader than himself (more involved with the people/more on their level) (<i>Bamidbar</i> 27:18)	Is replaced by younger, much different leader than himself (more involved with the people/more on their level) (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:16)

While Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Eliyahu *HaNavi* are clearly quite similar, by looking at how they differ, we can gain a deeper understanding of Eliyahu. Both Moshe and Eliyahu perform great miracles, yet while every miracle Moshe performs is in accordance with the directive of God, Eliyahu often acts of his own accord out of zealotness.²⁶ Moshe and Eliyahu similarly run away at one point in their lives under the threat of being killed (*Shemot* 2:15, *Melachim* I 19:3); yet while Moshe eventually returns to the people with a greater sense of mission and purpose (*Shemot* 4:20), Eliyahu asks *Hashem* to take his life (*Melachim* I 19:4) and gives up on himself and his mission.²⁷ Though Moshe, too, asks to die (*Bamidbar* 11:15), his request is short-lived as soon after, he follows God's command and speaks to the people, continuing his purpose as prophet (*Bamidbar* 11:24). Perhaps most striking is that both prophets go forty days and nights without eating and drinking (*Shemot* 24:18, *Melachim* I 19:8) and speak to God in the exact same location on *Har Sinai*.²⁸ Yet the nature of their discussions with God are profoundly different.

²⁶ Abarbanel on *Melachim* I 18:34 and 19:12

²⁷ Malbim on *Melachim* I 19:3 and 19:9

²⁸ Rashi and Abarbanel on *Melachim* I 19:9

Moshe pleads on behalf of the Jewish People, begging that God forgive them for the sin of the golden calf or else “erase [him] from the record which You have written” (*Shemot* 32:32). In stark contrast, Eliyahu blames the people for their sins and laments to God that “[he] alone [is] left” (*Melachim* I 19:10 and 19:14). Even after God teaches Eliyahu about the importance of mercy and compassion through the vision of the still, small voice, Eliyahu still does not pray for the people. As Eliyahu is standing in the same location where God has taught Moshe how to pray through the thirteen attributes of mercy (*Shemot* 34:6-7), Eliyahu’s failing to walk in Moshe’s footsteps and pray for the people is an even greater disappointment. Moshe and Eliyahu are both servants of God par excellence, yet of the two great prophets, only Moshe succeeds in also being a true advocate for the people.

Another significant parallel, that can be understood in two different ways, is Eliyahu and Yonah. Both Eliyahu and Yonah run away from their missions as prophets²⁹ (*Melachim* I 19:3, *Yonah* 1:3) and sit under a tree where they ask God to take their life (*Melachim* I 19:4, *Yonah* 4:3). These similarities, and thus the connection between Eliyahu and Yonah, are highlighted by *Chazal*³⁰ who state that Yonah is the son of the *Tzarfatit* woman whom Eliyahu revives. On the one hand, Eliyahu and Yonah seem to have similar personality traits, a strong sense of justice and perhaps not enough compassion. After *Ninveh* repents and God renounces His current decree to destroy them, Yonah is greatly angered, calls out to God and asks to die (*Yonah* 4:1-3). The Malbim³¹ explains that Yonah is angry because he knows the people of *Ninveh* will not perform complete repentance and yet God will still have mercy on them and save them. In Yonah’s mind of strict justice, the people of *Ninveh* do not deserve to be spared. In this way, Yonah and

²⁹ Malbim on *Melachim* I 19:3

³⁰ *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 33:2 on *Melachim* I 17:15

³¹ Malbim on *Yonah* 4:2

Eliyahu are quite similar; they both strongly believe in justice. Moreover, God attempts to teach both Yonah and Eliyahu the importance of compassion, Eliyahu through the vision and the still, small voice (*Melachim I* 19:11-12), and Yonah with the *kikayon* tree that he comes to care for but which then withers (*Yonah* 4:6-11). It is unclear whether they ever internalize that message of compassion as after those episodes their missions are over.

