

Prophecy: When G-d Talks to Us!

He has granted the flow of prophecy to His treasured splendid people (- Yigdal Prayer)

1. Prophecy Quiz:

1. How many prophets have the Jews had over our history?
a) 7 b) 48 c) 600,000 d) 1.2 million
2. How many religions claim to have a national revelation (i.e. a revelation to the entire nation)?
a) 1 b) 3 c) 13 d) 41
3. Who was the greatest prophet to ever live?
4. Who will win the Texans/Patriots game tonight?

2. One of the 13 Fundamentals of Jewish Faith

The Sixth Principle:

The Sixth Principle concerns prophecy. We must realize that there exist human beings who have such lofty qualities and achieve such great perfection that their souls become prepared to receive pure spiritual wisdom. Their human intellect can then become bound up with the Creative Mind, and receive an inspired emanation from it. This is prophecy, and those people who achieve it are the prophets.

- *Rambam, Commentary on Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1*

3. Who Can Be a Prophet

I call to witness heaven and earth that it does not matter if one is a Jew or gentile, man or woman, male slave or female slave, but rather what matters is one's actions with regard to whether the Divine Inspiration will rest upon him!

Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah Chapter 9

4. Rambam Explains What Prophecy Is...

1) It is [one] of the foundations of [our] faith that God conveys prophecy to man.

[What It Takes to Become a Prophet]

Prophecy is bestowed only upon a very wise sage of a strong character, who is never overcome by his natural inclinations in any regard. Instead, with his mind, he overcomes his natural inclinations at all times. He must [also] possess a very broad and accurate mental capacity.

A person who is full of all these qualities and is physically sound [is fit for prophecy]. When he enters the *Parades* and is drawn into these great and sublime concepts, if he possesses an accurate mental capacity to comprehend and grasp [them], he will become holy. He will advance and separate himself from the masses who carry on in the darkness of the time. He must continue and diligently train himself not to

have any thoughts whatsoever about fruitless things or the vanities and intrigues of the times. Instead, his mind should constantly be directed upward, bound beneath [God's] throne [of Glory, striving] to comprehend the holy and pure forms and gazing at the wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, in its entirety, [in its manifold manifestations] from the most elevated [spiritual] form until the navel of the earth, appreciating His greatness from them. [After these preparations,] the divine spirit will immediately rest upon him.

When the spirit rests upon him, his soul becomes intermingled with the angels called *ishim*, and he will be transformed into a different person and will understand with a knowledge different from what it was previously. He will rise above the level of other wise men, as [the prophet, Samuel] told Saul [*I Samuel 10:6*]: "[The spirit of God will descend upon you] and you shall prophesy with them. And you will be transformed into a different person."

[The State of the Person During Prophecy]

2) There are a number of levels among the prophets. Just as with regard to wisdom, one sage is greater than his colleague, so, too, with regard to prophecy, one prophet is greater than another. They all, [however, share certain commonalities]. They receive prophetic visions only in a visionary dream or during the day after slumber has overtaken them, as [*Numbers 12:6*] states: "I make Myself known to him in a vision. I speak to him in a dream."

When any of them prophesy, their limbs tremble, their physical powers become weak, they lose control of their senses, and thus, their minds are free to comprehend what they see, as [*Genesis 15:12*] states concerning Abraham: "and a great, dark dread fell over him." Similarly, Daniel [*10:8*] states: "My appearance was horribly changed and I retained no strength."

[The Prophetic Medium: Allegories and Their Meaning]

3) When a prophet is informed of a message in a vision, it is granted to him in metaphoric imagery. Immediately, the interpretation of the imagery is imprinted upon his heart, and he knows its meaning. For example, the ladder with the angels ascending and descending envisioned by the patriarch, Jacob, was an allegory for the empires and their subjugation [of his descendants]. Similarly, the creatures Ezekiel saw, the boiling pot and the rod from an almond tree envisioned by Jeremiah, the scroll Ezekiel saw, and the measure seen by Zechariah [were all metaphoric images]. This is also true with regard to the other prophets.

Some would relate the allegory and its explanation as these did. Others would relate only the explanation. At times, they would relate only the imagery without explaining it, as can be seen in some of the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah.

All of the prophecies come in the form of metaphoric imagery and allegories.

[Conditions for Prophecy]

4) All the prophets do not prophesy whenever they desire. Instead, they must concentrate their attention [upon spiritual concepts] and seclude themselves, [waiting] in a happy, joyous mood, because prophecy cannot rest upon a person when he is sad or languid, but only when he is happy.

Therefore, the prophets' disciples would always have a harp, drum, flute, and lyre [before them when] they were seeking prophecy. This is what is meant by the expression [*I Samuel 10:5*]: "They were prophesying" - i.e., following the path of prophecy until they would actually prophesy - as one might say, "So and so aspires to greatness."

5) Those who aspire to prophecy are called "the disciples of the prophets." Even though they concentrate their attention, it is possible that the Divine Presence will rest upon them, and it is possible that it will not

rest upon them.

Rambam, Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 7:1-5

5. Prophecy of Moshe

6) All the statements made above describe the path of prophecy of all the early and later prophets, with the exception of Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets.

