
PROPHECY

When God Communicates With Man

When modern Jews open the Torah or Tanach they are immediately confronted by a vastly different world than the one they are used to. The phenomenon of God speaking to man – prophecy – is foreign to us today. Nevertheless, the belief that God has communicated His Will to mankind is at the very foundation of Judaism. This shiur will explore the concept, history, and nature of prophecy. We will learn that the primary goal of prophecy was to achieve a heightened closeness with God and the secondary goal was the communication of messages to the Jewish people.

This class will address the following questions:

- What is prophecy? What is its purpose? What does it feel like?
- Who qualifies to be a prophet?
- Why is there no prophecy today? When did it stop? What replaced it?
- Is there anything like prophecy today?
- Will there ever be real prophecy again?

Class Outline:

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- Section II. What is Prophecy?
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SECTION I. INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPHECY

Rambam (Maimonides) counts prophecy as one of the Thirteen Fundamentals of Jewish Faith; this is an indispensable foundation of Judaism.

1. **Rambam, Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1 – Prophecy is an attachment of the human intellect to God’s “mind.”**

The Sixth Foundation [of Jewish belief] is prophecy. That is, that a person must know that there are individuals who have very lofty qualities and great perfection; whose souls are prepared until their minds receive perfect intellect. After this, their human intellect can then become attached to the Active Intellect [i.e. the “mind,” so to speak, of God] and have bestowed upon them an exalted state. These are the prophets and this is prophecy.

והיסוד הששי הנבואה. והוא, לדעת שזה המין האנושי יש שימצאו בו אישים בעלי כשרונות מפותחים מאד ושלמות גדולה, ותתכונן נפשם עד שמקבלת צורת השכל, ויתחבר אותו השכל האנושי בשכל הפועל, ויאצל עליהם ממנו אצילות שפע, ואלה הם הנביאים, וזהו הנבואה וזהו ענינה.

2. **Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Fundamentals and Faith, pp. 69-70 – Judaism rests on the foundation of the reality of prophecy.**

Rambam’s choice of the term “prophecy” rather than “inspiration” is significant: Prophecy is defined as the reality of man receiving a direct and clear message from God ... Those contemporary thinkers who believe that the Torah was not given through direct communication with the Almighty, that the words of Torah are not His exact words but merely Divinely inspired words of men, do humanity a great disservice. Since a person is easily inspired by a message he wants to hear, a law built upon inspiration obviously will not command the respect and authority necessary to bind man; it will become malleable in his hands. Such a Torah would cease to be the source of life from Above, and would instead become a mere product and target for human manipulation.

Prophecy is crucial to the structure of Judaism: there can be no such thing as a commandment from God if He has no way of communicating His Will directly to us.

However, the logical necessity of prophecy within Judaism does not make it any more believable to one who has never experienced it. Does the lack of prophecy today mean that it never existed, or does it rather indicate that the nature of the world and our relationship to its Creator has changed?

3. **Jeremy Kagan, The Jewish Self, pp. 25-6 – Bridging the gap to the world of prophecy.**

The Torah is the supreme prophetic vision, yet it is completely foreign to us. Not only are we baffled by most of its commandments and prohibitions, we don’t even recognize the world it portrays. It is filled with descriptions of miracles and the appearance of God in the world – but we have never seen a sea split or a flaming representative of the Creator descend from the heavens. The Torah is fixated on the need to separate us from idol worship – but we feel no overwhelming desire to bow as we pass a rock or tree. For that matter, worship itself is incomprehensible ... Yet the archeological record makes clear that all ancient societies were worshipping societies ...

Prophecy is a complement to miracle and worship – all involve an awareness of a direct relationship

with the Creator. We lack this awareness. The consistency of worship in the ancient world and the existence of prophecy in the past indicate to us that the nature of awareness has a history; there was clearly a time when we were aware of ourselves and the world in a very different way than we experience them today.

The idea that somehow people in the past were more advanced than we are today itself seems strange. After all, we are certainly more technologically advanced than our ancestors were. Does that not indicate that we are smarter?

Our control over the physical world has certainly advanced over the years, but our awareness of the spiritual world has declined in proportion to our technological progress.

4. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Shabbat 112b – Decrease in spiritual levels over time.**

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rabba bar Zimuna, “If the earlier generations were as angels, then we are like people; if they were like people, then we are like donkeys – and not like the [special] donkeys of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa or Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, but rather like regular donkeys.”

אמר רבי זירא אמר רבא בר זימנא: אם ראשונים בני מלאכים - אנו בני אנשים, ואם ראשונים בני אנשים - אנו כחמורים, ולא כחמורו של רבי חנינא בן דוסא ושל רבי פנחס בן יאיר, אלא כשאר חמורים.

5. **Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakuda, Chovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart), Sha'ar Prishut, Ch. 7 – Inverse relationship between technology and spirituality.**

The more the world is developed, the more the intellect is destroyed.

וכל אשר נוספה הארץ יישוב, נוסף השכל חורבן ...

Our exploration of prophecy must be coupled with humility. The people of the ancient world may not have been as technologically advanced as we are, but they possessed a sensitivity to the spiritual world that we lack today.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ☞ Prophecy is the linchpin of the binding authority of the Torah. If it never happened, then how can we justify Divine commandments?
- ☞ Prophecy does not exist today and this may lead to some skepticism as to whether it ever did.
- ☞ The fact that every ancient culture was a worshipping society certainly implies that they had real experiences of encounters with the spiritual world.
- ☞ Even though our generation is much more technologically advanced than the people who lived in ancient times, they enjoyed a higher level of spiritual awareness than we do today, thus enabling them to attain prophecy.

SECTION II. WHAT IS PROPHECY?

In this section we will describe the phenomenon of prophecy: what it is, how it felt, and why it was used. We will also distinguish between the prophecy of Moshe (Moses), i.e. the Torah, and the vision of other prophets in the Jewish tradition.

PART A. THE NATURE OF PROPHECY

1. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of God) 3:3:4, translation by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers – Prophecy is a state of being bound to God.**

Prophecy is a degree of inspiration where an individual reaches a level where he literally binds himself to God in such a way that he can actually feel this attachment. He then clearly realizes that the One to Whom he is bound is God. This is sensed with complete clarity, with an awareness that leaves no room for doubt whatsoever. The individual is as sure of it as he would be if it were a physical object observed with his physical senses ...

Besides this, however, it is also often accompanied by certain information and enlightenment. Through prophecy one can gain knowledge of many lofty truths among God's hidden mysteries.

ואמנם למעלה מכל זה יש מעלה אחרת, והיא הנבואה. וענינה, שיגיע האדם ויתקשר בבורא ית"ש ויתדבק בו דביקות ממש, באופן שירגיש ההתדבקות וישג מה שהוא מתדבק בו, דהיינו כבודו ית', על הדרך שנבאר לפנינו, ויהיה הדבר ברור אצלו ומורגש ממנו בלי ספק כלל, כדרך שלא יסתפק בדבר גשמי שירגישו בחושיו. והנה עיקר הנבואה הוא השיג הדביקות והקשר הזה, עודו בחיים, שזה שלימות גדול ודאי.

ואולם יתלוה לזה ידיעות והשכלות, כי אמנם ישג על ידי זה ענינים אמיתים ונכבדים מאד מסתרי סודותיו ית', וישגם בברור בדרך ההשכלה הנשפעת שזכרנו, וביותר כח מבעל רוח הקדש.

2. **Ramchal, Da'as Tevunos (The Understanding Heart) 177 – Prophecy is knowledge of God attained through a (partial) revelation of His Glory.**

Prophecy is the knowledge and attainment of God, for God gives some of His Glory to the prophet ... The one who attains prophecy understands it on his level ... for the prophets do not have the ability to see God's Glory as it really is, but when the Glory is revealed to them it creates images of prophecy in their heart.

הנבואה היא ידיעה והשגה שהקב"ה נותן לנביא מכבודו יתברך... וישגהו תופס במדה שתפס...

כי לא ניתן רשות לנביאים לראות הכבוד העליון כמו שהוא, אבל הכבוד המתגלה עליהם יחדש בלבם דמיונות נבואיים.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 89a – Every prophecy is unique to the prophet.**

As Rabbi Yitzchak said: the same message goes to many prophets, but no two prophets prophesy with the same style.

דאמר רבי יצחק סיגנון אחד עולה לכמה נביאים, ואין שני נביאים מתנבאין בסיגנון אחד.

PART B. THE PROPHETIC STATE: WHAT A PROPHET SEES OR HEARS

1. **Shelah, Introduction to Asarah Ma'amarot – An out-of-body experience.**

Someone who perfects his image according to the path I have written will reach the heights of prophecy. His physical shape will be removed and he will wear a spiritual form which he has fixed and perfected, and then will have prophecy.

ומי שהשלים דמותו על הדרך שכתבתי, הנה זה יעלה למעלת הנבואה, ויפשיט הצורה החומרית וילבש הצורה הרוחנית אשר תיקן והשלים ואז יתנבא.

2. **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah (Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah) 7:2-3 – Prophecy is a message received in parable form while in a sleeping state.**

There are many different levels of prophecy: just as in wisdom some Sages are wiser than others, so too in prophecy some prophets are greater than others.

And all of them only see the vision of prophecy in a dream – a vision of the night, or if sleep comes upon them in the day, as it says, “I will be known to him in a vision, in a dream I will speak to him” (Bamidbar/Numbers 12:6).

The things that are made known to a prophet in a vision of prophecy are made known through parables, and immediately the explanation of the prophetic vision will be engraved on his heart, and he will know what it means ...

