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"The Silent Voice: A Critical
Approach to Prophetic Origins"

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination.

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

March 2, 1992

Referee, Professor David B. Weisberg

DIGEST

The existential launching point of an investigation into prophetic origins has been and remains directly related to the immediate absence of prophetic experience. It then becomes crucial to explain from where it has come, in order to explain where it has gone. At one time in a world where the authority of revelation was supreme, any explanation given in the name of such authority by recognized leaders of its institutions, would naturally, without question, be accepted.

With the advent of the modern age however, we no longer accept the authority of tradition. Empiricism has become the standard of our science, and science has become the Torah of our belief. Consequently, assiduous scholarly efforts have put such an abundance of evidence upon the tables that we are moved beyond reasonable doubt to view prophecy as indeed the child of our own human invention. Indeed, scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and even theology, have proposed serious and substantial theories tracing the phenomenon of prophecy back to human origins.

In part, aside from the panoply of diagnoses linking certain specific prophetic personalities with a sundry of psychotic maladies, psychologists have shown significant correlations between the stimulation of specific areas of the brain and the experience of supernatural-like foci. Similar correlations have linked particular prophetic experiences to

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those commonly associated with epilepsy.

Sociologists, making use of their own as well as anthropological research, have shown prophecy to be a universal phenomenon- occurring throughout history, even into the modern day. They suggest that prophecy is a society's response to social, political and or economic instability. Prophecy accordingly, is not only a product of human invention, but it is legitimated and governed according to a society's perception of its own social need.

Maimonides, as a scholar of philosophy, offered that prophecy is the transmission of natural laws of governance through the human medium of a rationally guided imagination upon achieving superior intellectual, moral and emotional preparation. And theologians like Mordecai Kaplan, found that prophecy arose out of the human endeavor towards potentiality, denying any supernatural involvement at all.

Ultimately, all these theories have one thing in common, (as do even those theological theories which maintain God's role as actual and interactive.) That is, they all, even if subconsciously, originate in man looking for the voice of God. Of course, to the extent that we have come to enjoy and rely upon our modern autonomy, God's voice may continue to remain unheard. Only those who have not mistaken the silence for God's absence, who engage the silent dialogue, will eventually succeed.

In memory of
a precious soul, our grandmother,

Ida Lo Guercio Castiglione

March 14, 1897

February 21, 1992

six children

fifteen grandchildren

twenty-seven great grandchildren

"She looks well to the ways of her household.

Her children rise up and call her blessed."

I dedicate this work, as I dedicate my life and my love, to those who fill my silence with song... You are my inspiration, and the object of my abiding affection.

To my family,

Adrienne, Nathan, Brandon, and Jared.

I also humbly offer my sincerest appreciation and thanks, to Rabbi David B. Weisberg, a man whose boundless patience and faith have allowed dignity, scholarship, and freedom of thought to guide this student's hand.

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CHAPTER 1

OF NEURONS AND PSYCHOSIS:

A psycho-physiological perspective

"Whenever a man's life is at once sufficiently illustrious and recorded with sufficient fullness to be a subject of profitable study, he inevitably falls into the morbid category. ... And it is worthy of remark that, as a rule, the greater the genius, the greater the unsoundness."

J. F. Nisbet,

The Insanity of Genius, 1893

Were the Israelite prophets mentally unsound? Consider this observation by Max Weber in 1952,

"The prophets engaged in strange activities... Jeremiah publicly smashed a jug, buried a belt and dug the putrid belt up again, he went around with a yoke around his neck, other prophets went around with iron horns, or like Isaiah for a long time, naked. Still others, like Zachariah inflicted wounds upon themselves, still others were inspired to consume filth, like Ezekiel. They screamed (karah) their prophecies aloud to the world, partly in indistinguishable words, partly in imprecations, threats, and benedictions with saliva running from their mouths...now murmuring or stammering. They described visual and auditory hallucinations and abnormal sensations of taste and feeling of diverse sorts (Ezek. 3:2). They felt as if they were floating..or borne through the air... Above all, they heard sounds (Ezek. 3:12ff.; Jer. 4:19), voices (Is. 40:3ff.) both single ones and dialogues, especially often, however, words and commands addressed to themselves."¹

¹Max Weber, Ancient Israel, 1952 p. 286-287.