What is the difference between Moses' prophecy and that of all the other prophets? [Prophecy is bestowed upon] all the [other] prophets in a dream or vision. Moses, our teacher, would prophesy while standing awake, as [Numbers 7:89] states: "When Moses came into the Tent of Meeting to speak to Him, he heard the Voice speaking to him."

[Prophecy is bestowed upon] all the [other] prophets through the medium of an angel. Therefore, they perceive only metaphoric imagery and allegories. Moses, our teacher, [would prophesy] without the medium of an angel, as [Numbers 12:8] states: "Mouth to mouth I speak to him," and [Exodus 33:11] states: "And God spoke to Moses face to face." [Numbers 12:8] states: "He gazes upon the image of God" - i.e., there was no metaphor. Rather, he would perceive the matter in its fullness, without metaphor or allegory. The Torah testifies concerning him [Numbers 12:8]: ["I speak to him...] manifestly, without allegory." His appreciation of prophecy would not be through metaphor, but through open revelation, appreciating the matter in its fullness.

All the [other] prophets are overawed, terrified, and confounded [by the revelations they experience], but Moses, our teacher, would not [respond in this manner], as [Exodus 33:11] relates: "[God spoke to Moses...] as a man speaks to a friend" - i.e., just as a person will not be awe-struck from hearing his friend's words, so, too, Moses' mental power was sufficient to comprehend the words of prophecy while he was standing in a composed state.

All the [other] prophets cannot prophesy whenever they desire. Moses, our teacher, was different. Whenever he desired, the holy spirit would envelop him, and prophecy would rest upon him. He did not have to concentrate his attention to prepare himself [for prophecy], because his [mind] was always concentrated, prepared, and ready [to appreciate spiritual truth] as the angels [are]. Therefore, he would prophesy at all times, as [Numbers 9:8] states: "Stand and hear what God will command you."

He was promised this by God, as [implied by Deuteronomy 5:27-28]: "Go and tell them: 'Return to your tents,' but you stand here together with Me." This should be interpreted to mean: When prophecy departs from all the [other] prophets, they return to their "tents" - i.e., the needs of the body like other people. Therefore, they do not separate themselves from their wives. Moses, our teacher, never returned to his original "tent." Therefore, he separated himself from women and everything of that nature forever. He bound his mind to the Eternal Rock. [Accordingly,] the glory never left him forever. The flesh of his countenance shone, [for] he became holy like the angels.

Ibid. 6

6. The Purpose of Prophecy

It is possible that a prophecy is for the prophet alone, to expand their heart or deepen their understanding, so they will know great things that they wouldn't have otherwise known.

And it is possible that the prophecy is sent for one of the nations of the world, or the inhabitants of a city or Kingdom, to tell them what to do, or to stop them from the evil acts in their hands

Ibid. 7

With regard to prophets as being sent as G-d's messengers, that in fact is not the essence of prophecy, and it is not necessary at all that a prophet be sent to others altogether.

Rather, the essence of prophecy is the close attachment to G-d, His revealing Himself to the prophet, and the passing of knowledge and understanding to him.

- *Derech Hashem (Way of G-d) 3:4:6*

7. Establishing Credability

When a person comes who is fitting for the work of G-d, and does not add or subtract [from the Torah], rather serves G-d in the Torah's commandments, we don't say to him 'split the sea' or 'revive the dead', etc, and then we'd believe him...

Rather we say to him, 'If you are a prophet, tell us things that will happen in the future.' And he says these things. And we wait to see if his predictions do occur.

If they do not happen – even if only one small detail is missing – it is known that he is a false prophet.

And if all his words do happen, we see him as trustworthy.

And we check him many times. 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 a prophet and them?

In truth, astrologers and 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 G-d shall fall to the ground" (Kings 2 10:10)

Rambam, Hil. Yisodei HaTorah 10:1-3

8. Prophet or the Chacham (Sage)

היפה — R' Avdimi from Chaifah said: מיום שחרב בית המקדש — From the day that the First Temple was destroyed, גיטלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה לתקמים — the power of prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to sages.

אטו תקם לאו נביא הוא — Is it really true that no sage before the Destruction was a prophet?

הכי קאמר — This is what R' Avdimi meant to say: אף על פי שגיטלה מן הנביאים — When the Temple was destroyed, although [prophecy] was taken from prophets that were not sages, מן התקמים לא גיטלה — it was not taken from sages — they retained their prophetic power even after the Temple's destruction.

אמר אמימר תקם עדיף מנביא — Ameimar said: And a sage is even greater than a prophet, ונבא לבב, שניאמר: מי נתלה במי — as [the verse] states: [Psalms 90:12] "And a prophet (v'navi) has a heart of wisdom."

— When we compare two things, which one do we compare to the other? הגוי אומר קטן נתלה בגדול — I would say, we compare the lesser to the greater! Thus, since the verse attributes wisdom to prophets, it is evident sages are the greater of the two

- Bava Basra 12a

Ramban Explains:

This is what [the Talmud] meant:

Even though the prophets' prophecy – ie in visions – was taken, the prophecy of sages – the path of wisdom – was not taken away, rather they know the truth through the Divine Spirit inside them

- *Ramban ad loc.*

Answer to the Quiz:

A great many prophets were established within the Jewish Nation – double the amount (of men) that left Egypt. ... Those prophecies that were relevant for the future generations were recorded (in Scripture), otherwise they were not recorded for posterity. (Megillah 14a)