

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [225]

"Father Elijah was a Kapdan"
Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 113b
See: Stories with a Twist # 253



Background to Our Story

Jose ben Halafta



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jose_ben_Halafta

Rabbi Jose ben Halafta or Yose ben Halafta was a Tanna of the fourth generation (2nd century CE). Jose was a student of Rabbi Akiva and was regarded as one of the foremost scholars of halakha and aggadah of his day. He was a teacher and mentor to, among other notables, Judah ha-Nasi and thus is prominently mentioned in the Mishnah, being the fifth most frequently mentioned sage in the Mishnah. Of the many Rabbi Yose's in the Talmud, Yose Ben Halafta is the one who is simply referred to as Rabbi Yose.

Elijah



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elijah>

Elijah (Hebrew: **אֵלִיָּהוּ**, *Eliyahu*, meaning "My God is Yahu/Jah") was a prophet and a miracle worker who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Ahab (9th century BC), according to the Books of Kings in the Hebrew Bible. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah defended the worship of Yahweh over that of the Canaanite deity Baal. Yahweh also performed many miracles through Elijah, including resurrection (raising the dead), bringing fire down from the sky, and entering Heaven alive "by a whirlwind". He is also portrayed as leading a school of prophets known as "the sons of the prophets". After his death, Elisha his disciple and most devoted assistant took over his role as leader of this school.

When Ahab confronts Elijah, he refers to him as the "troubler of Israel." Elijah responds by throwing the charge back at Ahab, saying that it is Ahab who has troubled Israel by allowing the worship of [false gods](#). Elijah then berates both the people of Israel and Ahab for their acquiescence in Baal worship. "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people were silent. The Hebrew for this word, "go limping" or "waver", is the same as that used for "danced" in verse 26, where the prophets of Baal frantically dance. Elijah speaks with sharp irony: in the religious ambivalence of Israel, he is portraying here as engaging in a wild and futile religious "dance".

At this point Elijah proposes a direct test of the powers of Baal and Yahweh. The people of Israel, 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of [Asherah](#) are summoned to [Mount Carmel](#). Two altars are built, one for Baal and one for Yahweh. Wood is laid on the altars. Two oxen are slaughtered and cut into pieces; the pieces are laid on the wood. Elijah then invites the priests of Baal to pray for fire to light the sacrifice. They pray from morning to noon without success. Elijah ridicules their efforts. "At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, 'Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.' They respond by cutting themselves and adding their own blood to the sacrifice (such mutilation of the body was strictly forbidden in the Mosaic law). They continue praying until evening without success.

Elijah now orders that the altar of Yahweh be drenched with water from "four large jars" poured three times. He asks God to accept the sacrifice. Fire falls from the sky, consuming the water, the sacrifice and the stones of the altar itself as well. Elijah then orders the deaths of the prophets of Baal. Elijah prays earnestly for rain to fall again on the land. Then the rains begin, signaling the end of the famine.

Jewish legends about Elijah abound in the aggadah, which is found throughout various collections of rabbinic literature, including the Babylonian Talmud. This varied literature does not merely discuss his life, but has created a new history of him, which, beginning with his death – or "translation" – ends only with the close of the history of the human race. The volume of references to Elijah in Jewish Tradition stands in marked contrast to that in the Canon. As in the case of most figures of Jewish legend, so in the case of Elijah, the biblical account became the basis of later legend. Elijah the precursor of the Messiah, Elijah zealous in the cause of God, Elijah the helper in distress: these are the three leading notes struck by the Aggadah, endeavoring to complete the biblical picture with the Elijah legends. His career is extensive, colorful, and varied. He has appeared the world over in the guise of a beggar and scholar.

I Kings 17

¹ Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe^[a] in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."

² Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: ³"Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. ⁴You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there."

⁵ So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. ⁶The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

I Kings 18

¹⁶ So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"

¹⁸ "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. ¹⁹ Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four

hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

²⁰ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

But the people said nothing.

²² Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. ²³ Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God."

Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

²⁵ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." ²⁶ So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

²⁷ At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." ³² With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs^[a] of seed. ³³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

³⁴ "Do it again," he said, and they did it again.

"Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. ³⁵ The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷ Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!"

⁴⁰ Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

I Kings 19

¹ Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

³ Elijah was afraid^[a] and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁰ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

¹¹ The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴ He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

I Kings 21

¹⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: ¹⁸ "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. ¹⁹ Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood—yes, yours!'"

²⁰ Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!"

"I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. ²¹ He says, 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendants and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free.'^[a] ²² I will make your house like that of Jeroboam son of Nebat and that of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have aroused my anger and have caused Israel to sin.'

²³ "And also concerning Jezebel the LORD says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of^[b] Jezreel.'

²⁴ "Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country."

Kapdan

A person who is overly strict, easily offended and disinclined to let affronts or provocations pass.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 113b

דָּרַשׁ רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּצִיפּוֹרִי: אָבֹא אֵלָיְהוּ קַפְדָּן. הָיָה רָגִיל לְמִיתֵי גַבְיָהּ. אֵיכָסִיָּה מִיָּנִיָּה תִּלְתָּא יוֹמֵי וְלֹא אָתָּא.
כִּי אָתָּא אָמַר לֵיהּ: "אֲמַאי לָא אָתָּא מָר?" אָמַר לֵיהּ: "קַפְדָּן קָרִית לִי!" אָמַר לֵיהּ: "הָא דְקַמְנָ, דְקָא קַפִּיד מָר".

Rabbi Yosei of Tzippori taught: Father Elijah, a deferential and affectionate characterization for Elijah the prophet, was short-tempered.

Elijah was accustomed to coming and revealing himself before Rabbi Yosei each day. He was hidden from him for three days and did not come. When he came again, Rabbi Yosei said to him: Why did the Master not come? Elijah said to him: you called me short-tempered!

Rabbi Yosei said to Elijah: This example that is before us illustrates the point, as my Master was being short-tempered by not coming during those days.



Explaining the Story

What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

- ?** Why did Rabbi Yose expound: "Father Elijah was short-tempered"?
- ?** Why did Eijah visit Rabbi Yose every day?
- ?** Why did Elijah conceal himself for three days?
- ?** How did Rabbi Yose prove his point?
- ?** In hindsight, why did Rabbi Yose expound: "Father Elijah was short-tempered"?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text



If you wish to change your reputation...

EPILOGUE

Prophet Elijah doesn't appreciate being known as a "*kapdan*" (a person who is short-tempered or easily offended), and when Rabbi Yose refers to him as a "*kapdan*" he becomes offended.

Rabbi Yose, as he clarifies his position to Prophet Elijah, leaves us with a deep, yet simple and practical teaching: the most effective and fastest way to change your reputation, is to actually change the same traits and characteristics that built that reputation to begin.