

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM SHULCHAN ARUCH PROJECT

The Noahide Laws – Prophecy and Inspiration



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Prophecy & Inspiration

Introduction

The Tanach is replete with examples of divine inspiration, whether mere assistance or outright prophecy. What is prophecy? Does it exist today? How does God speak to us? In this lesson we are going to provide an overview of divine assistance, inspiration, and prophecy.

Siyata D'Shmaya - Divine Assistance

The lowest level of inspiration is what we can best call “divine assistance.”¹ Though not uncommon, it is so that those who have it are usually unaware of it.² This level of inspiration is given to all of those who teach Torah in public with the proper motivations and fear of God.³ This level of inspirations is alluded to in many places. For example in Psalms 25:14:

The counsel of HaShem is with them that fear Him; and His covenant, to make them know it.

This was the minimal level of inspiration possessed by all leaders in the Tanach and Talmud. Any Torah leader whose works have been accepted by all or a substantial portion of Israel is assumed to have possessed this level of inspiration. This level can be attained by any person in any time or place.

Ruach HaKodesh – Divine Inspiration

Ruach HaKodesh is the next highest level of inspiration. At this level a person is aware that God is guiding his actions.⁴ However, it is still not prophecy.

¹ Moreh Nevuchim II:45.

² Kuzari II:14, III:32, and III:65

³ Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:8 – 9.

⁴ See Ramban to Shemos 28:30 and Derech HaShem III:3:1 – 3.

Prophecy, as we shall see, is a communication between God and man. *Ruach HaKodesh* is not communication. Rather, it is inspiration and guidance. Through it a person develops unique intuition as to future events⁵ and even the thoughts and actions of others.⁶ There are ten qualities a person must perfect before he is even minimally worthy of this inspiration:⁷

- **Torah** – he must be unceasingly involved in the study and teaching of Torah.
- **Zehirus**, caution - He must be extremely careful to never violate a negative commandment.
- **Zerizus**, zeal – he must zealously perform every positive commandment.
- **Nekius**, cleanliness – he must be clean of sin in thought and desire.
- **Perishus**, abstention – he must sanctify himself even in that which is permitted and abstain from it if it may possibly lead to untoward desires or actions.
- **Tahara**, purity – he must have repented and cleanse himself of all sin, having righted all his past wrongs.
- **Chasidus**, piety – complete dedication to God beyond the letter of the law, but in the spirit of the law as well.
- **Anavah**, humility – complete nullification of ego and self.
- **Yiras Chet** – Dread and fear of sin.
- **Kedusha**, holiness – separation from worldly needs and desires.

Once these qualities have been mastered, then the initiate may engage in meditations, certain rituals, or methods of intense Torah study in order to merit *Ruach ha-kodesh*.

⁵ R' Bachya to Lev. 8:8 and Derech HaShem ibid.

⁶ Eliahu Rabbah to OC 101:8. See also Maharitz Chayes to Shabbos 12b.

⁷ See Avodah Zarah 20b. Mishnayos Sotah 9:14.

Within this level there are many gradations that may be attained in greater or lesser measure.

The *Ketuvim*, Writings, were written in a state of *Ruach haKodesh*, divine inspiration, while the Prophets were written in a state of *Nevuah*, prophecy. That is why the Prophets are on a higher level than the writings.⁸

Nevuah - Prophecy

At first, prophecy was attainable by all human beings. Moses, however, prayed that it be granted to Israel alone – a request to which God agreed:

*And he [Moses] said unto Him: 'If Your presence go not with me, carry us not up. For wherein now shall it be known that I have found grace in Your sight - I and Thy people? Is it not in that you go with us, so that we are distinguished, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth?' And HaShem said unto Moses: 'I will do this thing that you have spoken, for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.'*⁹

This restriction went into effect upon completion of the tabernacle.¹⁰ From that moment on, prophecy was not granted to non-Jews unless it was for the sake of Israel.¹¹ Even in these instances, however, the prophetic vision was the bare minimum needed to convey the message. It would come secretly, at night, and in a vague form. This is the statement of the prophet:

*Now a word was brought to me secretly.*¹²

⁸ Moreh Nevukhim II:45. There are numerous, vast discussions about the relative holiness of these books.