הנביאים, מעלות מעלות הן: כמו שיש בחכמה חכם גדול מחברו, כך בנבואה נביא גדול מנביא.

וכולן אין רואין מראה הנבואה אלא בחלום בחזיון לילה, או ביום אחר שתיפול עליהן תרדמה: כמו שנאמר “במראה אליו אתוודע, בחלום אדבר בו” (במדבר יב:ו)...

הדברים שמודיעין לנביא במראה הנבואה--דרך משל מודיעין לו, ומיד יחקק בליבו פתרון המשל במראה הנבואה, וידע מזה הוא...

3. **Midrash HaGadol Bereishit (Genesis) 22:3 – A prophecy leaves no room for ambiguity: example of the Akeidah.**

“Avraham arose early in the morning.” This teaches us the power of prophecy. Even though prophecy happens at night in a dream, or during the day after he has fallen asleep, everything that the prophet sees is completely clear and he has no doubt nor uncertainty about it. The words of prophecy and the words of logic are equal in the mind of the prophet. Because the matter was clearly true and there was no doubt about it at all, Avraham arose to sacrifice his only son and did not ask any questions; he did not question whether this prophecy was true or was only a false dream.

וישכם אברהם בבקר, מגיד הכתוב כוחה שלנבואה, שאף על פי שהיא בחלום הלילה או ביום לאחר תרדמה, כל שרואה הנביא הוא דבר על בירורו, ואין בו ספק ולא הרהור, אלא דברי הנבואה ודברי החכמה שווין הן אצל הנביאים, ולפי שהדבר אמת ואין בו דופי ולא ספק, קם אברהם לשחוט את בנו יחידו ולא הרהר, ולא חשב שמא דבר נבואה זו אמת או הבלי חלומות.

PART C. THE PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

As our first source below illustrates, prophecy was widespread throughout Jewish history. Apart from the books of the prophets in Tanach, there were hundreds of thousands of people who attained the level of a prophet. This begs the question, what was the purpose of prophecy if not merely to convey a message to humanity? The primary goal of prophecy was to achieve a heightened closeness with God. A secondary goal was the communication of messages to the Jewish people.

1. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 14a – There were many prophets, but only those with a message for future generations were included in Tanach.

There were many (prophets) as it was taught: “Numerous prophets were established within the Jewish Nation – double the amount [of people] as left Egypt [i.e. 1.2 million] ... Those prophecies that were relevant for future generations were recorded [in Scripture]; otherwise they were not recorded.

טובא הוו כדתניא הרבה נביאים עמדו להם לישראל
כפלים כיוצאי מצרים ... נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות
נכתבה ושלא הוצרכה לא נכתבה.

2. Rashi, ibid. 14a – The prophets guided the people to do *teshuvah* and taught them Jewish laws.

The prophets were needed for future generations to guide them to improve their behavior and to teach Jewish laws. And these forty-eight prophets who were necessary for future generations [were written down].

נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות - ללמוד תשובה או הוראה
וכל הנך ארבעים ושמונה הוצרכו.

3. Ramchal, Derech Hashem 3:4:6 – The point of prophecy is the *medium*, a connection between the prophet and God; the *message* is secondary.

And regarding prophets, the fact that they are sent as God's messengers – that is not the core of prophecy, and it is not necessary at all that a prophet be sent to others. Rather, the core of prophecy is as we have explained: the close attachment to God, His revealing Himself to the prophet, and the passing of knowledge and understanding to him.

וממה שיגיע לנביאים, הוא היותם משתלחים
בשליחות ממנו יתברך. והיינו, כי לא זה הוא עצם
הנבואה, ואינו מוכרח כלל בנביא שישתלח לאחרים,
אבל עצם הנבואה כבר ביארנוהו שהוא התדבק בו
יתברך, והיגלותו יתברך אליו. ויתלוו לזה הידיעות
וההשכלות שיתלוו.

4. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7:7 – A prophecy may be for the prophet's personal elevation or to direct a city or nation.

It is possible that a prophecy is for the prophet alone – to expand his heart and deepen his understanding so that he will know great things that he would otherwise not have known.

הנביא, אפשר שתהיה נבואתו לעצמו בלבד, להרחיב
ליבו ולהוסיף דעתו, עד שיידע מזה שלא היה יודע,
מאותן הדברים הגדולים.

And it is possible that the prophecy is sent

ואפשר שישולח לעם מעמי הארץ, או לאנשי עיר או

for one of the nations of the world, or the inhabitants of a certain city or kingdom – to inform them what they should do or to prevent them from continuing in their evil ways ...

ממלכה, לבונן אותם ולהודיעם מה יעשו, או למנוע אותם ממועשים הרעים שבידיהם...

5. **Rabbi Sa'adiah Gaon, Emunos ve-Deos, Introduction, Ch. 6 – Prophecy is a shortcut to knowledge of religious matters that ensures clarity of transmission.**

We must certainly discuss this topic, which cannot be ignored. The question is this: If all the principles of religion can be attained through investigation and proper analysis, as God makes them known to us, what then is the point of the wisdom that is given to us through prophecy, verified through wonders and open miracles rather than rational arguments?

ובהכרח צריך לספח לענין זה דבר שאין לעבור מעליו, והוא שנסאל ונאמר: אם כל עניני הדת יושגו בחקירה ובעיון הנכון, וכפי שהודיענו ה', מה היא נקודת החכמה שנתנם לנו בדרך הנבואה, ועשה על כך מופתי האותות הגלויים לא המופתים השכליים?

The correct answer, with the help of God, must be the following: a wise man knows that the things that are learned through intellectual investigation only reach completion after a long time. And if we would be devoid of any knowledge of religion, we would remain without this knowledge for a long time, until we completed the task of learning it. It is possible that many people would not complete the task because of some personal lack; some would not manage due to lack of resolve, or they might become plagued with doubts which lead to confusion that will impede them.

ונשיב בסיוע ה' יתעלה התשובה השלמה ונאמר, מפני שידוע לפני החכם שהלימודים הנלמדים על ידי העיון לא יגיעו לשלמותם אלא בזמן ממושך, ושהוא אם יפנה אותנו אליהם בידעת הדת, היינו נשארים זמן רב ללא דת, עד אשר תשלם לנו המלאכה ויסתיים העסק בה. ואפשר שרבים ממנו לא תשלם להם המלאכה מחמת חסרונם, ויש שלא יסתיים לו העסק בה מחמת קוצר רוחו, או שישתלטו עליו הספקות ויביאוהו במבוכה ויעצרוהו.

Therefore, God freed us from all these troubles and sent us this information through His messengers [the prophets] by way of pronouncement, and showing us with our own eyes signs and wonders about which there can be no doubt or refutation.

ולפיכך שיחרר אותנו יתהדר ויתרומם מיד מכל הטרדות האלה, ושגר אלינו את שליחו, ומסרם לנו בדרך הודעה, והראנו בעינינו עליהם אותות ומופתים מה שלא ישלם בהם ספק, ולא תמצא שום דרך לדחייתם.

6. **Ibid. Ma'amar 3 – Even the rational laws in the Torah contain a depth that would otherwise not be accessible without prophecy.**

It is worthwhile to clarify what the necessity is for messengers and prophets, for I have heard that some say that mankind has no use for prophets, that the intellect is sufficient to rule on matters of morality ... So I looked into the matter and found that there is indeed a great need for prophets, not only to teach the mitzvot known through revelation, but even rational mitzvot, for their practice cannot be complete unless the

ראוי שאבאר מה היה הצורך לשלוחים ולנביאים. כי שמעתי כי יש אנשים שאומרים כי אין לבני אדם צורך לנביאים, ושישכליהם מספיקים להם להישירם במה שיש בהם מן הטוב ומן הרע... ואחר כך הסתכלתי בענין, ומצאתי צורך הברואים אל השלוחים צורך גדול, לא מפני המצוות השמעייות בלבד, להודיע אותם, אך מפני המצוות השכליות, כי המעשה בהם לא ישלם כי אם בשלוחים, שיעמידו בני אדם עליהם.

prophets show us how to perform them. Thus, for instance, reason demands gratitude toward God for the blessings received from Him, but does not specify the form, time, and posture appropriate for the expression of such gratitude. So we are in need of prophets. They gave it a form which is called “prayer”; they fixed its times, its special formulae, its special modes and the special direction which one is to face when praying.

ומזה שהשכל דן בהודאה לאל על טובתו, ולא שם גבול להודאה ההיא, לא ממאמר מזמן ותכונה, והצטרכו לשלוחים. ושמו לו גבול, וקראוהו תפלה. ושמו לו עתים ומאמרים מיוחדים ותכונה מיוחדת ומגמה מיוחדת.

7. **Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, The ArtScroll Tanach Series, Tehillim (Psalms) 147:20 – Prophecy illuminates our understanding of life, otherwise unknowable.**

*He declared His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances unto Israel;
He did not do so for any other nation, for His judgments, they know them not – Praise God!*

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Bloch of Telshe explains that here “judgments” refer to the Torah’s precepts that readily appeal to human reason, such as the Ten Commandments, which are universally accepted by both Jew and gentile. However, it may seem as if the Revelation at Sinai was a wasted opportunity. Why did God present the readily acceptable judgments at that moment...?

God wished to demonstrate that even the seemingly logical judgments are truly beyond the understanding of the nations: *they know them not* ... The Jewish understanding encompasses spheres of action that are totally unknown to the gentiles. [For example, the prohibition *Thou shall not kill* also includes embarrassing someone in public (Bava Metziah 58b), rape (Devarim/Deuteronomy 2:26), and causing someone to lose his livelihood (Yevamot 78b).] God reserved this depth and breadth for His beloved, treasured people – Israel.