While Eliyahu and Yonah seem very similar, Yonah's running away and his plea to die can be seen from a different light demonstrating the contrast between the two. Chazal³² write, "Eliyahu claim[s] the honor of the Father [God], but not the honor of the son [the Jewish People]," while "Yonah claim[s] the honor of the son, but not the honor of the Father." The Metzudat David,³³ quoting *Chazal*, explains that the reason Yonah is angry over God's pardoning Ninveh is because Yonah is afraid that Ninveh's quickness in repenting will reflect negatively on the Jewish People who may not repent as readily. Thus, while Yonah may have a strong sense of justice, he balances that with mercy and compassion for the Jewish People, an attribute which Eliyahu is not able to emulate.

Eliyahu's zealotry is perhaps best expressed through the parallel between him and Pinchas, who like Eliyahu is described as a zealot and who *Chazal*³⁴ say is Eliyahu. Pinchas is known for his act of zealotry in *Bamidbar* when he kills the Jewish man, Zimri, and Midianite woman, Kazbi, who are physically intimate directly in front of the *Ohel Moed* for all to see (*Bamidbar* 25:7-9). Due to his quick action on behalf of God, God tells Moshe that Pinchas "has turned anger away from the children of Israel by his zealously avenging Me among them, so that I did not destroy the children of Israel because of My zeal. Therefore, say, 'I hereby give him My

³² Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:1

³³ Metzudat David on Yonah 4:2

³⁴ Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 47:8

covenant of peace” (*Bamidbar* 25:11-12). Pinchas is praised for his zealotry; however, when Eliyahu responds to God’s question on *Har Sinai* and states that he is filled with zealousness for God, God is not pleased with his answer (*Melachim* I 19:14-16). How does Eliyahu’s zealotry differ from Pinchas’s? The key to understanding the difference between Eliyahu’s zealotry and Pinchas’s lies in the *halachik* definition of *kinah*, zealotry. There is a concept in Jewish law termed “*kanaim pogim bo*”³⁵ which outlines certain situations wherein a zealot can take the law into his own hands and kill someone committing a specific sin. This law, however, has specific parameters such as only being able to act during the performance of the sin itself and the action has to be purely for God’s honor. The limited scope of *kanaim pogim bo* teaches that acts of zealotry should be reserved for particular instances but should not extend beyond that. Pinchas’s act of zealotry is warranted in that specific case. As this is the only time Pinchas acts in such a way, he is lauded for his zealotry. Eliyahu, on the other hand, who embodies zealousness and whose actions are all imbued with this extreme fiery passion to protect God’s honor, is too extreme. Especially as a leader, Eliyahu needs to not only be focused on God’s honor, but also the people’s honor and defend them before God.

Part IB. Second Depiction of Eliyahu in Tanach

The information presented above depicts Eliyahu as overly zealous for God, not as compassionate for the people and one who often acts without God’s directive or endorsement; this, though, is not the only way to understand the *pesukim* or his character. Another way to look at Eliyahu in *Tanach* is as a highly-elevated, angel-like prophet who always acts in accordance with God’s approval or command. This illustration can be seen from Eliyahu’s very first act

³⁵ Sanhedrin 82a

recorded in *Tanach*, his declaring a three year drought (*Melachim I 17:1*). Unlike other commentators who view Eliyahu's action as too harsh or even as a sin, the Radak³⁶ and the Abarbanel³⁷ explain that Eliyahu only stops the rain in the hope that it will inspire the people to repent and return to God. The drought is not meant as a punishment, but as a means for the Jewish People to change their ways for the better and stop worshipping idols, a cardinal sin in Judaism. Moreover, Eliyahu does not declare this drought when the people are first beginning to sin but rather when idolatry is widespread, after understanding that other methods of stirring the people to repent are not working.

If Eliyahu's actions are laudable, why does God tell him to hide in *Nachal Krit* and be fed by the ravens (*Melachim I 17:2-4*)? According to the Malbim,³⁸ the reason Eliyahu has to leave to *Nachal Krit* is because now that Eliyahu has stopped God's blessing of rain from flowing to the Jewish People, if Eliyahu stays, his merit alone would be enough for God's blessing to flow onto him, and thus on the people around him. The people, though, are not worthy of the blessing, as indicated when Eliyahu declares a drought (*Melachim I 17:1*) to invigorate the people to repent. With Eliyahu alone at the *Nachal*, God can provide exclusively for him and shower His blessing upon him through the ravens and the brook, as only he is deserving of such miracles. Nonetheless, here too, after some time *Hashem* dries up the river and tells Eliyahu to leave once again (*Melachim I 17:7-9*). The Alshich³⁹ explains that while Eliyahu is correct for declaring a drought, and even sanctifies God's name in public by doing so, God wants Eliyahu to know that it is His desire to be slow to anger even with people sinning greatly. God is pleased with