If the names were different, we might not be hard pressed to associate Weber's observations with the behavior of any one of the hundreds of "abnormal" folk who walk the streets of New York City every day- people, we as a modern society label "mentally unsound". Yet to observe the average interaction between the "normal" New Yorker on the street and his "abnormal" fellow, one would be hard pressed to ascertain any sense of alarm on the part of the former when coming into contact with the latter. In New York, this kind of abnormal behavior blends into the background. It is not mainstream perhaps, but neither is it cause for concern.

As a definition, abnormality is that behavior or pattern which crosses beyond a given society's recognized range of acceptability.² As such, "...psychological abnormality is not an absolute but a relative concept, changing from century to century and from society to society."³ In defining and

²There are four generally accepted criteria for defining abnormal behavior: 1) Norm Violation- any substantial deviation from the society's norms or its accepted standards for proper conduct. 2) Statistical Rarity- any substantial deviation from the statistically calculated average behavior in that social group. 3) Personal discomfort- any behavior that causes distress to the person responsible for the behavior. 4) behavior that falls short of a theoretical ideal of optimum psychological adjustment. (Bootzin, Abnormal Psychology) With the exception of number 3, all the other criteria can be successfully argued in favor of prophetic behavior if restricting such behavior to a recognized subgroup within the society.

³Richard Bootzin, Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives, 1980 p.3.

explaining abnormal behavior, societies must rely upon their own prevailing beliefs and systems. Thus when approaching prophetic activity, different cultures throughout history have understood it for example as the product of divine possession or conversely of ultimate rational achievement, of a maladjusted sex drive, or of a biochemical imbalance within the brain.

Since the eighteenth century, Western society has developed multiple psychological theories explaining abnormal behavior. Despite their differences, they all reflect the modern, secular, scientific age. They share a common base in seeking answers in natural events- such as disturbances within the body or in human relationships- rather than in supernatural inspiration. Consequently, within the developing world of psychology, prophecy could no longer be accepted as the word of God. It would instead become a symptom, for which many a naturalist theory would be proposed.

At the root of these theories, are several basic assumptions. Foremost is that abnormal behavior is indicative of someone suffering from a *malady*, from something gone wrong. Second is that abnormal behavior is divisible into recognizable categories by a specific syndrome or set of symptoms. And third is that each of these categories has a discernable and

natural cause.⁴

This said, there are two fundamental approaches within psychology, both of which engage the concept of abnormality. The physiological approach traces abnormal behavior back to an organic, biological malfunctioning. The psychoanalytic approach on the other hand, with all its myriad of schools, focuses upon the relatively intangible psychological processes which result from a subject's interactions with and within his environment.

The problem with both of these genres however, lies in the questionable tendency, on the part of their respective proponents, to endow their theories with a universal quality which necessarily is meant to transcend the whole of human history. There is a fundamental fallacy in this. For in viewing the realities of an earlier society through the eyes of a latter society's standards and technology, we inevitably reinterpret events in ways which they who first experienced them were almost always unaware. Simply stated, for example, prophetic behavior in both its ecstatic and non-ecstatic forms did not always carry the stigma of representing something waiting to be cured.

⁴ibid. chapter 1.

In fact, Heschel, in his work, The Prophets Volume II, noted that in ancient Greek culture for one, "abnormal" prophetic behavior was highly regarded. It had an inherent value, something worth preserving, not fixing. According to the Greek philosophers, "madness," as associations with the Greek understanding of the word prophecy would imply,⁵ was regarded in Greek society as the highest state of spiritual receptivity.⁶ For the philosophers it was apparently greater in value than even the product of reason, "... as the ancients testify, is madness superior to reflection, for reflection is only human, but madness springs from the gods."⁷ Thus, we find in the same work that Socrates observed, "... prophecy