PART D. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MOSHE AND OTHER PROPHETS

We have been talking about prophecy in general. It is important to distinguish between the level of prophecy of Moshe in comparison to others. While the prophecy of others was either to elevate the prophet himself or to convey a message to other people, the prophecy of Moshe was different: his was direct from God, qualitatively purer, received in a conscious state, and could occur whenever he desired. Ultimately, it had the status of “Torah.”

1. **Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 49b – Moshe’s vision was “clearer.”**

As it was taught: all the prophets looked through a lens that was not clear, but Moshe Rabbeinu looked through a clear lens.

כדתניא כל הנביאים נסתכלו באספקלריא שאינה מאירה, משה רבינו נסתכל באספקלריא המאירה.

2. **Rambam, Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1 – The Seventh of the Thirteen Fundamentals of Faith maintains that Moshe’s prophecy was qualitatively different from all other prophets – it was perfectly pure.**

The Seventh Foundation [of Jewish belief] is the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, may he

והיסוד השביעי נבואת משה רבינו. והוא, שנאמין שהוא אביהן של כל הנביאים שקדמו לפניו והבאים

rest in peace. This means to believe that he is the father of all the prophets, both those that preceded him and those who arose after him; all of them were below his level. He was the chosen one from all of mankind, for he attained a greater knowledge of the Blessed One, more than any other person ever attained or will ever attain.

For he, may he rest in peace, rose up from the level of a human to the level of the angels and gained the exalted status of an angel. There did not remain any screen that he did not tear and penetrate; nothing physical held him back. He was devoid of any flaw, big or small. His power of imagination, his senses and perceptions were all nullified; the power of desire was separated from him, leaving him with pure intellect. It is for this reason that it is said regarding him that he could speak to God, Blessed be He, without the mediation of angels.

אחריו, הכל הם למטה ממנו במעלה, והוא בחיר ה' מכל המין האנושי, אשר השיג ממנו יתעלה יותר ממה שהשיג וישיג כל אדם שנמצא ושימצא.

ושהוא עליו השלום הגיע לתכלית הרוממות מעל האנושיות עד שהשיג המעלה המלאכית ונעשה במעלת המלאכים, לא נשאר לפניו שום מסך שלא קרעו ולא עצר בעדו שום מעצור גופני, ולא נשאר בו שום דבר מן החסרון לא מעט ולא הרבה, והושבתו בו הכוחות הדמיוניים והחושים בכל השגותיו, ונתבטל כוחו המתעורר, ונשאר שכל בלבד, ועל ענין זה אמרו עליו שהוא מדבר עם ה' בלי אמצעות המלאכים.

Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy was different from that of other prophets in the following four ways:

1. God spoke to him directly.
2. Moshe remained in a conscious state throughout the prophecy.
3. Moshe was physically unaffected by the prophecy.
4. Moshe could receive prophecy at will.

3. **Ibid. – Four differences between the prophecy of Moshe and all other prophets.**

First, every other prophet received the word of God through an intermediary, whereas Moshe did not have an intermediary, as it says, "*Mouth to mouth I speak to him.*" (Bamidbar 12:8)

Second, all other prophets only receive their prophecy either when they are sleeping, as we find in numerous places: "*In a dream at night*" (Bereishit 20:3) and "*In a vision at night*" (Iyov/Job 33:15), and many other examples; or by day when a trance has fallen over them, which removes all their senses and leaves their mind open as in a dream. This is called a vision ...

Moshe received his prophecy by day as he stood before the *kruvim* (cherubim), as is testified to by God, Blessed be He, "*And I will commune with you there*" (Shemot/Exodus 25:22) ...

Third, when a prophet receives prophecy, even though it was only a vision and by means of an angel, he would nevertheless be weakened by it

ההבדל הראשון שכל נביא איזה שיהיה אין ה' מדבר אתו כי אם על ידי אמצעי, ומושה בלי אמצעי כמו שאמר פה אל פה אדבר בו.

וההבדל השני שכל נביא לא יבואהו החזון אלא בזמן השינה כמו שאמר בכמה מקומות בחלום הלילה, ויחלם, בחלום חזיון לילה וכו' והרבה מן הענין הזה, או ביום אחר תרדמה הנופלת על הנביא ומצב שבו שובתים כל חושיו ומתרוקנת מחשבתו כעין שינה, ומצב זה נקרא מחזה ומראה...

ומושה בא לו הדבור ביום והוא עומד בין שני הכרובים כמו שהבטיחו ה' ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך וכו'...

וההבדל השלישי שהנביא כאשר בא לו החזון ואף על פי שהוא במראה ועל ידי מלאך יחלשו כחותיו

and his body would shudder. He would be stricken with a very great fear almost to the point that his spirit would leave his body ... But for Moshe, may he rest in peace, this was not so: rather, the word came to him and he did not experience trembling and shivering in any way, as it says, *“And God spoke to Moshe face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”* (Shemot 33:11) ... This was due to his total attachment to [God]...

Fourth, all the [other] prophets were unable to receive prophecy when they willed it, but only when God, Blessed be He, wished it. The prophet could wait days or years and prophecy would not come ... However Moshe, [could prophesy] at any time he wished. As he said, *“Wait and I will hear what God has commanded you”* (Bamidbar 9:8); and as it says, *“Speak to Aharon your brother, he shall not come at all times in the holy place,”* about which our Sages of blessed memory said, “Aharon could not enter, but this did not apply to Moshe.”

ומתחלחל גופו וירד עליו מורא עצום מאד כאלו הולך למות... ומשה אינו כן אלא יבואהו הדבר ולא תארע לו חלחלה כלל והוא אמרו יתעלה ודבר ה' אל משה פנים אל פנים כאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו... וזה מחמת חווק התחברו...

וההבדל הרביעי שכל הנביאים לא יבואם החזון ברצונם אלא ברצון ה', ויש שישאר הנביא כמה שנים ולא יבואהו חזון, ויש שמבקשין מן הנביא להודיעם דבר בנבואה וישאר עד שתבוא לו הנבואה אחר ימים או אחר חדשים או לא תבוא לו כלל... אבל משה רבינו כל זמן שירצה אמר עמדו ואשמעה מה יצוה ה' לכם, ואמר דבר אל אהרן אחיך ואל יבוא בכל עת, ואמרו אהרן בכל יבוא ואין משה בכל יבוא.

4. **Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Fundamentals and Faith, pp. 81-2 – Only Moshe’s prophecy constitutes Torah.**

[T]he prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu – which was validated through a unique moment in history, the revelation to the entire Nation of Israel – that prophecy is Torah. “Torah” represents the absolute truths of the Almighty directly communicated to man ... In contrast, the prophecy of all other prophets is not Torah. Indeed, their prophecy is validated only through the criteria established by Torah ... In certain cases, prophecy was granted in order to deliver a message to a community or the Nation ... These messages served as a source of insight or inspiration regarding the teachings of the Torah ... However, these communications *never* innovated any Torah commandment.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- ☞ Prophecy is an act of supreme communion with God, a state in which one is attached to the Creator. Such a connection is valuable in its own right, but can also be useful for gleaning insights into the workings of the spiritual world.
- ☞ While the medium of prophecy – the state of being close to God – is certainly the principal goal, prophecy was sometimes used by God to convey messages to people other than the prophet himself. As a system of Divine communication it served as a clearer and more efficient way to transmit knowledge of God than any alternative.
- ☞ While there are different degrees of a prophet’s clarity, the prophecy of Moshe was qualitatively higher than that of all other prophets. His prophecy was direct from God, qualitatively purer, received in a conscious state, and could occur whenever he desired. Ultimately, it had the status of “Torah.”

SECTION III. WHO CAN BE A PROPHET?

In this section we will outline the prerequisites for being a prophet and the process of personal development a person would undergo to achieve prophecy. We will also examine how to test if a prophet was in fact genuine.

PART A. JEWISH AND IN ISRAEL

Prophecy has been restricted to Jews since the time of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), except for Bilaam (Balaam), whose prophecy was ultimately for the benefit of the Jewish people. Prophecy occurs in the Land of Israel, except in cases where a prophet initially received prophecy in Israel and subsequently has prophecy outside of Israel.

1. Sifri, Devarim 18:15 – Only in the Land of Israel and only Jews.

“A prophet from your midst, of your brethren, shall God establish for you – to him shall you listen.” (Devarim 18:15)

“A prophet from your midst” – to the exclusion of someone outside the Land of Israel.

“Of your brethren” – to the exclusion of other nations.

נביא מקרבך מאחיד כמני יקים לך יקוק אלהיך אליו
תשמעו: (דברים יח:טו)

נביא מקרבך, ולא מחוצה לארץ.

מאחיד, ולא מאחרים.

2. Ramban (Nachmanides), *ibid.* – Prophecy is only in the Land of Israel.

The reason it says: “From your midst” is that prophecy only takes place in the Land of Israel.

טעם מקרבך לרמוז שאין נבואה אלא בארץ ישראל.

3. Midrash Sifri Zuta 35:34 – Prophecy requires that the Jews are living in the Land of Israel.

Rabbi Nahorai said, “For I am the Lord ...” Perhaps you might think that the Divine Presence dwells even outside the Land, therefore it says, “... In the Land.” Perhaps it dwells in the Land when the Jews are in exile? Therefore it says, “In the midst of the Children of Israel,” i.e. at a time when they are in the Land and not when they are outside of it.

ר' נהוראי אמר כי אני ה' שוכן בגלות ת"ל בארץ או בארץ ואתם בגלות ת"ל בתוך בני ישראל בשעה שבני אדם בארץ ולא בשעה שהן בחוצה לארץ.