³⁶ Radak on *Melachim I 17:1*

³⁷ Abarbanel on *Melachim I 17:1*

³⁸ Malbim on *Melachim I 17:3*

³⁹ Alshich on *Melachim I 17:4-7*

Eliyahu's actions but wants to teach him to be merciful even to unworthy people. It is in this vein that Eliyahu then goes to stay with the widow in *Tzarfat* where he facilitates a miracle to feed her and her son (*Melachim I 17:13-16*).

During the period of Eliyahu's stay, the widow's son becomes severely ill and dies (*Melachim I 17:17*). She turns to Eliyahu and says, "What harm have I done to you, man of God, that you should come here to recall my sin and cause the death of my son?" (*Melachim I 17:18*). The widow is lamenting, says the Metzudat David,⁴⁰ that while she would be considered righteous in her time and in her city, compared to Eliyahu *HaNavi* she is like a wicked person. In essence, her statement highlights Eliyahu's unbelievable greatness, that even good people for their time would not be considered righteous when set side by side with Eliyahu. The Ralbag⁴¹ goes so far as to say that Eliyahu is free of sin and "a complete person." It is for this reason that the widow is worried her sins will be more apparent next to Eliyahu's purity. Eliyahu is on a level above and beyond everyone else, illustrated further through the miracle God performs through Eliyahu, of resurrecting the widow's son (*Melachim I 17:19-22*). Such a prophet is no ordinary human being.

With each subsequent episode recorded in these chapters of *Melachim*, more of Eliyahu's greatness and spiritual height is revealed. After his time at the widow's house, Eliyahu confronts Achav and gathers the Jewish People at *Har Carmel*. There he facilitates a remarkable showdown between him and the prophets of idolatry to show the Jewish People that *Hashem* is the one true God (*Melachim I 18:19-40*). Following the failed attempt of these false prophets to bring down a fire upon their sacrifice (*Melachim I 18:26-29*), Eliyahu prepares his sacrifice on

⁴⁰ Metzudat David on *Melachim I 17:18*

⁴¹ Ralbag on *Melachim I 17:18*

his rebuilt altar. He directs the people to fill up four jugs of water, scarce at this time because of the three year drought, which they pour over the sacrifice and around the altar at his command (*Melachim I 18:30-35*). The Malbim⁴² explains that Eliyahu has the people fill four jugs of water, corresponding to the four creatures that carry God's chariot and throne, to awaken God's mercy for the Jewish people. Only because of Eliyahu's greatly elevated state is he able to bridge the heavens and the earth and draw the blessings of God into this world in such a way. What is more remarkable than awakening the four figures of the *Merkavah*, God's chariot, to channel God's blessing into this world, is that Eliyahu's prayer to God is answered and through that, he is able to bring down the revelation of God's presence.⁴³ Throughout *Tanach*, the physical manifestation of God's presence and the sign that indicates God's approval of our service to him is consistently revealed in the form of a heavenly fire.⁴⁴ At *Brit Bein HaBetarim*, "The Covenant of Parts," a heavenly fire passes between the pieces of the sacrifices (*Bereshit 15:16*); at *Har Sinai*, God comes down in a fire (*Shemot 19:18*); and when Shlomo *HaMelech* completes building the *Beit HaMikdash*, a fire from above comes down upon the sacrifices he offers (*Divrei HaYamim II 7:1*). The fact that God manifests His physical presence in response to Eliyahu's prayer indicates the eminence of Eliyahu *HaNavi*. As Rav Yosef Ibn Kaspi⁴⁵ writes, "this prophet [Eliyahu] [i]s even greater than Moshe Rabbeinu [in this regard of bringing down God's blessing]."