⁵The word prophet is derived from the word *prophetes* an agent-noun which appears in Greek texts as early as the fifth century BCE. It is presumed to be formed from the verb *phemi* "to speak", or "to say" with the prefix 'pro' meaning, "before", or "forth". Because the prefix 'pro' is ambiguous, the meaning of *prophetes* must be learned from the contexts of its earliest uses. There it is used in connection with those who served as oracles for Apollo and Zeus. The *prophetes* proclaimed and interpreted divine messages, which sometimes dealt with the future, and they were means for the people to contact the gods. In the Septuagint, the word *prophetes* is consistently used to translate the Hebrew word *nabi*. Apparently without making a distinction between prophetic roles, it is also used to translate *roeh* and *hozeh*, [1Chron. 26:28; 2Chron. 16:7,10; 19:2; 29:25,30; 35:15] and it is used once to translate *malak*. [2Chron. 36:15] Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel pp.22-23. In its hithpael form, [as found in 1Sam. 10:5,6], the Greek translation renders the word *nabi* as, "to behave like a prophet, or to prophesy ecstatically" It is of interesting note that the word 'ecstasy' is derived from a Greek compound meaning, "to set or stand out", thus "to put out of place, derange" or "to be beside oneself". Bernhard Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament. p. 250 footnote 4.

⁶Abraham Heschel, The Prophets Volume II, 1962 p.172.

⁷ibid. p.172; Phadrus, p.244 ff.

is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestess at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and in private life, but when in their senses, few or none."⁸ Similarly minded, Plato was also to latter comment in Timaeus, (71), "...no man, when in his wits, attains prophetic truth and inspiration,; but when he receives the inspired word, either his intelligence is enthralled in sleep, or he is demented by some distemper or possession."⁹

Ancient Israel had a similarly positive appreciation for their own prophetic institutions. Indeed the works of the prophets were canonized. And inasmuch as the Septuagint's collaborators chose to make blanket use of the Greek word *prophetes* for all categories of Israelite prophecy, we may assume that though they too recognized the "abnormality" of the prophets behavior, they saw nothing innately pathological about it.

Yet naturalist, secular science, does not accept the notion of the supremacy of context, wherein one society's sickness may, with equal validity, be another's revelation. It argues for the timeless universality of scientific truth. In other

⁸ibid. p.172.

⁹ibid. p.171.

words, had our forebears known then what we know now, they too would have undoubtedly looked for natural causation rather than supernatural influence. Since they did not know from neurons and psychoanalysis two thousand years ago, everything necessarily relied upon a supernatural explanation. They, not we, were simply ignorant. (A condition as curable as the behavior they sought to canonize.)

As regards the truths revealed with the discovery of "neurons and psychoanalysis," several hypotheses have been posed by our modern science to help explain the prophetic phenomenon. Although there is a wealth of literature which examines the prophetic personality through the psychodynamic, behavioral, humanistic-existential and psycho-physical perspectives, I will deal primarily only with the latter. Evidence for conclusions drawn within any of the first three fields must necessarily be of the utmost immediacy for any real accuracy. Relying only upon what the text provides us does not allow for true or ethical analysis.

I accept the caution of Abraham Heschel who warned,

"The scientific hazards involved in the attempt to expose, on the basis of literary remains, the subconscious life of a person who lived thousands of years ago are so stupendous as to make the undertaking foolhardy. . .one would have to take into

account in the analysis of the prophetic personalities the tremendous distance and dissimilarity in relation to words, in historic perspective, in intensity of emotion, and in spiritual sensitivity."¹⁰

I would only add, and authorship.

THE PSYCHO-PHYSIOLOGICAL CASE FOR ECSTASY:

Ecstatic behavior has long been associated with the Israelite prophets. According to Max Weber,

"Psychologically viewed, most pre-Exile prophets were ecstatic men. At least, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel professed to be and undoubtedly were. Without gross carelessness, one may safely assume that all were ecstasies, though of various kinds and in different degree."¹¹

Maintaining that ecstasy was characteristic of all Israelite prophets, including even the latter writing prophets, Gunkel, quoted by H. H. Rowley in the Servant of the Lord, (London, 1952, p.93) stated, "The fundamental experience of all types of prophecy is ecstasy."