4. Talmud Bavli, Moed Katan 25a – Even though Yechezkel (Ezekiel) prophesied outside the Land of Israel, he was able to do so because he had already prophesied in the Land of Israel.

Rabbi Abba said, “Our Master was worthy that the Divine Presence should abide with him, but [the fact that he was in] Babylon prevented it.”

פתח עליה רבי אבא: ראוי היה רבינו שתשרה עליו שכינה, אלא שבבל גרמה ליה.

Thereupon Rabbi Nahman, son of Rabbi Chisda – some say it was Rabbi Chanan, son of Rabbi Chisda – referred to [the text]: “The word of the Lord came expressly unto Yechezkel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar.” His father [R’ Chisda] tapped him with his sandal, saying to him, “Have I not told you not to worry everybody [with this point]? What is meant by the double expression ‘Hayoh [hayah]?’ That the Divine Presence had come to him before he came to Babylon.”

מתים רב נחמן בר חסדא, ואמרי לה רב חנן בר חסדא:
 “היה היה דבר ה’ אל יחזקאל בן בוזי הכהן בארץ
 כשדים!” (יחזקאל א’) טפח ליה אבוה בסנדל. אמר
 ליה: לאו אמינא לך לא תיטרוד עלמא? מאי היה -
 שהיה כבר.

5. Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 1:12 – The requirement for a prophet to be Jewish went into effect after the building of the Mishkan.

Rabbi Yitzchak said, “Before the Mishkan was built, prophecy was common amongst the non-Jewish nations. Once the Mishkan was built prophecy left them” ... They asked him, “But Bilaam was a non-Jewish prophet (and lived after the Mishkan was built)!” He replied, “His prophecy was for the benefit of Israel, as he [Bilaam] said (Bamidbar 23:10), ‘Who can count the dust of Yaakov?’” ...

אמר רבי יצחק, עד שלא הוקם המשכן היתה נבואה
 מצויה באומות העולם, משהוקם המשכן נסתלקה
 מביניהם... אמרו לו הרי בלעם מתנבא, אמר להם
 לטובתן של ישראל נתנבא, מי מנה עפר יעקב...

6. Shemot 33:16; Talmud Bavli, Berachot 7a – The restriction of prophecy to Jews was due to Moshe’s prayer.

Unless You accompany us, how can it be known that I and Your people are pleasing to You? [But if You do,] I and Your people will be distinguished from every nation on the face of the earth (Shemot 33:16).

[Moshe] asked that the Divine Presence should not rest upon the nations of the world, and it was granted to him. For it is said, “I and Your people will be distinguished” ... (Shemot 33:16).

ובמה יודע אפוא כי מצאתי חן בעיניך אני ועמך הלא
 בלכתך עמנו ונפלינו אני ועמך מכל העם אשר על פני
 האדמה: (שמות לג:טז)

בקש שלא תשרה שכונה על עובדי כוכבים ונתן לו,
 שנאמר: (שמות לג:טז) ונפלינו אני ועמך...

The Chasam Sofer explains that Moshe sought this exclusive arrangement specifically after the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe was afraid that without this pledge it would be possible for a non-Jew to replicate the spiritual accomplishments of Avraham (Abraham) and found a new Chosen People. However, from that point on, any non-Jew seeking prophecy would have to convert to Judaism first.

PART B. CHARACTER REFINEMENT

Only someone who has developed an exceptional character qualifies to receive prophecy.

1. **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7:1 – Developing wisdom, self-restraint, and knowledge.**

Prophecy only comes to one who is very wise; one who has control over his character traits; and whose [Evil] Inclination does not control him at all, rather he intentionally overcomes it at all times; and one who is extremely knowledgeable.

...ואין הנבואה חלה אלא על חכם גדול בחכמה, גיבור במידותיו, ולא יהיה יצרו מתגבר עליו בדבר בעולם אלא הוא מתגבר בדעתו על יצרו תמיד, והוא בעל דעה רחבה נכונה עד מאוד

2. **Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Sukkah 22b – One must be in a state of joy to receive prophecy.**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Why is it called ‘The House of Drawing’? Because from there is drawn Divine Inspiration” ... Rabbi Yonah said, “[The prophet] Yonah ben Amitai went to Jerusalem for the festival, and he went to the joyous Water Drawing Ceremony, and Divine Inspiration rested upon him. This teaches us that Divine Inspiration only rests on someone whose heart is happy.”

א”ר יהושע בן לוי למה נקרא שמה בית השואבה שמשם שואבים רוח הקודש... אמר רבי יונה, יונה בן אמיתי מעולי רגלים היה ונכנס לשמחת בית השואבה ושרת עליו רוח הקודש, ללמדך שאין רוח הקודש שורה אלא על לב שמח.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 20b – The eleven-step process to prophecy.**

Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said, “Torah leads to carefulness, carefulness leads to enthusiasm, enthusiasm leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to separation, separation leads to purity, purity leads to righteousness, righteousness leads to modesty, modesty leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to purity, purity leads to Divine Inspiration (prophecy), and Divine Inspiration leads to the resurrection of the dead.”

א”ר פנחס בן יאיר תורה מביאה לידי זהירות זהירות מביאה לידי זריזות זריזות מביאה לידי נקיות נקיות מביאה לידי פרישות, פרישות מביאה לידי טהרה, טהרה מביאה לידי חסידות, חסידות מביאה לידי ענוה, ענוה מביאה לידי יראת חטא, יראת חטא מביאה לידי קדושה, קדושה מביאה לידי רוח הקודש, רוח הקודש מביאה לידי תחיית המתים.

Character development is not just for those individuals striving to achieve prophecy. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote an incisive guide, *The Path of the Just* (Mesillat Yesharim), for every Jew to develop his attributes based on Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair’s teaching. This book has been studied daily worldwide by thousands ever since its publication in the 18th century.

4. **Rambam, Introduction to Shemoneh Perakim – Learning and fulfilling the ethical teachings of Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) leads to prophecy.**

Our Sages of blessed memory have stated that “whoever wishes to become pious should fulfill the words of Pirkei Avot” (Bava Kama 30a). There is no greater virtue than piety, other than prophecy.

וכבר אמרו רבנן זכרונם לברכה (בבא קמא ל.), “האי מאן דבעי למיהוי חסידא לקיים מילי דאבות”, ואין אצלנו מעלה גדולה מחסידות אלא הנבואה, והיא המביאה אליה כמו שאמרו רבנן זכרונם לברכה

And piety actually brings one to prophecy, as our Sages of blessed memory said, “Piety leads to ... Divine Inspiration” (Avodah Zarah 20b). Hence fulfilling the dictates of Pirkei Avot leads to prophecy.

(עבודה זרה כ.), “חסידות מביאה לידי רוח הקדש”.
הנה התבאר מדבריהם שבקיום מאמרי זאת המסכתא
מביא לידי נבואה.

5. **Rabbeinu Peretz, Ma'arechet Elokut, Ch. 10 – Righteousness is a prerequisite for prophecy.**

According to the way I explained the essence of man, the intelligent person will understand that when man is righteous, he is fitting to prophesy and live the eternal existence, for he has become like God.

וממה שביארתי בדמות האדם יכול להתבונן המשכיל
כי בהיות האדם צדיק גמור כי ראוי לו שיתנבא ויחיה
לעולם כי מצא מין את מינו וניעור.

6. **Jeremy Kagan, The Jewish Self, pp.46-50 – Character refinement leads to prophecy because it enables one to resemble the Creator.**

Why is the character development outlined in Pirkei Avot identified [by Rambam] as the way to become a prophet? What is the nature of our direct connection with the Creator that human character should mediate the process?

Human character can mediate this connection because it is structured around the very act of creation which connects Spirit to physical reality. Just as a full act of creation is only initiated by a desire to give selflessly, so the foundation of refined human character is a desire to give and relate to others ... When we refine our character, we attune ourselves to Spirit's analogous connection to creation. Because of this, the Sages tell us that we must, within the confines of our own situation, imitate the Creator.

PART C. MITZVAH FULFILLMENT

As explained in the Morasha class on the mitzvot, each commandment we fulfill intrinsically connects us with God. Hence, fulfilling mitzvot also has the power to create the closeness to God that can lead to prophecy.

1. **Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim 1:6 – Keeping mitzvot properly is a prerequisite for the Divine Presence to rest on a person.**

When a person fulfills the mitzvot in perfection, with every detail and nuance essential to the act, adding to that a purity and holiness of thought ... the Glory of God will rest upon him always.

וכאשר קיים כל המצות בשלימות בכל פרטיהם
ודקדוקיהם בעיקר המעשה ונוסף עליהם הצטרף
עוצם טהרת וקדושת המחשבה.....וכבוד ה' חופף עליו
תמיד.

PART D. ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY FOR PREDICTIONS

Most people consider the role of a prophet is to predict the future. As we have seen, the primary goal of a prophet is to develop closeness to God. Nevertheless, a prophet's ability to foresee the future is critical to verify his credibility as a messenger of God.

1. **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 10:1-3 – A prophet is repeatedly tested for the accuracy of his predictions.**

When a person comes who is fitting for prophecy in the employment of God and does not intend to add or subtract [from the Torah], but rather to serve God in the Torah's commandments – we do not demand that he split the sea or revive the dead, etc., and only then believe him ... Rather, we say to him, "If you are a prophet, tell us things that will happen in the future." He does so and then we wait to see if his predictions come true. If what he said does not occur, even if only one small detail is missing, it is known that he is a false prophet. But if all his words do come true, then we consider him trustworthy.

We test him many times and if all his words are reliable he is considered a true prophet.