Eliyahu's incredible level of spirituality and holiness can also explain why he is replaced as prophet. Although many reasons are given above as to why Eliyahu is replaced as prophet, which reflect a deficit in Eliyahu's character, such as lack of compassion for the people, his

⁴² Malbim on *Melachim I 18:34*

⁴³ Abarbanel on *Melachim I 18:19*

⁴⁴ Abarbanel on *Melachim I 18:19*

⁴⁵ Rav Yosef Ibn Kaspi on *Melachim I 18:32*

replacement can also be looked at from another angle. Perhaps Eliyahu is replaced as prophet not because of anything inherently wrong with his character or leadership, but rather because of the reality at hand. Eliyahu, being head and shoulders above the nation in spirituality and closeness to God, is on too high of a level for the people. With such a large gap between him and the people, they cannot relate to him and he, in turn, does not always fully comprehend their struggles and challenges. While Eliyahu is able to temporarily inspire the people at *Har Carmel* and all could see his greatness and God's ability to perform miracles (*Melachim I 18:19-40*), the spiritual schism between Eliyahu and the people is not conducive for constant communication and interaction between the two. With Eliyahu only coming to perform miracles, the people are only temporarily shaken but are not able to maintain the path towards positive change. For that they need someone more on their level, who will dwell among them and to whom they can relate.

A similar phenomena is found with Moshe *Rabbeinu* and David *HaMelech*. The Ralbag⁴⁶ explains that Moshe cannot take the people into Israel because the people are not worthy. If Moshe takes the people into the land, all of their enemies will be immediately destroyed due to Moshe's great merit. Since the people are not worthy of entering the land so easily, *Hashem* orchestrates that Yehoshua, not Moshe, lead the people into Israel. The same idea is found with David *HaMelech* to explain why he cannot build the *Beit HaMikdash*. If David *HaMelech* builds the *Beit HaMikdash*, relates the *Midrash*,⁴⁷ God will never be able to destroy it for David's merit is too great. Since the Jewish People are not worthy of an eternal *Beit HaMikdash* at that time, God has David's son, Shlomo *HaMelech*, build it instead. As with Moshe and David, Eliyahu

⁴⁶ Ralbag on Bamidbar 20:8-9

⁴⁷ Midrash Tehillim (Midrash Shocher Tov) 62:4

being replaced does not reflect any negative aspect of his character. On the contrary, it shows he is on too high a level for the people and therefore, is not the right match for them.

As the Eliyahu stories come to an end, the extent of Eliyahu's greatness is finally revealed in the way he is taken from this world. In an unprecedented act, Eliyahu, in front of his student and successor, Elisha, is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind accompanied by "a fiery chariot and fiery horses" (*Melachim II* 2:11). *Chazal*⁴⁸ in multiple places state that Eliyahu is still alive; he never dies. This episode of Eliyahu's being taken in a whirlwind leads many commentators, and even *Chazal*, to say that perhaps Eliyahu is an angel. The Radak⁴⁹ says that Eliyahu only becomes an angel when he ascends to heaven in the whirlwind, while others, like the Chida, argue that Eliyahu has always been an angel. The Chida,⁵⁰ quoting the *Yalkut Reuveni*, writes that Eliyahu is one of the angels God consults with before creation when He says, "let us make man" (*Bereshit* 1:26). After, Eliyahu asks God if he can go down into the world to serve Him and God agrees, calling Eliyahu the guardian of His children. This *Midrash* is supported by the *gemara* in *Brachot*⁵¹ which discusses the hierarchy of certain angels, among whom Eliyahu is listed. This picture of Eliyahu, of a highly-elevated, angel-like prophet, illustrated by looking at *Tanach* through a second lens and backed by many statements of *Chazal*, can also be seen by delving into parallels between Eliyahu and other characters or episodes in the *Torah*, specifically Moshe, Pinchas, and the episode of Adam and Chava's sin.

