
PROPHETS AND PROPHECY II

Limits of Authority, Examples of Prophecy, and Prophecy Today

In the first class we introduced the purpose of prophecy and the nature of those who possess it. In this class we will explore prophecy in more depth.

We will find that although prophecy stems from a Higher source, a prophet's authority was only to back up the Torah, not to change it. Secondly, we will demonstrate some examples of prophecy found in Tanach. And finally, we will also explore the history and future of prophecy, explaining the reasons why prophecy is foreign to us today, and when we might expect to see its revival.

This class will address the following questions:

- ∞ What are the limits of a prophet's authority? Can he go against the Torah?
- ∞ What historical prophecies have come true today?
- ∞ 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:

- Section I. The Limits of a Prophet's Authority
 - Part A. Adding to or Subtracting from the Torah
 - Part B. Temporary Suspension of Torah Law

- Section II. Examples of Prophecy
 - Part A. The Eternal Jewish People
 - Part B. Few in Number
 - Part C. Return to the Promised Land
 - Part D. The Western Wall

- Section III. Why There is No Prophecy Today
 - Part A. When and Why Prophecy Ended
 - Part B. Wisdom Replaces Prophecy

- Section IV. Conclusion: Hearing God's Voice Today

SECTION I. 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? What if only on a temporary basis? In this section we will explore the extent and the limits of a prophet's authority.

PART A. ADDING TO OR SUBTRACTING FROM THE TORAH

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 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-הַדְבָר, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אִתְּכֶם--אִתּוֹ תִשְׁמְרוּ, לַעֲשׂוֹת: לֹא-תִסְפֶּה עֲלֵי, וְלֹא תִגְרַע מִמֶּנּוּ. כִּי-יָקוּם בְּקִרְבְּךָ נְבִיא, אוֹ חֵלֶם חִלּוּם; וְנָתַן אֵלָיךָ. אוֹת, אוֹ מוֹפֶת. וְבָא הָאוֹת וְהַמוֹפֶת, אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר: נִלְכָּה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, . אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יְדַעְתֶּם--וְנַעֲבָדֵם. לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ, אֶל-דִּבְרֵי הַנְּבִיא הַהוּא, אוֹ אֶל-חֹלֶם הַחִלּוּם, הַהוּא: כִּי מִנְסָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, אֶתְכֶם, לְדַעַת הַיִּשְׁעִים אֲחֵרִים אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, בְּכֹל-לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכֹל-נַפְשְׁכֶם. אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ, וְאִתּוֹ תִירָאוּ; וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ תִשְׁמָעוּ, וְאִתּוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ וְבוֹ תִדְבָּקוּ.

2. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), 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 הויתרו על מה שכתוב בתורה, חוץ ממקרא מגילה.

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

3. Rambam (Maimonides), 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 ... 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 (Moses), or

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

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.

ישראל אינן לעולם ולדור 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 הותיר על מה שכתוב בתורה דערובין אינו
רק גדר להוצאת שבת מרה"ל לרה"ע 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 1:22 – The mitzvah to read Megillat Esther was only added after an additional source in the Torah was found 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 [the reading of] Megillat Esther [as a mitzvah] for future generations [as well as the institution of the day of Purim]. The Sages replied (Mishlei/Proverbs 22:20), "Have I not written [in the Tanach] for you three times?" [i.e. the scriptural sources teaching the obliteration of Amalek, but not four sources] until they found a fourth source [teaching the destruction of Amalek, which they used as a source to institute these new Rabbinic mitzvot] (as derived in the Talmud, Megillah 7a).

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

PART B. TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF TORAH LAW

1. **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

וכן אם יאמר לנו הנביא שנודע לנו שהוא נביא לעבור

[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 ...

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).

2. 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 I

- ☞ 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 II. EXAMPLES OF PROPHECY

As mentioned above (Part I, 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 (Leviticus) 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.

וְאִם גַּם זֹאת בְּהִיוֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיהֶם לֹא מֵאַסְתִּים
וְלֹא גַעֲלֹתִים לְכַלְתֶּם לְהַפֵּר בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם כִּי אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק
אֱלֹהֵיהֶם. וְזָכַרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית רֵאשִׁנִּים אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי
אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם לְהִיֵּת לָהֶם לְאֱלֹקִים
אֲנִי ה':

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.”

כֹּה אָמַר ה' נִתַּן שְׁמֶשׁ לְאוֹר יוֹמִים חֹקֵת יָרֵחַ וְכוכְבִּים
לְאוֹר לַיְלָה רִגַע הַיָּם וְנִהְמוּ גְלוֹי ה' צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ: אִם
יִמְשׁוּ חֻקֵּימַי הָאֵלֶּה מִלְפָּנַי נָאִם יְקֹוֹק גַּם זָרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל
יִשְׁבְּתוּ מִהַיּוֹת גּוֹי לְפָנַי כָּל הַיָּמִים:

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.

וְנִשְׁאַרְתֶּם בְּמִתֵּי מַעַט תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתֶם כְּכוכְבֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְרֹב כִּי לֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

As the Rambam taught, (Prophets and Prophecy I, 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 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.