Do astrologers and magicians not also tell the future? What is the difference between them and a prophet? The difference is that with astrologers, magicians, and those like them, some of their words come true and some do not ... but a prophet – all his words come true, as it is said, "And nothing from the word of God shall fall to the earth" (Melachim/Kings II, 10:10).

כשיבוא אדם הראוי לנבואה במלאכות ה', ולא יבוא להוסיף ולא לגרוע, אלא לעבוד את ה' מצוות התורה-אין אומרים לו קרע לנו את הים או החיה מת וכיוצא באלו, ואחר כך נאמין בו. אלא אומרים לו, אם נביא אתה, אמור לנו דברים העתידים להיות; והוא אומר, ואנו מחכים לו לראות היבואו דבריו אם לא יבואו, ואפילו נפל דבר אחד קטן--בידוע שהוא נביא שקר. ואם באו דבריו כולם, יהיה בעינינו נאמן.

ובודקין אותו פעמים הרבה. אם נמצאו דבריו כולם נאמנים, הרי זה נביא אמת..

והלא המעוננים והקוסמים אומרים מה עתיד להיות, ומה הפרש בין הנביא ובנים--אלא שהמעוננים והקוסמים וכיוצא בהן, מקצת דבריהן מתקיימים ומקצתן אין מתקיימים.... אבל הנביא--כל דבריו קיימים, שנאמר "כי לא ייפול מדבר ה' ארצה" (מלכים ב' י').

2. **Ibid. 7:7 – Miracles confirm the truth of someone previously considered worthy to be a prophet.**

When a prophet is sent [to prophesy to the people], he is given a sign and a wonder to prove to the people that God has truly sent him. Not that everyone who performs signs and wonders is believed to be a prophet. Rather, someone who was already considered worthy to be a prophet due to his wisdom and good deeds, who has risen above all his contemporaries, and has walked in the ways of prophecy, holiness, and asceticism, and only then performs a wonder and says that God sent him – at that point it is a mitzvah to listen to him, as it is said, "And to him you shall listen" (Devarim 18:15).

וכשמשלחין אותו, נותנים לו אות ומופת כדי שידעו העם שהאל שילחו באמת. ולא כל העושה אות ומופת, מאמינים אותו שהוא נביא: אלא אדם שהיינו יודעים בו מתחילתו שהוא ראוי לנבואה בחכמתו ובמעשיו, שנתעלה בהן על כל בני גילו, והיה מהלך בדרכי הנבואה ובקדושתה ופרישותה, ואחר כך בא ועשה אות ומופת ואמר שהאל שילחו--מצוה לשמוע ממנו, שנאמר "אליו, תשמעון" (דברים יח:טו)

3. **Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 89b – Once a prophet's credentials have been established, he no longer needs to prove himself.**

[The Mishnah noted that] one who ignores the words of a prophet [is punished].

המוותר על דברי נביא מנא ידע דאיענש דיהב ליה אות והא מיכה דלא יחב ליה אות ואיענש היכא דמוחזק שאני.

[The Gemara asks:] How should one know [that the prophet is true, that he] should be punished on his account? He gives a sign [and it comes true]. But in the story of Michah (Micah) he does not give a sign and yet [those who ignored him] were punished! The case of [a prophet] who is already established as such is different.

The Rambam writes that a prophecy of harmful events does not need to be fulfilled, but a prophecy of a prosperous future must be fulfilled.

4. **Rambam, Introduction to the Mishnah – An unfulfilled prophecy of harm does not indicate a false prophet; an unfulfilled prophecy of goodness reveals a false prophet.**

There is a very important matter that requires clarification. If a prophet's prophecy predicts harmful events, deserved by the people's behavior, and he prophesies, for example, that there will be famine or war ... and then these events do not happen, and the people are pardoned and time passes peacefully – this does not indicate that the prophet is false and deserves the death penalty, since God relented on the evil, for it is possible that the people repented or that God suspended the decree in His mercy or pushed off their punishment to a different time ... or God forgave them on account of previous good deeds ...

However, if [the prophet] promised that fortuitous events will take place at a specific time: for example, he says that the upcoming year will be peaceful and then a war ensued, or he said that the year will have rain and blessing and there was famine and no rain, and similar things, he is a false prophet. For if God promised good things for the people through a prophet, He will certainly fulfill His promise in order to show the truth of their prophecy to mankind ...

ונשאר כאן ענין גדול צריך לבארו. והוא, שהנביא אם נתנבא ברעות לבני אדם שנתחייבו בכך, כגון שיתנבא על רעב או חרב...ולא נתקיים שום דבר מזה אלא נמחל להם ועבר מצבם בשלום, לא יתברר בזה כזבו של הנביא ויהיה נביא שקר ויתחייב מיתה, כי ה' יתעלה ויתרומם נחם על הרעה, ואפשר שישבו ופירשו מחטאותם, או שהאריך להם ה' בחכמתו ודחה פרעונם לזמן אחר...או שמחל להם בגלל טובה שעשו מלפני כו...

אבל אם הבטיח שטובות תבואנה בזמן מסויים כגון שיאמר ששלום יהיה בשנה זו והיתה מלחמה, או שיאמר שהשנה תהיה גשומה וברוכה והיה רעב ובצורת וכדומה לכך, הרי זה נביא... לפי שה' אם הבטיח טובה לעם על ידי נביא הוא מקיימה בהחלט כדי שתתאמת נבואתם אצל בני אדם...

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ☞ While prophecy was once attainable by all mankind, since the times of Moshe it has been in the domain of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.
- ☞ Beyond the basic conditions of being Jewish and living in the Land of Israel, the process of becoming a prophet entailed rigorously refining one's character and perfecting one's mitzvah observance.

- ☞ These requirements reflect the very core of what prophecy is: in order to get close to God one must emulate His attributes.
- ☞ A prophet had to prove his abilities by repeatedly successfully predicting events in the future. Only then would his message from God be taken seriously.
- ☞ A prophecy of predicting harmful events does not need to be fulfilled, but a prophecy for a prosperous future must be fulfilled.

SECTION IV. THE LIMITS OF A PROPHET'S AUTHORITY

The fact that a prophet conveys the Will of God can present a challenge to the extent to which he leads the Jewish people. Can a prophet add or subtract from the Torah's laws? Are there any limits to his authority?

1. Devarim 13:1-5 – A prophet cannot go against God.

[It is enough that you] carefully observe everything that I am prescribing to you. Do not add to the Torah and do not subtract from it. [This is what you must do] when a prophet or a person who has visions in a dream arises among you. He may present you with a sign or miracle, and on the basis of that sign or miracle, say to you, "Let us try a different god and serve it." Do not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to see if you are truly able to love Him with all your heart and all your soul. Follow the Lord your God, remain in awe of Him, keep His commandments, obey Him and serve Him, and you will then be able to cleave to Him.

את כל-הדבר, אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם--אתו תשמרו, לעשות: לא-תסף עליו, ולא תגרע ממנו. כי-יקום בקרבך נביא, או חלם חלום; ונתן אליך. אות, או מופת. וקא האות והמופת, אשר-דבר אליך לאמר: נלכה אחרי אלהים אחרים, . אשר לא-ידעתם--ונעבדם. לא תשמע, אל-דברי הנביא ההוא, או אל-חולם החלום, ההוא: כי מנסה יהוה אלהיכם, אתכם, לדעת הישכם אהבים את-יהוה אלהיכם, בכל-לבבכם ובכל-נפשכם. אחרי יהוה אלהיכם תלכו, ואתו תיראו; ואת-מצותיו תשמרו ובקלו תשמעו, ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקו.

2. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 14a – The prophets cannot add or detract from the Torah.

The Sages taught: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied for the Jewish people and they did not detract or add to that which is written in the Torah, except for the reading of the Megillah.

תנו רבנן: ארבעים ושמונה נביאים ושבע נביאות נתנבאו להם לישראל, ולא פחתו ולא הוטרפו על מה שכתוב בתורה, חוץ ממקרא מגילה.

Please refer to source #5 below regarding the reading of the Megillah.

3. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, Ch. 9:1 – A prophet has no power to change the Torah in any way.

It is made clear and explicit in the Torah that [the Torah] is a commandment to last forever: there will be no change, no subtraction, no addition ...

דבר ברור ומפורש בתורה, שהיא מצוה עומדת לעולם ולעולמי עולמים: אין לה לא שינוי, ולא גירעון ולא תוספת...היא למדת שכל דברי תורה, מצווין אנו

We are commanded to keep all the words of the Torah forever ... A prophet is not allowed to change anything. Therefore, if someone arises, Jewish or not, and performs a wonder and says that God has sent him to add or subtract a mitzvah, or to explain a commandment in a way that we did not hear it from Moshe, or he says that the commandments that the Jewish people were commanded are not forever or for every generation, rather that they were for a limited period of time ... [that person] is a false prophet.

לעשותן עד עולם;...אין נביא רשאי לחדש דבר... לפיכך אם יעמוד איש, בין מישראל בין מן האומות, ויעשה אות ומופת ויאמר שה' שלחו להוסיף מצוה, או לגרוע מצוה, או לפרש במצוה מן המצוות פירוש שלא שמענו ממושה, או שאמר שאותן המצוות שנצטוו בהן ישראל אינן לעולם ולדורי דורות אלא מצוות לפי זמן היו--הרי זה נביא שקר...

The Maharsha below explains that the many enactments from the prophets were not additional Torah laws.

4. **Maharsha, Megillah, 14a – King Solomon's laws of Eruvin and *netilat yedayim* are related to the Torah laws of carrying on Shabbat and *terumah*, respectively.**

It is not a difficulty that Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) established Eruvin and *netilat yedayim* [ritual washing of hands] – these are not considered additional laws to what is written in the Torah. For Eruvin is part of the laws of carrying on Shabbat from a private domain to a public domain and *netilat yedayim* is related to the laws of *terumah*.