From the many parallels to Moshe brought in the previous chart, the similarity between Moshe and Eliyahu is evident. Moshe is the greatest prophet, the only prophet to ever speak to

⁴⁸ Bava Basra 121b, Moed Katan 26a

⁴⁹ Radak on Melachim II 2:11

⁵⁰ Chomat Anach on Melachim I 17:1

⁵¹ Brachot 4b

God face-to-face (*Shemot* 33:11); the parallels between Moshe and Eliyahu indicate Eliyahu's spiritual greatness as well. Another parallel that highlights Eliyahu's spiritual height is between Eliyahu and Pinchas. Aside from their both being described as zealous for God (*Melachim* I 19:10, *Bamidbar* 25:11), Eliyahu and Pinchas are also similar in their strong sense of truth and justice. Pinchas's embodiment of truth and justice is described in Malachi in reference to the covenant of peace and priesthood God makes with Pinchas as a reward for his noble act of zealotry (*Bamidbar* 25:11-13). Malachi writes, "I [God] had with him [Pinchas] a covenant of life and well-being...For he stood in awe of My name" (*Malachi* 2:5). This description is followed by further details of Pinchas according to some opinions,⁵² when Malachi writes, "*Torat Emet*, proper rulings, were in his mouth and nothing perverse was on his lips...And men seek rulings from his lips for he is a *malach*, messenger, of the Lord of Hosts" (*Malachi* 2:6-7). Just as Pinchas is filled with *Torat Emet*, the Torah of truth, so too is Eliyahu. Eliyahu goes after truth and justice wholeheartedly, exacting punishment when necessary and upholding God's word.⁵³ More strikingly is the fact that Pinchas is described in Malachi as a *malach* of God (*Malachi* 2:7), which can be translated as a messenger or an angel. As Eliyahu is referred to as an angel in the *gemara*,⁵⁴ the usage of that particular language of *malach* seems like no coincidence especially in light of *Chazal's* statement that Pinchas is Eliyahu.⁵⁵ Finally, while Pinchas is given a covenant of peace (*Bamidbar* 25:11-13), Eliyahu is given the task of heralding the final

⁵² Ibn Ezra on Malachi 2:6 quoting the opinion of Rebi Yeshua

⁵³ Eliyahu could be seen exacting punishment at Har Carmel when he kills many prophets of idolatry (*Melachim* I 18:40) and could be seen upholding God's word many times, one in particular is when he declares a drought to ensure God's promise in Devarim 11:16-17 is upheld (*Sanhedrin* 113a)

⁵⁴ *Brachot* 4b

⁵⁵ *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* 47:8

redemption (*Malachi* 3:23) and bringing peace to the world.⁵⁶ Both the parallel between Eliyahu and Pinchas and Eliyahu and Moshe thus demonstrate the lofty spiritual level of Eliyahu.

A third parallel that exemplifies Eliyahu’s angel-like status is a connection between God’s interaction with Adam and Chava after their sin and God’s interaction with Eliyahu at *Chorev* laid out in the following chart:

Eliyahu	Adam and Chava
<i>Hashem’s kol</i> is heard- “ <i>kol demamah dakah</i> - a still, small voice” (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:12)	<i>Hashem’s kol</i> is heard- “ <i>kol Hashem Elokim mithalech b’gan</i> - the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:8)
<i>Ruach, ra’ash, esh</i> - wind, earthquake, fire (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:11-12)	<i>Ruach</i> - “ <i>l’ruach hayom</i> - at the breezy time of day” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:8) <i>Esh</i> - “ <i>lahat hacherev</i> - fiery sword” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:24) <i>Ra’ash</i> - not mentioned explicitly, but as <i>ra’ash</i> literally means sound, it can be hinted to when <i>pasuk</i> states, “ <i>v’yishmau et kol</i> - they heard the sound” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:8) or “ <i>kolcha shamati</i> -I heard the sound of You” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:10)
Hides in reaction to hearing <i>kol Hashem</i> - “ <i>vayalet panav b’edrato</i> -he wrap[s] his mantle about his face” (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:13)	Hides in reaction to hearing <i>kol Hashem</i> - “ <i>vitchabeh h’adam v’ishto</i> - and the man and his wife hid[e]” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:8)
<i>Hashem</i> asks question in a way to draw out the answer even though <i>Hashem</i> clearly knows the answer- “ <i>Mah lach poh Eliyahu</i> ”- Why are you here Eliyahu?” (<i>Melachim</i> I 19: 9, 13)	<i>Hashem</i> asks question in a way to draw out the answer even though <i>Hashem</i> clearly knows the answer- “ <i>Ayekah</i> - Where are you?” (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:9)
Blame someone else- <i>blames Bnei Yisrael</i> - they sinned so much, “I alone am left” (<i>Melachim</i> I 19: 10, 14)	Blame someone else- Adam blames Chava, Chava blames snake (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:12, 13)
Punished in some way- Eliyahu is replaced with Elisha (<i>Melachim</i> I 19:15, 16)	Punished in some way- Adam and Chava are both cursed (<i>Bereshit</i> 3:16-19)