וְשָׁב ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת שְׁבוּתְכֶם וְרַחֲמֶכֶם וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצְכֶם מִכָּל
הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיצְכֶם יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שְׁמָה: אִם יִהְיֶה נִדְחֶכֶם
בְּקִצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצְכֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶכֶם:
וְהִבְיֵאתְכֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָרְשׁוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וִירְשֶׁתֶּהּ
וְהִיטְבְּכֶם וְהִרְבֶּכֶם מֵאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם:

2. **Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 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.”

לְכֵן אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן הָעַמִּים וְאֶסַּפְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִפְצַוְתֶם בָּהֶם וְנָתַתִּי לְכֶם אֶת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

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.

הֲנֵה זֶה עוֹמֵד אַחֵר כְּתַלְנוּ (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ב:ט)

, אַחֵר כּוֹתֵל מֵעֵרְבֵי שֶׁל בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לִמָּה שֶׁנִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ הַקֶּב"ה שֶׁאֵינוֹ חָרֵב לְעוֹלָם.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

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 III. WHY THERE IS NO PROPHECY TODAY

In this section we will explore the reasons why prophecy ended and how the wisdom from Torah study came to succeed it.

PART A. WHEN AND WHY PROPHECY ENDED

Prior to 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

אָמַר לֵיהּ: מֵאַחֵר דְּחִימְתוּ כּוֹלֵי הָאֵי, מֵאִי טַעְמָא קָא

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!”

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 יהבתי 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 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

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

ומצינו בדברי רבי צדוק הכהן זצ"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 שפעלו לצד הע"ז, כגון רוח שקר של נביאי הבעל, כישוף, קסם וכו' וזה כדי שתשאר בחירה חפשית. וכן רואים אנו שבתחילת ימי בית השני בטל יצרא דע"ז ולעומתו פסקה גם הנבואה מיישראל.

the drive for idolatry was abolished at the beginning of the Second Temple Period, correspondingly the power of prophecy left the Jewish people.

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 [*bat kol*]. 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 one man in your midst who is deserving that the *Shechinah* [Divine Presence] should rest upon him [because he could be a prophet], but his generation is unworthy of it." They all looked at Hillel the Elder; and when he died, they eulogized, "Alas, the righteous man! Alas, the humble man! Disciple of Ezra!"

משמתו חגי זכריה ומלאכי - נסתלקה רוח הקודש מיישראל, 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;

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 with Ramban (Nachmanides) – The Sage is greater than the prophet, because while the path of prophecy ceased, the path of wisdom remains intact.**

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

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.

the Sages. Ameimar said, “A Sage is greater than a prophet.”

Ramban:

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.

רמב"ן:

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

2. 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, 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?!’” [Since the time of the destruction of the Temple we learn His awesomeness, for all the Nations gather to destroy them and they survive – Rashi].

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 כל הגזירות שגוזרים 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 להשמדים ונתקיימו מהן. - רש"י).

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

3. **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 III

- ☞ 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 abolished the drive for idolatry.
- ☞ 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, since the forces of transcendence at either end of the spectrum were both 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 IV. 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 (Ethics of the Fathers) 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 pronouncing, ‘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 God [in the previous source], 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 שמעיית 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 in God and to affirm His law, 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!

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'.

4. **Bamidbar (Numbers) 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 3:1).

אמר הקב"ה בעולם הזה נתנבאו יחידים, ולעולם הבא
כל ישראל נעשין נביאים שנאמר (יאול ג') וְהָיָה אַחֲרָי
כִּן אֲשַׁפּוּךְ אֶת רוּחִי עַל כָּל בֶּשָׂר וְנִבְאוּ בְנֵיכֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיכֶם
זְקֵנֵיכֶם ...

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- ☞ 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.

CLASS SUMMARY:

☞ WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF A PROPHET'S AUTHORITY? CAN HE GO AGAINST THE TORAH?

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. If that was necessary, an established prophet could even *temporarily* abrogate any Torah command, except the prohibition of idolatry.

☞ WHAT HISTORICAL PROPHECIES HAVE COME TRUE TODAY?

Examples are: (1) the Jewish people is eternal despite the attempts of the nations of the world to wipe them out, (2) the Jewish people 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.

☞ WHY IS THERE NO PROPHECY TODAY? WHEN DID IT STOP? WHAT REPLACED IT?

In the ancient world, people experienced a strong drive for transcendence that was common to both idolatry and prophecy. When the drive for idolatry was removed by the Sages in 400 BCE, the ability to achieve prophecy was also lost. Wisdom, the knowledge of God experienced as intellectual inspiration rather than external awareness, has replaced prophecy and flourished in the period after the passing of prophecy.

☞ IS THERE ANYTHING LIKE PROPHECY TODAY?

Yes, when a person has inspired thoughts, and deep inner-stirrings to relate to God and call out to Him, he is experiencing a glimmer of prophecy.

☞ WILL THERE EVER BE REAL PROPHECY AGAIN?

Yes, there will be. We are promised that the entire Jewish people will be prophets in the World to Come.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

SECTION II

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 III

Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self* (entire book)

Rabbi E.E. Dessler, *Strive for Truth*, Vol. II, "Discourse on Free Will"

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