¹⁰Abraham Heschel, The Prophets Vol. II, 1962 p.177.

¹¹Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, 1952 p.286.

On the other hand, there have also been those scholars who have said the exact opposite. For them, ecstasy played a very limited role. They have denied that ecstasy had anything to do with the experience of the latter writing prophets at all, or if it did exist in the latter prophets' time, it could only at most be applied to the false prophets.¹²

Of those who have argued for the pervasiveness of ecstasy throughout the overall prophetic experience, some have contended that there was a qualitative difference between the ecstatic experience of the early and then of the latter prophets. And of these, there are some who insist that even though the writing prophets may have experienced mild though infrequent forms of ecstasy, we must make a clear distinction between the content of the prophets' words and the process through which their words were received.¹³ Along these lines, still others have argued that although ecstasy had a role, the prophets experienced their ecstasy first, and only latter produced rational orations describing the experience.¹⁴

¹²Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, 1980 p.7; Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination" (Journal of Biblical Literature Volume 98), 1979 p.321-323.

¹³ibid.

¹⁴Robinson, "The Ecstatic Elements in Old Testament Prophecy", (The Expositor, Eighth series, No. 123), March 1921, p.235. Quoted in Heschel, The Prophets, Volume II p.125.

Regardless of which theory is most accurate, all of them acknowledge that during at least one point in the Israelite prophetic experience, ecstasy played some significant role. And clearly, as regards the accounts of the *b'nei nebiim*, ecstatic behavior was the venue of their day.

According to Robert Wilson, "In ecstasy, the prophet becomes dissociated from his normal state and enters some sort of supra-normal relationship with God." The transition involves the loss of consciousness, physiological collapse, obsessive or compulsive actions, garbled speech, and visions or hallucinations.¹⁵ Weber observed that, "... when the spirit came over them, the prophets experienced facial contortions, their breath failed them, and occasionally they fell to the ground unconscious, for a time deprived of vision and speech, writhing in cramps. (Is. 21)" ¹⁶ Some like Ezekiel (3:15), or Saul (1Sam. 19:24), would end up lying paralyzed for a day or even more.

Why? As regards the *bene nebiim*, evidence suggests that the music (1Sam. 10:5) which accompanied their ecstasy, may have

¹⁵Robert Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: a Reexamination", (Journal of Biblical Literature Volume 98), 1979, p.324.

¹⁶Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, 1952 p.286.

had much to do with their behavior. In 1961, Andrew Neher¹⁷ conducted an experiment utilizing auditory driving, exposing subjects to loud and rapid drumming. The resulting modified electrical brain rhythms were shown to produce feelings of fear, disgust, pleasure, hallucinations, and even epileptic seizures.

Twenty-five years latter, Felicitas Goodman¹⁸, using a gourd rattle instead of drums, produced similar results. Within fifteen minutes of rattling, the majority of subjects had dropped to the floor- shivering and twitching. "Those on their knees would rock up and down, their faces flushed; some had cold and stiff hands and feet."¹⁹ Some of the subjects eventually experienced hallucinations. After the rattling, "The body and head were heavy, eyes would not stay open, and when they finally did, everything was too bright, very luminous or fuzzy, the latter doubtless a result of the

¹⁷Andrew Neher, "Auditory Driving Observed with Scalp Electrodes in Normal Subjects", (Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology Volume 13), 1961 pp.449-451, also "A Physiological Explanation of Unusual Behavior in Ceremonies Involving Drums" (Human Biology Volume 34), 1962 pp.151-160 ; As cited in David Wulff, Psychology of Religion, 1991 pp.76-77.

¹⁸Felicitas Goodman, "Body Posture and the Religious Altered State of Consciousness: An Experimental Investigation", (Journal of Humanistic Psychology Volume 26 (3)), 1986 pp.81-118; David Wulff, Psychology of Religion, 1991 p.77.