והא דלא תקשי הא דתקון שלמה ערובין ונט"י דאין זה מקרי הותר על מה שכתוב בתורה דערובין אינו רק גדר להוצאת שבת מרה"י לר"ה ונט"י משום סרך תרומה.

All of the enactments of the prophets have some basis in the Torah. Their laws were instituted to strengthen or safeguard existing Torah laws. For example, the prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah) added specific laws to enhance the special atmosphere of Shabbat through our speech, movement, and activities (see Yeshayahu 58:13-14).

Even the addition of Megillat Esther was only included after the Sages found a basis for it in the Torah.

5. **Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim, Sha'ar Aleph, Ch. 22 – Megillat Esther was only added to the Holy Writings after an additional source in the Torah was referenced to teach the destruction of Amalek.**

Behold, Esther was one of the seven prophetesses (see Talmud Megillah 14a) and she nevertheless requested permission from the Sages to include Megillat Esther for future generations. The Sages replied (Mishlei/Proverbs 22:20), "Have I not written [in the Tanach] for you three times" [the scriptural sources teaching the obliteration of Amalek, but not four sources] until they found a fourth source [teaching the destruction of Amalek, which would then include the Megillah as part of the Holy Writings] (as derived in the Talmud, Megillah 7a).

שהרי אסתר שהיתה אחת משבע נביאות (מגילה י"ד, א'), עם כל זה כששלחה לחכמים כתבוני "לדורות", השיבוה: "הלא כתבתי לך שלשים", (משלי כ"ב, כ'), עד שמצאו לה אחר כך סמך מן המקרא (מגילה ז', א').

6. **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah Ch. 9:3 – The exception to the rule: a known prophet may temporarily suspend mitzvot.**

Similarly, if a prophet who is known to be a [true] prophet tells us to transgress one or many of the commandments of the Torah – whether a stringent or a more lenient one – but only as a temporary practice, then we are commanded to listen to him. Thus we learned from the earlier Sages, that we should listen to a prophet, whatever the commandments he tells us to transgress are, as with Eliyahu (Elijah) at Mount Carmel – except if the commandment he tells us to transgress is that of not practicing idolatry. And that is provided that he tells us to transgress only as a temporary measure, like Eliyahu did at Mount Carmel, when he offered sacrifices outside Jerusalem, the city chosen for that purpose ...

וכן אם יאמר לנו הנביא שנודע לנו שהוא נביא לעבור על אחת מכל מצות האמורות בתורה או על מצות הרבה בין קלות בין חמורות לפי שעה מצוה לשמוע לו, וכן למדנו מחכמים ראשונים מפי השמועה בכל אם יאמר לך הנביא עבור על דברי תורה כאלוהו בהר הכרמל שמע לו חוץ מעבודת כוכבים, והוא שיהיה הדבר לפי שעה, כגון אליהו בהר הכרמל שהקריב עולה בחוץ וירושלים נבחרת לכך...

Eliyahu HaNavi offered sacrifices outside the Temple in accordance with what God had instructed him in order to discredit the (false) prophets of Baal (see Melachim I, Ch. 18).

7. **Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 90a – No prophet may ever demand idol worship.**

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, “In every matter, if a prophet tells you to transgress the commands of the Torah, obey him, with the exception of idolatry. In that case, even if he makes the sun stand still in the middle of the sky, do not listen to him.”

א"ר אבהו א"ר יוחנן בכל אם יאמר לך נביא עבור על דברי תורה שמע לו חוץ מעבודת כוכבים שאפילו מעמיד לך חמה באמצע הרקיע אל תשמע לו.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- ☞ A prophet's words were heeded only as long as they did not contradict the Torah.
- ☞ The task of a prophet as an emissary of God was to strengthen the observance of God's commandments. The many enactments from the prophets were not additional Torah laws. Rather, they were instituted to strengthen or safeguard existing Torah laws. If that was necessary, an established prophet could even *temporarily* abrogate any Torah command, except the prohibition of idolatry.

SECTION V. EXAMPLES OF PROPHECY

As mentioned above (Section II.C.1), the prophecies that the Bible recorded for posterity have a message for all time. Below we list some prophecies that have come true in the course of Jewish history.

PART A. THE ETERNAL JEWISH PEOPLE

Prophecies that the Jewish people will always exist:

1. Vayikra 26:44-45 – God will not reject His people even in exile.

Yet even so, even while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject or spurn them, lest I break My covenant with them by destroying them, for I am their God. I will remember them because of the covenant I made with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt under the eyes of the nations, so that I might be their God, I am the Lord.

ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאסתי ולא געלתיים לכלתם להפר בריתי אתם כי אני יקוק אלהיהם: וזכרתי להם ברית ראשנים אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ מצרים לעיני הגוים להיות להם לאלהים אני יקוק:

2. Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 31:34-35 – The Jewish people are eternal.

Thus says the Lord, “Who establishes the sun to light the day, the laws of the moon and stars to light the night? Who stirs up the sea into roaring waves? Whose name is the Lord of Hosts? If these natural laws should ever give way before Me,” says the Lord, “only then shall the offspring of Israel cease to be a nation before me for all time.”

כה אמר יקוק נתן שמש לאור יומם חקת ירח וכוכבים לאור לילה רגע הים ויהמו גליו יקוק צבאות שמו: אם ימשו החקים האלה מלפני נאם יקוק גם זרע ישראל ישבתו מהיות גוי לפני כל הימים:

PART B. FEW IN NUMBER

1. Devarim 28:62 – Despite their eternal nature, the Jews will remain a small nation.

You will remain few in number, whereas you could have become as numerous as the stars of the heavens, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

ונשארתם במתי מעט תחת אשר הייתם ככוכבי השמים לרב כי לא שמעת בקול יקוק אלהיך:

As the Rambam taught above (Section III.D), a harmful prophecy would only be fulfilled if the Jewish people's behavior would so justify. In this case, the fact that the Jewish people are few in number is attributed to their not having listened to God.

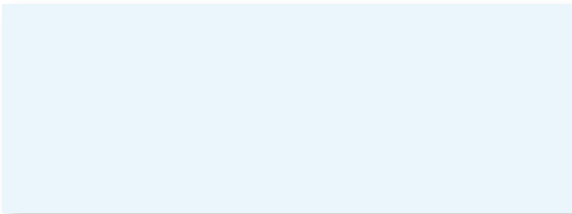
PART C. RETURN TO THE PROMISED LAND

1. Devarim 30:3-5 – No matter how great the exile, God will reverse the process and bring the Jewish people back to the Land of Israel.

God will then bring back your remnants and have mercy on you. The Lord your God will once again gather you from among all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been dispersed to the ends of the heavens, the Lord your God will gather you up from there and He

ושב יקוק אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך מכל העמים אשר הפיצך יקוק אלהיך שמה: אם יהיה נדחך בקצה השמים משם יקבצך יקוק אלהיך ומשם יקחד: והביאך יקוק אלהיך אל הארץ אשר ירשו אבותיך וירשתה והיטבך והרבך מאבתיך:

will take you back. The Lord your God will then bring you to the land that your ancestors inherited, and you too will inherit it. He will be good to you and make you flourish even more than your forefathers.



2. Yechezkel 11:17 – God will gather the Jews and bring them back to their Land.

Thus says the Lord, God, “I will gather you from the nations and assemble you from the lands where you have been scattered, and I will give you the Land of Israel.”

לכן אמר כה אמר אדני יקוק וקבצתי אתכם מן העמים ואספתי אתכם מן הארצות אשר נפצותם בהם ונתתי לכם את אדמת ישראל:

PART D. THE WESTERN WALL

There is a Midrash that the Western Wall will always stand.

1. Midrash Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs) Rabbah 2:26 – The Western Wall will always remain.

“Behold, He [i.e. God] stands behind our wall ...” (Shir HaShirim 2:9)

... Behind the Western Wall of the Temple. What is special about the Western Wall? Because God swore to the Western Wall that it would never be destroyed.

הנה זה עומד אחר כתלנו (שיר השירים ב:ט)

, אחר כותל מערבי של בית המקדש למה שנשבע לו הקב"ה שאינו חרב לעולם.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V

As messages of inspiration as well as warning, major themes of Jewish history have been predicted by the Torah and the prophets. These include: (1) the eternal nature of the Jewish people, (2) that the Jews will remain a small nation, and (3) that God will gather the Jews and bring them back to their Land. There is also a Midrash that the Western Wall will always stand.

SECTION VI. WHY THERE IS NO PROPHECY TODAY

In this section we will explore the reasons why prophecy ended and how the wisdom of the Torah expressed through the human intellect came to succeed it.

PART A. WHEN AND WHY PROPHECY ENDED

Prior and during the First Temple Period, people experienced a strong drive for transcendence that was common to both idolatry and prophecy. When idolatry got out of hand, leading to the destruction of the

First Temple and the exile of the Jews from Israel, the Sages at the time strove to abolish the drive for it. This does not mean that idol worship ceased – it remains a feature of different cultures even today – but that the intense psychological drive for its worship died.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 102b – One cannot underestimate the influence of the drive to worship idols.**

He [Rav Ashi] then questioned him [King Menashe/Manasse], “Since you are so wise, why did you worship idols?” He replied, “Were you there, you would have picked up the ends of your garment and sped after me!”