⁵⁶ Mishnah Edyot 8:7 view of Chachamim

Eliyahu takes off his cloak/piece of clothing- flings his cloak at Elisha (<i>Melachim I 19:19</i>)	<i>Hashem</i> makes Adam and Chava “ <i>katnot ohr v’yalbishem</i> - garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothe[s] them” (<i>Bereshit 3:21</i>)
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As indicated in the chart, the episode of Adam and Chava post-sin is quite similar to Eliyahu’s vision on *Chorev* in all but one way. Both hide from the voice of God (*Bereshit 3:8, Melachim I 19:13*), God draws out an answer from them (*Bereshit 3:9, Melachim I 19:9, 19:13*), they place the blame on someone else (*Bereshit 3:12, 3:13, Melachim I 19:10, 19:14*), and are punished (*Bereshit 3:16-19, Melachim I 19:16*). Yet, while God clothes Adam and Chava after they hear of their punishment (*Bereshit 3:21*), after Eliyahu is punished and replaced as leader, he removes a piece of clothing (*Melachim I 19:19*). This seemingly small difference can explain the deeper significance of the parallel between Eliyahu and Adam and Chava. After Adam and Chava’s sin of eating from the tree of knowledge (*Bereshit 3:6*), God states that they “have become like one of us,” referring to the heavenly realm and angels,⁵⁷ “knowing good and bad” (*Bereshit 3:22*). The ability to discern between right and wrong, evil and goodness, is originally reserved for God and the angels, but as a result of Adam and Chava’s eating from the tree, humans hold this ability as well. As God does not wish for Adam and Chava to become any more angel-like, he kicks them out of the garden and right before that, clothes them in an act to make them more human-like (*Bereshit 3:21-23*). Like Adam and Chava, Eliyahu possesses the ability to discern between right and wrong, containing the knowledge originally designated for only heavenly bodies. Eliyahu’s clear sense of what is just and what is not, what is good and what is evil, shines through in his zealous actions to maintain justice and punish the wicked.⁵⁸ In direct contrast to

⁵⁷ Ibn Ezra on *Bereshit 3:22*

⁵⁸ See footnote 51 above

Adam and Chava, while they become more human-like overtime, Eliyahu becomes more angel-like after his interaction with God at *Chorev* (*Melachim I* 19:9-18). Eliyahu takes off his cloak, a piece of his humanity, after the episode at *Chorev*, slowly shedding his physicality until, by the time he ascends to heaven in a whirlwind, he is only left with the spiritual side of him, the angel within.⁵⁹ Eliyahu is among the most unique human beings as he reaches the level of an angel.

Part II. Approaches as to Why Eliyahu Will Bring the Redemption

Having learned an in-depth character study of Eliyahu *HaNavi* and the two ways he can be portrayed in *Tanach* through the lens of many commentators and different statements of *Chazal*, three approaches emerge that can answer the original question of why Eliyahu is chosen to herald the final redemption. One approach follows the first way Eliyahu can be seen through *Tanach*, the next approach follows the second depiction of Eliyahu in *Tanach*, and the third approach combines both perspectives to look at Eliyahu as a whole, complex figure.