¹⁹ibid. pp.77, 88.

dilated pupils"²⁰

All this, Goodman attributed to auditory driving, although she, Neher and others acknowledged the influence of other factors as well. As Wulff points out, the "vigorous and prolonged movement patterns," the "excitement and stress" often found in ecstatic rituals, all contribute to the increase in heart and breathing rates, the modified blood chemistry, the disturbed sense of balance and equilibrium, and the eventual point of breakdown as evidenced by a sudden change in the individual's personality.²¹

Epileptics, in varying degrees, are also known to experience the symptoms described by Wilson and Weber. In fact, the often striking similarities have led several scholars²² to postulate that perhaps the ecstatic prophet's behavior stemmed not so much from a super-natural encounter with God, as much as it did from an epileptic seizure.

OF EPILEPSY:

Historically, descriptions and theories of epilepsy appear as

²⁰ibid. pp.77, 89.

²¹David Wulff, Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views, 1991 p.78.

²²For example, Yehezkeil Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel, 1960 p.275; T.H. Robinson, Prophecy and the Prophets, 1923 p.36.

early as 400 BCE.²³ Although there is no longer thought to exist an "epileptic personality" per se,²⁴ clinical lore had characterized the "classic" epileptic personality as one who was impulsive, suspicious, egocentric, prone to explosive irritability, viscosity of intellect and emotion, as well as excessive religiosity.²⁵

As regards at least this last characteristic, it is not surprising that epilepsy has long been associated with some of the world's greatest religious leaders. Saint Paul and Muhammad are two prominent examples.²⁶ Apparently, such associations were not hard to make. Consider for example G. Murphy's observations and conclusion:

First, the epileptic attack, preceded by its momentary "aura" or warning, and manifesting itself in violent convulsions, with the loss of consciousness, immediately suggests that a spirit has entered the body...On the other hand, the attack may take, so to speak, a substitute form; instead of losing consciousness, the patient suffers what is called

²³C. Kornetsky, Pharmacology: Drugs Affecting Behavior, 1976.

²⁴Richard Bootzin, Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives, 1980 p.457.

²⁵ibid. p.91.

²⁶David Wulff, Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views, 1991 p.91.

an "epileptic equivalent". In these conditions he is just as truly "out of his mind" as in the former; he becomes dissociated, is confused, and often undergoes a tremendous emotional upheaval. Sometimes he...passes through a deep, genuine, and profoundly impressive religious experience. This not only sets its mark upon the character of the patient, but may, if the people near by are religiously minded, convince them that a prophet is in truth before them.²⁷

Hence, epilepsy had over time earned the epithet of the "Sacred Disease".

Epilepsy however is not in itself a disease. It is rather a disorder of the central nervous system arising from abnormal electrical activity in brain neurons. The seizures and convulsions associated with epilepsy are due to a disruption in the neuron's electrical and physio-chemical activity.²⁸

Though it is possible to identify triggers for epileptic seizures, (blows to the head, high fevers, hyperventilation, hypoglycemia, alcohol, sleep deprivation, certain musical

²⁷G. Murphy, Journal of Philosophy, 1928 p.339. As cited in David Wolf, Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views, 1991 p.90.

²⁸Richard Bootzin, Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives, 1980 p.456.

notes, or flashing light sequences,)²⁹ as it is also possible to record abnormally high electrical activity in certain areas of the brain during seizures, the exact reason for why these triggers work, or why they affect the neurons the way they do, is not very well understood.³⁰

There is strong evidence however, that certain epilepsies are associated with particular personality types. Epilepsy originating in the temporal lobe for example, is associated with emotionalism, compulsiveness, and a concern with issues of conscience-³¹ the classic prophetic personality. While psychomotor epilepsy on the other hand, is often associated with personality disturbances.

A psychomotor episode is usually preceded by an aura, or warning, and lasts several minutes or seconds. During the episode a person loses contact with reality, though appears normal because of automatic participation in some mechanical type of activity. When the person gains awareness, he is completely amnesic as regards the episode. At times however, "... psychomotor epileptics may show bizarre, schizophrenic-

²⁹ibid. p.457.

³⁰Charles Levinthal, The Physiological Approach in Psychology, 1979 p.34.