⁹ Exodus 33:16-17; see Brachos 7b and Bava Basra 15b for explanation and interpretation.

¹⁰ Vayikra Rabbah I:12 and Shir HaShirim Rabbah II:12.

¹¹ See the previous footnote for sources.

¹² Job 4:12.

CONDITIONS
FOR
PROPHECY

Even with the restriction of prophecy to Israel alone, a number of conditions must exist for prophecy to take place:

**Land of Israel
and Her People**

Prophecy is only possible in the land of Israel when the majority of the Jewish people are living there:

*HaShem, your G-d, with raise up a prophet for your, **from your midst, from your brethren, like me.** To him shall you listen.¹³*

The bold section indicates that prophecy is only possible in Israel when it is inhabited by the Jewish people. This is because prophecy requires a particular degree of *Kedushah*, holiness, which is only possible in Israel and in the midst of the people of Israel.¹⁴

Once a prophet has mastered prophecy in Israel, he can then attain prophecy even outside of Israel.¹⁵ However this prophecy will be harder to achieve and only granted in specific circumstances.¹⁶

**The Ark of the
Covenant**

Full prophecy is only possible when the Ark of the Covenant rests in the temple. At that time, the influence of the Ark, the root of prophecy in this world' extended to the boundaries of the land of Israel.¹⁷

**Worthiness of
the individual**

There are a number of qualities a person must possess as a prerequisite to prophecy:

- Must be of pure Israelite lineage¹⁸ and a direct descendant of Abraham.¹⁹ Moses alluded to this when he said:

¹³ Deuteronomy 18:15.

¹⁴ Sifrei; Yalkut Shimoni I:919.

¹⁵ See commentaries to Ezekiel 1:3.

¹⁶ Kuzari II:14; Maharitz Chayes to Moed Katan 25a; Mekhilta to exodus 12:1.

¹⁷ Sefer Ikkarim III:11.

*God, your Lord, will elevate a prophet from you... from your brethren, just like me*²⁰ - meaning of Israelite ancestry like Moses himself²¹

- This is a general rule, however. Exceptions have been made for those of special merit, such as Obadiah.²²
 - A potential prophet must possess a number of personal qualities as prerequisites:²³
 - Must be mentally healthy and stable²⁴
 - Must have a mature intellect which has maximized its potential²⁵
 - Must be an expert in all areas of the Torah.²⁶
 - Must have what he needs and be materially completely satisfied with no desires materially for more or less.²⁷
 - The generation must be capable of meriting prophecy. Prophecy is only granted for the sake of God's people.²⁸ Even if an individual is worthy and
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¹⁸ See Kiddushin 70b & Tos. Ad loc. See also Yevamos 47b and Niddah 13b. See also Kuzari I:114.

¹⁹ See Bamidbar Rabbah 12:4; Rashi to Sanhedrin 39b.

²⁰ Deuteronomy 18:15

²¹ Sifrei, Yalkut Shimoni I:919. See also Rashi there and Rambam in the Iggeros Teiman.

²² See Sanhedrin 39b.

²³ Shabbat 92a and Nedarim 38a.

²⁴ Moreh Nevukhim II:36.

²⁵ Moreh Nevukhim Ibid; Nedarim 38a; Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 7:1.

²⁶ See Shu"t HaRashba 548.

²⁷ Moreh Nevukhim ibid.; Avos 4:1; Shemonah Perkim 7.

²⁸ Mekhilta Shemos 12:1. See also Rashi to Devarim 2:16 and Shelah to Taanis II:137a.

capable of receiving prophecy, it will not be bestowed if the Generation is not worthy or capable of recognizing true prophecy.²⁹

Once these minimum benchmarks are met, the candidate may begin to prepare for prophecy. This involves techniques of meditation and focus to attain the state required for prophecy.³⁰

Master & Guide

Every potential prophet must have a master to guide him and constantly give him “reality checks.”³¹ Without a master to teach him and keep him on the right track, the result of his efforts will be psychosis and hallucinations.³²

The Experience of Prophecy

Prophecy, being a skill and a craft, is something the prophet works to perfect over a long period of time.³³ His first early prophecies will be flawed, unfocused and possibly unrecognizable as prophecy.³⁴

As his prophecy is perfected, it may be experienced as either a waking vision or a nocturnal dream:³⁵

And He said: 'Hear now My words: if there be a prophet among you, I HaShem will make Myself known unto him in a vision, I will speak with him in a dream.'³⁶

The type of prophetic experience indicates greater and lesser degrees of prophetic ability. In ascending order of ability:

- A Waking vision is always higher than a dream vision.