אמר ליה: מאחר דחכימתו כולי האי, מאי טעמא קא פלחיתו לעבודה זרה? אמר ליה: אי הות התם - הות נקיטנא בשיפולי גלימא ורהטת אבתראי.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 69b – The death of the drive to worship idolatry.**

And [they] cried out with a great voice unto the Lord, their God. What did they cry? “Woe, woe, it is ‘he’ [the desire for idolatry] who has destroyed the Sanctuary, burned the Temple, killed all the righteous, driven all Israel into exile, and is still dancing around among us! You have surely given him to us so that we may receive reward through him [by overcoming the desire]. We want neither him, nor the reward through him!” Thereupon, a tablet fell down from heaven to them, upon which the word “Truth” was inscribed ... They ordered a fast of three days and three nights, whereupon he was surrendered to them. He came forth from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion. Afterwards, the prophet said to Israel, “This is the evil desire for idolatry.”

ויצעקו אל ה' אלהים בקול גדול מאי אמור? - אמר רב ואיתימא רבי יוחנן: בייא, בייא! היינו האי דאחרביה למקדשא, וקליה להיכליה, וקטלינהו לכולהו צדיקי, ואגלינהו לישראל מארעהון, ועדיין מרקד בינן. כלום יהבתייה לן אלא לקבולי ביה אגרא - לא איהו בעינן. ולא אגריה בעינן. נפל להו פיתקא מרקיעא, דהוה כתב בה אמת... אותיבו בתעניתא תלתא יומין ותלתא לילואתא, מסרוהו ניהליהו. נפק אתא כי גוריא דנורא מבית קדשי הקדשים. אמר להו נביא לישראל: היינו יצרא דעבודה זרה.

3. **Vilna Gaon, Commentary on Seder Olam Rabbah, Ch. 30 – The cessation of prophecy corresponded with the end of the natural desire to worship idols.**

When they killed the Evil Inclination for idolatry, prophecy ceased.

משהרגו את היצר הרע בטלה הנבואה.

4. **Seder Olam Rabbah, Ch. 30 – Prophecy ceased in the beginning of the Second Temple Period (around 4th century BCE)**

Alexander the Great ruled for twelve years. After that time, prophets no longer prophesied with Divine Inspiration.

הוא אלכסנדרוס מוקדון שמלך י"ב שנה. עד כאן היו הנביאים מתנבאים ברוח הקדש.

People used to have a natural drive to worship idols, when that drive was taken away so was prophecy. What is the connection between prophecy and idolatry?

5. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, Worldmask, pp. 134-5 – Idolatry and prophecy stem from the same source in the human psyche.**

The Talmud relates that the Men of the Great Assembly annulled the human drive for idolatry. They reckoned that due to the relative descent of the generations in spiritual power, the ordeal provided by the temptation to idolatry was greater than the reward earned in overcoming it. Since it offered too dangerous a test, they decided to work for its obliteration, and they successfully removed it from the human psyche. From that time on, people do not have the natural and intrinsic drive to worship idols.

But the very act of abolishing the drive to idolatry also abolished prophecy. That generation was the last to witness prophecy ... What is the connection between idolatry and prophecy? Why must they stand and fall together?

The answer is that both of these ideas relate to transcendence. The human mind and *neshamah* [soul] long to transcend the bonds of the finite and physical, and essentially, such transcendence is possible. At a high enough level of human preparation and purity, prophecy is the result ... But there is a false channel for transcendence, too. That is the idea of idolatry ...

And that is why they inhabit the same zone within human consciousness and motivation – the very pinnacle of the mind, the point at which consciousness can transcend into the super-conscious, is that faculty which is activated in prophecy and betrayed in idolatry.

6. **Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid (12th century Germany), Sefer Chasidim 544 – Prophecy lasted as long as it did in order to counteract the forces of idolatry.**

In the Second Temple Period, there was no Divine Inspiration in the world to sustain prophets, for in the Second Temple Period the drive for idolatry was killed. When there had been miracles performed by the false prophets of Baal (during the First Temple period), had there not also been true prophets of God amongst the Jews at that time, they would have all been converted to idolatry. But when the drive for idolatry ceased there was no longer any need for prophecy.

ואין רוח הקודש בעולם להיות נביאים בעולם בבית שני מפני שבבית שני נשחט יצר ע"ז וכשהיו אותות נביאי הבעל אם לא היו נביאי ה' עושים היו נהפכים לע"ז, וכשנשחט יצר של ע"ז כבר לא היו צריך לנביא.

7. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. III, p. 277 – Prophecy ceased along with idolatry in order to maintain the equilibrium of free will.**

This is a very deep concept ... The Men of the Great Assembly saw that there was a need to strive with all their spiritual powers to remove from Israel the Evil Inclination for idolatry ...

We have found in the writings of Rav Tzadok HaKohen that as long as the Evil Inclination for idolatry existed there was a corresponding power of prophecy, and there were open miracles in Israel. God made the one corresponding to the other. There must always be a balance of power

הנה ענין זה עמוק הוא מאד...שראו אנשי כנסת הגדולה צורך להשתדל בכל כחותיהם הרוחניים לבטל מישראל את יצר הרע של ע"ז...

ומצינו בדברי רבי צדוק הכהן וצ"ל, שכל עוד שהיה קיים יצר הרע של ע"ז היתה כנגדו הנבואה והיו נסים גלויים בישראל, כי זה לעומת זה עשה האלקים, שכן לעולם יש שיווי משקל בין כחות הקדושה והטומאה, וכל זמן שהיתה נבואה בעולם שעל ידה משיגים אמונה חושית, היו לעומתה גם כחות טומאה מוחשיים

between the forces of holiness and spiritual impurity. As long as there was prophecy through which people could achieve tangible faith there were also tangible forces of impurity at work on the side of the Evil Inclination, such as the spirit of falsity propagated by prophets of Baal, magic, sorcery, etc. This balance existed in order to maintain free will. That is why we see that when the drive for idolatry was abolished at the beginning of the Second Temple Period, correspondingly the power of prophecy left the Jewish people.

שפעלו לצד הע"ז, כגון רוח שקר של נביאי הבעל, כישוף, קסם וכו' וזה כדי שתשאר בחירה הפשוטה. וכן רואים אנו שבתחילת ימי בית השני במל יצא דע"ז ולעומתו פסקה גם הנבואה מישראל.

We can explain this idea with the following analogy: many people feel an internal struggle between eating what tastes good and what is actually good for them. Nevertheless, we have the free will to choose at any moment between the two. But if one's taste buds were suddenly removed, then there would of course be no more struggle, and the correct diet would be obvious.

Similarly, in removing the "taste buds" for idolatry, God was limiting man's range of free will choices. In order to maintain free will, God had to curtail the other end of the spectrum as well. In the face of obvious manifestations of God's Presence in the world, such as prophecy and open miracles, man would be forced to recognize and obey God. Therefore, God took away prophecy to maintain the equilibrium of free will.

8. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 48b – While it is still possible for individuals to rise to the level of a prophet, the general state of mankind no longer allows for prophecy to take place.

When Chaggai, Zechariah and Malachi died, Divine Inspiration departed from Israel; nevertheless they made use of the Heavenly Voice. On one occasion [some Rabbis] were sitting in the upper chamber of Gurya's house in Jericho; a Heavenly Voice was granted to them which announced, "There is in your midst one man who is deserving that the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) should rest upon him, but his generation is unworthy of it." They all looked at Hillel the Elder; and when he died, they lamented over him, "Alas, the pious man! Alas, the humble man! Disciple of Ezra!"

On another occasion they were sitting in an upper chamber in Yavneh; a Heavenly Voice was granted to them which announced, "There is in your midst one man who deserves that the *Shechinah* should rest upon him, but his generation is unworthy of it." They all looked at Shmuel HaKatan; and when he died, they lamented over him, "Alas, the humble man! Alas, the pious man! Disciple of Hillel!"

משמנתו חגי זכריה ומלאכי - נסתלקה רוח הקודש מישראל, ואע"פ כן היו משתמשים בבת קול, שפעם אחת היו מסובין בעליית בית גוריא ביריחו, נתנה עליהן בת קול מן השמים ואמרה: יש בכם אדם אחד שראוי שתשרה שכינה עליו, אלא שאין דורו ראוי לכך, נתנו עיניהם בהלל הזקן, וכשמת, הספידוהו: הי חסיד, הי עניו, תלמידו של עזרא;

ושוב פעם אחרת היו מסובין בעלייה ביבנה, נתנה להן בת קול מן השמים ואמרה להן: יש בכם אדם א' שראוי שתשרה שכינה עליו, אלא שאין דורו זכאין לכך, נתנו עיניהם בשמואל הקטן, וכשמת, הספידוהו: הי עניו, הי חסיד, תלמידו של הלל

PART B. WISDOM REPLACES PROPHECY

Corresponding to the decline of idolatry and the rise of Greece in the world at large, within the Jewish world the fall of prophecy corresponded with the flourishing of the Oral Tradition. It was during this period that the Sages of the Mishnah begin to emerge. A new phase in the history of the Jewish people began as the Sage replaced the prophet.

1. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 12a – The Sage is greater than the prophet.

Rabbi Avdimi from Haifa said, “From the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the Sages.” But aren’t the Sages themselves prophets? This is what he meant: Even though it [prophecy] was taken from the prophets, it was not taken from the Sages. Ameimar said, “A Sage is greater than a prophet.”

אמר רבי אבדימי דמן חיפה מיום שחרב בית המקדש נישלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה לחכמים אטו חכם לאו נביא הוא הכי קאמר אע”פ שניטלה מן הנביאים מן החכמים לא נישלה אמר אמימר וחכם עדיף מנביא.

How can we say prophecy ended if it was transferred to the Sages?