³¹Richard Bootzin, Abnormal Psychology: Current Perspectives, 1980 p.458.

like behavior, such as public disrobing and urination, hallucinations and paranoid delusions, and possibly violent aggression."³² Though amnesia would tend to be antithetical in the case of a prophet, bizarre behavior, hallucinations, violent aggression, and certainly passion, are all typical of the prophets.

The most common type of epilepsy is Grand Mal which is experienced in four successive stages. First an aura phase, lasting about a minute, is followed by a tonic phase in which,

"..the person's body becomes very rigid-with arms flexed, legs outstretched, and fists clenched- and undergoes strong muscular contractions." During this short time, breathing stops. With the next phase, (clonic), "...breathing resumes and the muscles begin to contract and relax in a rhythmic way, causing the body to jerk in violent and rapid generalized spasms."³³

This phase also lasts about a minute.

In the last phase, (coma), the "...convulsions dissipate. ...the muscles slowly relax while the patient remains unconscious." When the patient awakens, they are often

³²ibid.

³³ibid. p.458.

confused, exhausted and sleepy. In some cases, such episodes can occur several times a day.³⁴ Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Saul, are all recorded to have experienced convulsions, and or periods of unconsciousness.

From the sources sighted above, it is possible to draw up the following chart of similarities between epileptic and ecstatic behavior, as well as to then pair them with some examples of prophetic experiences as found in the Bible.

<u>Common Epileptic Symptoms</u>	<u>Common Ecstatic Behavior</u>	<u>Prophetic Example and Source</u>
Aura/warning	particular sensory experience, or awareness of "funny feeling" or fear.	"The Lord put out His hand and touched my mouth..."(Jer.1:9); "..and there the hand of the Lord fell upon me."(Ezek. 8:1)
Violent convulsions	facial contortions, writhing in cramps	"O my suffering, my suffering! How I writhe!...; All my bones are trembling..."(Jer. 4:19; 23:9); "Therefore my loins are seized with trembling, I am gripped by pangs..."(Is. 21:3)
Dissociated, confused	dissociated from normal state, garbled speech	"Thereupon the spirit of the Lord gripped him, and he spoke in ecstasy..." (1Sam.10:10)
Loss of consciousness/coma	Loss of consciousness, physiological collapse, lying paralyzed	"..and he lay naked all that day and night."(1Sam. 19:24) "..for seven days I sat there stunned..."(Ezek. 3:15)
Public disrobing, urination	obsessive/compulsive actions	"..My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot for three years..."(Is. 20:3); (1Sam.19:24, see above)

³⁴ibid.

Common Epileptic Symptoms	Common Ecstatic Behavior	Prophetic Example and Source
Hallucinations	Same	"I saw my Lord standing by the alter.."(Amos 9:1); Jer. chap. 1; Zech. chaps:1-6; Ezek. chaps. 1, 37, 40...
Violent aggression	Frenzy, flagellantism...	"..and Elijah took them down.. and slaughtered them there." (1Kings 18:40); "..(Elisha) cursed them...thereupon two she-bears...mangled forty-two children."(2Kings 2:24)
Profound religious experience	Same	All
Emotionalism, Issues of conscience	Heightened emotionalism	All, (Literary prophets)
Fear of episodes	**	"The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called..I cried 'Woe is me; I am lost!..'"(Is. 6:10); "Jonah, however, started to flee.."(Jonah 1:3)

If we were to base a conclusion on the physical, behavioral similarities alone, we might be moved to conclude that the prophets did indeed suffer from epilepsy. If we were to take into consideration the opinion which further identifies the prophet's revelation as an unconscious attempt to come to terms with the mysterious, quasi-supernatural-like experiences of his own personal, physical epileptic encounters,³⁵ the

³⁵William Boven, 1919. As cited by David Wulff, Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views, 1991 p.92.

conclusion seems all the more plausible. Needless to say, the presence of such unconscious associations could in and of themselves evolve into a disorder of the most dramatic psychological dimensions.