²⁹ Sanhedrin 11a; Brachos 57a; Succos 28a; Bava Basra 134a.

³⁰ See Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 7:4. These techniques are discussed in a number of sources.

³¹ See Derech HaShem III:4:4.

³² See Maharsha to Shabbat 149b and Sanhedrin 89a. See also Derech HaShem III:4:6.

³³ Derech HaShem Ibid.

³⁴ Derech HaShem Ibid.

³⁵ Pirkei R' Eliezer 28. Yesodei HaTorah 7:2. Derech HaShem III:5:2.

³⁶ Numbers 12:6.

- Hearing words is higher than seeing visions.
- Seeing the speaker of the words is higher than only hearing them.
- Seeing an angelic speaker is higher than seeing a human speaker.

The prophetic experience cannot be had if the prophet is depressed or angry.³⁷ He must be in a pleasant, content, happy mood in order to enter the prophetic state.³⁸ For this reason, we often see music connected to the prophetic experience.³⁹

According to many, the voice one hears in a prophecy is the Prophet's own.⁴⁰ The face he may see is his own as well.⁴¹

PUBLIC
PROPHECY

Most of a prophet's visions are private and meant only for the prophet himself.⁴² However, a prophet is sometimes sent with a message for others. In such a case, the prophet is forced to reveal it even against his will:

And if I say: 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name', then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot.⁴³

Not all public prophecies were recorded and canonized. Only those prophecies that apply to all of Israel at all times were recorded as part of Tanakh.⁴⁴

³⁷ Shabbat 30a; Pesachim 66b and 117a.

³⁸ Yerushalmi Sukkah 5:1; Bereshis Rabbah 70:8. See also Tos. Sukkos 50b.

³⁹ I Samuel 10:5; II Kings 3:15; I Chronicles 25:1. Yesodei HaTorah 7:4.

⁴⁰ Shoshon Sodoth. See Brachos 45a that God spoke to Moses with the Voice of Moses.

⁴¹ Shoshan Sodoth.

⁴² Derech HaShem III:4:6.

⁴³ Jeremiah 20:9.

⁴⁴ Megillah 14a.

**THE
PROPHECY OF
MOSES**

None of the aforementioned applies to Moses. Moses's prophecy was of an entirely different type than all other prophets.⁴⁵ Moses spoke to God as one speaks to his fellow, face to face.⁴⁶ His prophecy was not in the form of symbols, visions, or dreams, but as a waking, absolutely normal experience. Moreover, Moses was able to engage in direct conversation with God at any time.⁴⁷

**PROPHECY'S
END**

Prophecy was very common during the first temple era. Many times there were over 1,000,000 people who had prophecy.⁴⁸

The period of Prophecy lasted from about 1313 BCE until about 40 years after the building of the second temple (about 313 BCE). Prophecy had begun to wane when the majority of the Jewish people refused to return to Israel with Ezra.⁴⁹ Additionally, the Ark was displaced after the destruction of the first temple, which weakened the potential of prophecy. Sadly, there is no prophecy in our times.

⁴⁵ Bereshis Rabbah 76:1; Zohar I:171a; Hil. Yesodei HaTorah 7:6.

⁴⁶ Exodus 33:11.

⁴⁷ See Numbers 12:6-8.

⁴⁸ Megillah 14a. See also Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:22 and Ruth Rabbah 1:2.

⁴⁹ Yoma 9b.

Summary

- There are three types of heavenly inspiration that exist. Each has its own numerous gradations and subdivision.
- The lowest level is Divine Assistance, and is granted to all those who teach Torah in public for the right reasons. All may attain this.
- The second level is Divine Inspiration. It is rarer than the first type. There are a number of personal qualities that the initiate must possess. This is a form of divine guidance granting the holder unique insight and intuition.
- The highest level is *Nevuah* – *prophecy*. This is an experience of communication with God via a vision or dream. Prophecy does not exist anymore in our days.