IIA. Approach One- Rectification

According to the first depiction of Eliyahu, as an overly zealous prophet who often acts without God's approval and does not show enough compassion towards the people, Eliyahu's heralding the redemption is a *tikkun*, a means to rectify his not being merciful enough to the Jewish People. Eliyahu's mission is not only to announce the coming of the *Mashiach*, but to come before God's Day of Judgement and garner the people to repent to save them from punishment or retribution.⁶⁰ The idea that Eliyahu will come to help the people repent so that they will not be punished on the Day of Judgement is in itself a rectification of Eliyahu's

⁵⁹ Malbim on *Melachim II* 2:11

⁶⁰ Radak on *Malachi* 3:23, Malbim on *Malachi* 3:24

previous actions. Eliyahu is focused on justice and God's honor above all, and even hopes that the Jewish People will be punished for their sins rather than defending them or praying on their behalf.⁶¹ With his job in bringing the redemption, Eliyahu will have to overcome his inflexible sense of justice and show mercy to the people, helping them return to God so that they do not get punished as they may deserve. Moreover, whereas at *Har Carmel* Eliyahu tries to reinvigorate the people's faith in God through a flashy miracle and fiery passion (*Melachim I* 18:19-40), with the redemption, Eliyahu will have to encourage the people to repent in a different way, with a soft, still voice and by bringing peace among all people.⁶²

Bringing peace among people, reuniting parents and children, and facilitating feelings of love and favor among people are other aspects of Eliyahu's mission that act as a *tikkun* for his previous actions, of not showing enough compassion to the people as a whole. This idea is hinted to in one letter, the letter *vav*, which is missing from Eliyahu's name in Malachi when referencing his role in heralding the final redemption (*Malachi* 3:23). The *Midrash*⁶³ explains that Eliyahu's name is missing a *vav* in five places throughout *Tanach*. They are taken from his name and given to Yaakov, paralleling the five places in the *Torah* where Yaakov's name is written with an extra *vav*. According to the *Midrash*, Yaakov takes the *vav* from Eliyahu as collateral and will only give it back to Eliyahu when he comes to announce the final redemption. Why does Yaakov take the letter *vav*? *Vav* is known as a connecting letter; its name means a hook and it is often used at the beginning of a word to connect that word to the previous statement as it means "and." By taking the *vav* specifically, Yaakov is teaching that a prerequisite for the coming of the final redemption is unity, connection and love between people.

⁶¹ Rashi on *Melachim I* 19:16

⁶² Mishnah *Edyot* 8:7 view of Chachamim, Abarbanel on *Malachi* 3:24 quoting Chazal

⁶³ Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:42 quoting a *Midrash*

While previously Eliyahu only seems to have true compassion for those close to him, such as for the widow and her son with whom he has lived (*Melachim I* 17:10-24), Eliyahu's mission in bringing redemption is now to connect all people and foster peace in the world. Only then, when Eliyahu rectifies his earlier behavior and reunites parent and child, will he receive the *vav* from Yaakov.

Though a logical answer, the question remains as to why Eliyahu alone is deserving of this chance to rectify his previous behavior.⁶⁴ Though there is a dispute as to whether Eliyahu ever dies, the Abarbanel⁶⁵ writes that Eliyahu will be the first to be brought back through *techiyat hametim*, resurrection of the dead. As Eliyahu is the first to have ever performed resurrection of the dead when he prays to God and acts as a catalyst for the widow's son's revival (*Melachim I* 17:19-22), it is fitting that Eliyahu will be the first to come back in this way. Though Eliyahu will be the first to be revived, he will not be the only one. Others will be revived and will also perhaps have a chance to rectify their earlier mistakes. As Eliyahu is the first to be brought back, however, he is likewise the first with the chance of *tikkun*.

IIB. Approach Two- Worthiness

Another answer as to why Eliyahu is the one to herald the redemption, based on the second way Eliyahu is portrayed in *Tanach* as being highly elevated spiritually and angel-like, is because he is worthy. The Malbim⁶⁶ and *Midrash*⁶⁷ both single out Eliyahu as one of the greatest prophets, right behind Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and therefore explain that while Moshe brought the first redemption, Eliyahu will bring the ultimate redemption. As is illustrated through the second

⁶⁴ Though there is an idea of *gilgulim* and rectifying mistakes by coming back in the form of someone else, in this section I am just focusing on the idea of *tikkun* as it relates to coming back through resurrection of the dead.