THE TEMPORAL LOBES:

We have already discussed how epilepsy, originating in the temporal lobe, is associated with the classic prophetic personality- one which reflects emotionalism, compulsiveness, and a concern with issues of conscience. Research has also shown that those affected by temporal lobe epilepsy have an increased or, "...excessive concern with detail, a sense that events have great personal significance and are under divine guidance, (they also have)...a tendency toward repetition, a deepening of all emotions, and tendencies toward guilt and hypermoralism."³⁶

According to neuropsychologist Michael Persinger, it is the temporal lobe itself which is the universal point of origin of all we perceive as religious and or mystical experience. In his own words, "The God experience is an artifact of

³⁶D. Bear, and P. Fedio, "Quantitative Analysis of Interictal Behavior in Temporal Lobe Epilepsy" (Archives of Neurology 34), 1977 pp.454-467. As cited in David Wulff, Psychology of Religion, 1991.

transient changes in the temporal lobe."³⁷ Or, as it would apply to biblical prophecy, revelation as experienced by the prophets was simply the natural manifestation of electrical abnormalities centered primarily in the right temporal lobes of their brains.

Through his experiments, Persinger et al. has shown strong correlations between abnormally high electrical activity occurring in the temporal lobes and those subjects who were identified with significant religious beliefs, mystical experiences and a strong sense of presence of another being.³⁸ Similarly, significant correlations were also shown between patients who experienced the presence of temporal lobe foci (i.e. visions or inexplicable odors,) and those who were identified with mystical experiences, the sense of presence of another being, and a heightened interest in writing.³⁹

³⁷Michael Persinger, Neuropsychological Bases of God Beliefs, 1987 p.135. As cited in David Wulff, Psychology of Religion, 1991 p.95.

³⁸M. Persinger and K. Makarec, "Temporal Lobe signs: Electroencephalographic Validity and Enhanced Scores in Special Populations" (Perceptual and Motor Skills Volume 60), 1985 pp.831-842. As cited in David Wulff, Psychology of Religion, 1991 p.95.

³⁹M. Persinger, and K. Makarec, "Temporal Lobe Epileptic Signs and Correlative Behaviors Displayed by Normal Populations", Journal of General Psychology, 1987, Vol 114, p.179-195, cited in David Wulff, Psychology of Religion, p. 94-95

It is widely held that the right hemisphere, and in particular the right temporal lobe, is the seat of visual-spatial capacities, musical ability, and emotional response. The left hemisphere on the other hand is widely regarded as the center of rational thinking, of logical analysis and of verbal and mathematical ability. Julian Jaynes,⁴⁰ focusing on the dichotomy of functions between the right and the left hemispheres of the brain, and particularly capitalizing on the faculties of the right temporal lobe, postulates that revelation was a hallucinatory process of the right hemisphere during times of crisis, which was experienced as providential messages from the gods, by the left. This process of conversion describes what Jaynes calls the bicameral mind.

In his theory, humanity as a species only began to evolve from the exclusive possession of a bicameral mind, to the possession of a mind capable of self-reflective consciousness, around the period of 1000 BCE and forward. Accordingly, where Jaynes cites Amos as an example of "...pure bicameral speech, heard by an illiterate desert herdsman and dictated to a scribe,"⁴¹ Jaynes points out that six centuries latter, by 200 BCE, Ecclesiastes represented a work not only filled with subjectivity, but a work which hardly ever mentioned God at

⁴⁰Julian Jaynes, The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, 1976.

⁴¹ibid. p.296.

all- thus demonstrating a significant evolution of process.

Is it possible that the voice the prophets heard, sprang from their own right temporal lobe? David Wulff suggests that experiments including the one in which patients, who upon the stimulation of their right temporal lobe with a mild electric current, frequently reported hearing, "...hazy voices coming from some strange and unknown place....," as well as other experiments in which the hallucinatory effects of LSD were diminished as a result of the removal of a patient's right temporal lobe,⁴² (where no loss of effect was experienced with the removal of the left one,) seems to suggest that it is indeed the case!

