



Prophecy in Our Time

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The Biblical prophets had intense aural and visual experiences of G-d that they conveyed to the people of Israel, often chastising them for their wayward ways. In the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, however, thinkers such as Maimonides, Abraham Abulafia and Hayyim Vital came to understand prophecy as not the Biblical revelation of G-d's word to the people but as the peak spiritual attainment of the dedicated spiritual practitioner - the Jewish version of enlightenment. The *Hasidic* master R. Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira built on this understanding and taught a personal, transformational and psychological understanding of prophecy. For R. Shapira, our awe, love and faith in G-d are themselves divine revelations that help us let go of our false senses of who we are and open ourselves to genuine compassion and insight (*Esh Kodesh* 149). Our very concrete experience of our own religious lives becomes a revelation when we are able to see it as such and open ourselves to the divine that is present in every moment

This revelation is not a general message to be communicated to the people but is intensely personal. The early *Hasidic* master, the Maor ve-Shemesh, considers the meaning of *sod*. *Sod* is the mysterious or mystical level of interpretation, the fourth level in the *Pardes* schema of hermeneutics. He argues that *sod* cannot be represented by kabbalistic interpretations for they are in no way 'secret' or 'mysterious.' Although these interpretations may be difficult to understand, *Talmud* is also difficult to understand, and we do not name that *'sod'*. What is genuinely mysterious, rather, is the personal revelation that each person receives in his/her very being. This revelation can never be fully communicated to another person (*Esh Kodesh* 150).

Prophecy then is ultimately not an intellectual or linguistic experience. It may be translated into discursive form, though not fully successfully. Prophecy is a felt sense of opening to, embracing and being embraced by the divine. As R. Shapira teaches, 'Intellect will not help one to taste the taste of the *mitzvah* nor anything else other than the portion of prophecy which is in us which recognizes and sees in everything holiness which is beyond the intellect' (*Derekh HaMelekh* 104). If we wish to not just think about a *mitzvah* but actually experience and taste its exquisite flavor, and if we wish to see the holiness in everything we encounter, then the path is prophecy. This prophecy is not the privilege of a chosen few but a possibility for every person who is willing to devote him/herself to embodied-emotional practices of opening to the actual experience of life and the divine that is inherent within it. It is a possibility available to each one of us if we are willing to let go of the cacophony of the intellect and to open ourselves to our direct experience of reality and its divine nature.