⁶⁵ Abarbanel on Malachi 3:23

⁶⁶ Malbim on Malachi 3:23

⁶⁷ Pesikta Rabti 4

perspective on Eliyahu from *Tanach*, Eliyahu acts with God's approval, sanctifies His name in public both by declaring the drought in hopes that the people will repent⁶⁸ and on *Har Carmel* (*Melachim I* 18:19-40), is possibly free of sin,⁶⁹ and is on such an elevated level that the physical manifestation of God's presence, a Heavenly fire, is brought down through him (*Melachim I* 18:38). Based on this depiction of Eliyahu, he certainly seems worthy of heralding the final redemption and even more so when understanding the purpose of exile and the redemption. Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi⁷⁰ explains that the point of *galut*, of exile, is to give us the chance to reach completeness of our souls. If this is the case, who is more worthy to bring us to this end of completing our souls than Eliyahu *HaNavi*, who himself completes his soul by being free of sin,⁷¹ as indicated by his becoming an angel when taken to heaven.⁷²

II.C. Approach Three- Complexity

A third answer as to why Eliyahu is chosen to announce the coming of the *Mashiach* and the redemption combines both perspectives on Eliyahu's character mentioned above. Eliyahu is highly elevated and seems out of this world in his spiritual heights, but at the same time is human and has flaws. When appreciating the complexity of Eliyahu's character, it is clear that the two approaches of how to understand Eliyahu's character from *Tanach* are not contradictory. Yes, he is highly elevated spiritually and unbelievably close to God, but he also needs to learn to be more compassionate and merciful to the Jewish People and at times displays too much zealotry. Why then is Eliyahu the one who will herald the final redemption? The answer lies precisely in his complexity, in his seemingly being stuck between two worlds, earth and the heavens. Eliyahu is

⁶⁸ Radak and Abarbanel on *Melachim I* 17:1

⁶⁹ Ralbag on *Melachim I* 17:18

⁷⁰ R' Ibn Kaspi on *Malachi* 3:23

⁷¹ Ralbag on *Melachim I* 17:18

⁷² Radak on *Melachim II* 2:11

often found in-between. He is in between a human and an angel. On the one hand Eliyahu performs many supernatural miracles (*Melachim* I 17:1, 17:13-16, 17:20-22, 18:38) and enters heaven in a whirlwind (*Melachim* II 2:11) hinting to his angel-like character. On the other hand, he is very much human, with flaws. God needs to teach him to be more compassionate⁷³ and he at times acts without God's command or approval.⁷⁴ Eliyahu is a complex character who seems to straddle this world and the next, and physically also, he often appears at doorways, in between the home and outside.⁷⁵ The *gemara* recounts many episodes where Eliyahu appears to people at doorways or entrances. Eliyahu appears to Rabbi Yosei,⁷⁶ for example, at the entrance of ruins and to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai⁷⁷ at the opening of a cave. Moreover, when God speaks to Eliyahu at *Chorev* and appears to him in a vision, Eliyahu is standing at the entrance of a cave (*Melachim* I 19:13). At the *seder* as well, we call out to Eliyahu from the doorstep. Finally, it is as if Eliyahu is standing on the threshold between this world and the next, as he is ready to attend every *brit milah*, welcoming a soul as it enters into this world, and will also be the first to come back in the resurrection of the dead according to the Abarbanel.⁷⁸ Eliyahu is the ultimate example of one who lives in-between, as manifested by his complex character, his being both human and angel-like, and standing in the in-between areas, like doorways. Therefore, only Eliyahu can be the one to bridge the ultimate gap between heaven and earth for the final redemption. Eliyahu *HaNavi* is waiting at the threshold to connect those seemingly separate entities, parents and children, heaven and earth, God and the Jewish People, and unite them as one for eternity.

⁷³ Rashi on *Melachim* I 17:7, Metzudat David on *Melachim* I 17:4, Ralbag on *Melachim* I 19:9,11, 12

⁷⁴ Abarbanel on *Melachim* I 17:1 and 19:12

⁷⁵ Shani Taragin, "Eliyahu at the Door...of Destruction," *mizrachi.org*, Mizrachi, August, 2019, <https://mizrachi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HaMizrachi-Tisha-BAv-5779.pdf>

⁷⁶ *Brachot* 3b

⁷⁷ *Shabbos* 33b

⁷⁸ Abarbanel on *Malachi* 3:23

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