2. Ramban, *ibid.* – While the path of prophecy ceased, the path of wisdom remains intact.

This is what [the Talmud] meant: Even though the prophets’ prophecy – i.e. in visions – was taken, the prophecy of Sages – the path of wisdom – was not taken away, rather they know the truth through the Divine Inspiration that they have within them.

הכי קאמר אע”פ שניטלה נבואת הנביאים שהוא המראה והחזון, נבואת החכמים שהיא בדרך החכמה: לא נטלה, אלא יודעים האמת ברוח הקדש שבקרבם:

3. Talmud Bavli, Yoma 69b – The Men of the Great Assembly were able to perceive through wisdom what the prophets could not.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Why were they called the Men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown of God’s Glory to its original luster. Originally Moshe had said, ‘The great, powerful, and awesome God’ (Devarim 10:17), but then Yirmiyahu came along and said, ‘Behold, strangers are croaking in His sanctuary [a reference to Nebuchadnezzar entering the Temple – Rashi], so where then are the displays of His awesomeness?’ [and hence in Yirmiyahu 32:18 he leaves out the word *awesome* – Rashi]; then Daniel came along and said, ‘Behold, strangers are enslaving His children, the Jewish people, so where then is His power?’ He therefore did not say ‘powerful’ when he prayed.

“But then the Men of the Great Assembly came along and said, ‘On the contrary! This is the magnificent display of His strength,

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: למה נקרא שמן אנשי כנסת הגדולה - שהחזירו עטרה ליושנה. אתא משה אמר (דברים י') האל הגדל הגבר והנורא, אתא ירמיה ואמר: נכרים מקרקרין בהיכלו, איה נוראותיו? לא אמר נורא. אתא דניאל, אמר: נכרים משתעבדים בבניו, איה גבורותיו? לא אמר גבור.

אתו אינהו ואמרו: אדרבה, זו היא גבורת גבורתו שכובש את יצרו, שנותן ארך אפים לרשעים (שכובש יצרו כל השנים הללו שנשתעבדו בהן ומאריך אפו על

for He restrains Himself in that He shows forbearance to the wicked [all the years that His people are subjugated and despite all the oppressive decrees issued against them, and does not punish them – Rashi]; and these are indeed the great displays of His awesomeness (for were it not for the fear of God how could one nation survive amongst all the other nations of the world)?!”

כל הגזירות שגזרים על בניו-רש"י. (ואלו הן נוראותיו - שאלמלא מוראו של הקדוש ברוך הוא היאך אומה אחת יכולה להתקיים בין האומות) מן יום החורבן אתה למד נוראותיו, שכל האומות נאספו להשמידם ונתקיימו מהן. - רש"י (!?)

The Men of the Great Assembly, therefore, reinstated mentioning the attributes “powerful” and “awesome” in their prayer.

4. **Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak 8:6 (adapted by Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, Chanukah in a New Light, pp. 88-9) – Wisdom supersedes prophecy because it provides a new understanding of God suitable to the situation of being in exile.**

It was the Men of the Great Assembly who sealed the Books of the Bible. At that moment prophecy ceased and the chain of tradition was bequeathed from prophets to Sages. We were then able to see that wisdom is greater than prophecy. Why? The prophet must record the spoken truth, but only wisdom is capable of grasping the thoughts of the “teacher” when he is silent. The result is that the truthfulness of wisdom was able to renew and restore the language of praise, i.e. the words “*the Great and Awesome*,” because indeed this is God’s greatness. In the face of evil He is able to restrain Himself and remain silent.

The renewal of the praises of God marks the conclusion of prophecy and the beginning of the period of the Sages. It is this transitional period that brings the brilliant recognition that God’s conducting the world in mysterious and silent ways in no way diminishes His greatness and awesomeness; indeed it enhances them.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION VI

- ☞ In the ancient world, people experienced a strong drive for transcendence that was common to both idolatry and prophecy. When idolatry got out of hand, leading to the destruction of the First Temple and the exile of the Jews from Israel, the Sages at the time strove to abolish the drive for it.
- ☞ Since prophecy was the spiritual counter-balance to idolatry, when one ceased so did the other: if people could not handle the challenge of idolatry, they would no longer merit the privilege of prophecy either.
- ☞ The balance of free will remained intact, the forces of transcendence at either end of the spectrum both getting curtailed.
- ☞ The new reality of exile gave rise to a new way of relating to God. Wisdom, the knowledge of God experienced as intellectual inspiration rather than external awareness, flourished in the period after the passing of prophecy. Since wisdom outlasted prophecy, providing as it did a new way of relating to God in the post-exile world, the Sages declared it to be superior.

SECTION VII. CONCLUSION: HEARING GOD'S VOICE TODAY

Prophecy has ended and has been replaced by wisdom, but does that mean we no longer have any direct connection with God? In this section we will examine the possibility that deep within our souls we can still hear God's voice today.

1. Pirkei Avot 6:2 – God's voice is transmitting a message around the world.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "Each and every day a voice issues forth from Mount Sinai declaring and saying, 'Woe to them, to the people, for their insult to the Torah.'"

אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת מהר חורב ומכרזת ואומרת: אוי להם לבריות מעלבונה של תורה.

As will be explained below, there are Heavenly messages sent daily and we have the ability to tune into these messages. (The Mishnah is specifically teaching that Mt. Sinai is an eternal witness to the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people. God's statement in the Mishnah above reflects His being "insulted" by those who do not take this great inheritance seriously – see Rashi, Vilna Gaon, and Sfats Emes).

2. Baal Shem Tov, Parshat Bechukotai 9 – The mind picks up the transmission from Mt. Sinai.

... Regarding this pronouncement from Above, it is difficult to understand: If it is useful, why is it not heard? ... "The pronouncement" is to be found in the realm of thought, and that is why there is no wicked person that does not have murmurings of repentance by virtue of hearing "the pronouncement" in his thoughts.

בענין הכרוז היוצא מלמעלה..... דקשה ממה נפשך אם הוא לתועלת למה לא נשמע... הכרוז הוא ענין המחשבה, ולכך אין לך רשע שאינו מהרהר בתשובה מצד שמעית הכרוז במחשבה.

3. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv (HaSaba M'Kelm), Chochmah U'Mussar 2:197 – The transmission creates stirrings of repentance and is a form of prophecy.

We are forced to reveal the secret. The spirit of prophecy is buried within every Jewish person. Acknowledgement is entrenched within his soul and belief is firmly rooted. Every day a Heavenly Voice (*Bat Kol*) issues from Mount Chorev [Mount Sinai] (Avot 6:2). Not at Mount Chorev but within my heart and the heart of all Israel, a Heavenly Voice issues forth with the belief of Mount Chorev ...

Therefore, when a person wakes somewhat from his spiritual slumber, the Heavenly Voice becomes audible in his heart. This is real prophecy placed in the heart of every person even though the name of God is almost forgotten from their lips ... When the sleep is removed even a bit, they begin to feel the voice of prophecy which is given from on high, to believe

אלא על כרחנו נתגלה לנו סוד, כי רוח נבואה טמון בלב האדם הישראלי, הודאות מושרשת בקרבו, והאמין כי יש לה שורש רב ממש. בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת מהר חורב (אבות ב') ולא בהר חורב, אבל בלבי ובלב כל ישראל יוצאת בת קול מאמונת הר חורב...

ולכן כאשר הקיצו מעט משנתם נשמע להם בת קול של לבם, היא הנבואה ממש, הנתונה בלב האדם, אם כי כבר נשכח מהם כמעט שם שמים מפייהם... וכאשר הסירו מה שנת מה, הרגיש קול הנבואה הנתונה לנו ממרומים להאמין בה', ולהתחזק בדתו ולקרא אליו, וזה אצלי ממש נפתחו שערי נבואה בדור היתום הזה, נפלאים מעשיך ה'.

in God and to affirm His religion, and call out to Him. I consider this to be literally the opening of the gates of prophecy in this orphaned generation – how wondrous are Your ways, O Lord!

4. Bamidbar Rabbah 15:25 – In the future, prophecy will return to the Jewish people.

God said, “In this world, individuals prophesy. In the World-to-Come all Jews will become prophets,” as the verse says, “It will come to pass after this that I will pour My spirit into all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Yoel/Joel 3).

אמר הקב"ה בעולם הזה נתנבאו יחידים, ולעולם הבא כל ישראל נעשין נביאים שנאמר (יאול ג') והיה אחרי כן אשפוך את רוחי על כל בשר ונבאו בניכם ובנותיכם זקניכם וגו'.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION VII

- ☞ We may have lost prophecy – the spiritual experience of God communicating directly with us – but there is part of us that has never lost its connection to our Creator.
- ☞ The voice of God issuing forth from Mount Sinai is capable of sparking thoughts in the deep recesses of the mind, stirring spiritual awakenings in our heart. It is our hope that that spark within us will ignite the soul of the Jewish people, and then we will experience the rebirth of prophecy.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

SECTION II

Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, section 3, Ch. 3 and 5
 Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought* Vol. I, Ch. 6
 Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, *Fundamentals of Faith*, pp. 67-86
 Rabbi J. David Bleich, *With Perfect Faith*, pp. 273-344

SECTION III

Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, section 3, Ch. 4
 Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought* Vol. I, 6-8

SECTION IV

Shraga Simmons, *Discovery*, pp. 50-72
 Rabbi Ezriel Tauber, *Days Are Coming*, pp. 78-141
 Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Handbook of Jewish Thought* Vol. II, Ch. 24

SECTION V

Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self* (entire book)
 Rabbi E.E. Dessler, *Strive for Truth*, Vol. II, “Discourse on Free Will”

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