TOWARD A CONCLUSION:

Undoubtedly, the biology of our bodies has a direct and pervading effect on what we sense and in the way that we perceive what we sense. Yet, to the extent that we allow ourselves to seek answers in the measurable truths of our physiology, we also open ourselves up to the significant and consuming danger of what William James had termed "Medical Materialism." That is, attendant with the need to reduce everything to a biological, organic cause, is the subsequent

⁴²David Wulff, Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views, 1991 p.100.

tendency to trivialize that which is of otherwise significant religious importance. With words of warning, James observed how, "Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic."⁴³

James continued,

"Scientific theories are organically conditioned just as much as religious emotions are;... So of all our raptures and our dryness, our longings and pantings, our questions and beliefs. They are equally organically founded, be they of religious or non-religious content." *According to medical materialism*, "...none of our thoughts and feelings, not even our scientific doctrines, not even our *dis*-beliefs, could retain any value as revelations of the truth, for every one of them without exception flows from the state of their possessor's body at the time."⁴⁴

The key, as James, Heschel, and others have taught, and as I have alluded to in the beginning of this chapter, is that although we must not ignore all that scientific discovery has

⁴³William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902 p.13.

⁴⁴ibid. p.14.

to offer, at least as regards religious experience, we must always judge the event by its affect. Regardless of the organic cause of Amos' call to righteousness, it is the affect it inspired within the people then, and ourselves now, that is of ultimate importance.

Consider what Abraham Heschel has written, "Neurosis should be regarded as that which challenges an artist rather than as that which makes him an artist. It was not Isaiah who produced prophecy, it was prophecy which produced Isaiah."⁴⁵ The significance is not in the neurosis, but in what a person does with it, how they rise above it.

Robert Wilson notes,

"...to many Western psychiatrists any talk of spirit possession is abnormal and an indication that the possessed individual is out of touch with reality... In addition, the characteristic behavior of intermediaries has a parallel in the West in the behavior of acute schizophrenics. Therefore, it is common for Western psychiatrists to conclude that all intermediaries are full-fledged psychotics or at least suffer from some sort of psychological abnormality. Yet, where possession is considered

⁴⁵Abraham Heschel, The Prophets Volume II, 1962 p.188.

normal, society has standards by which they judge how a possessed person is supposed to act. As long as the intermediary acts in such a way, he is considered well-adjusted mentally and socially."⁴⁶

If we see the prophets as sick or as anything other than what they were in the eyes of their contemporaries, then we are unfairly judging them by values and perceptions that would be as alien to them as their behavior might appear to us. It is perhaps the greatest act of sacrilege then, to judge biblical standards by our own twentieth century biases. Ultimately, the question should not be whether or not the prophets were hearing the voices of psychosis, but rather, considering the universal, timeless nature and endurance of their words, why we don't hear them too.

⁴⁶Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, 1980 p.44.

CHAPTER 2

PROPHETIC AUTHORITY:

A socio-anthropological approach

"...the authority of a prophet was a vulnerable, shifting social reality--closely tied to acceptance and belief. It was supported by verbal appeals to transcendent commission... But authority rested upon acceptance of those appeals....The prophet's authority...was made real insofar as his behavior was accepted by others."

Burke O. Long

Canon and Authority, 1977

When William James spoke of medical materialism,¹ he warned of the tendency, particularly within the field of medicine, to reduce all religious experience to a biological function within the human organism. The same however can be said to apply to most of the secular study of religion. That is, there is a tendency, if not an expectation, of explaining away all supernatural activity by means of a rational and "grounded" scientific theory.

The fields of sociology and anthropology are no different. In their treatment of prophecy in particular, revelation is understood as a human event which often originates in response to pressing social conditions. As such, prophecy provides the life-line a community needs in order to restore its sense of social stability and cosmic "equilibrium."²

By defining prophecy as a human event, science implies three things. First, given the proper social conditions and cultural attitudes, prophecy can appear where ever human

¹William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902 p.13.

²Robert Carroll, When Prophecy Failed, 1979 p.49;
Robert Wilson, Prophecy in Ancient Israel, 1973 p.58.

beings are present.³ Second, since prophecy originates in man, the rules by which prophecy is either recognized, accepted or rejected are consequently also within the human domain and are therefore determined by man. And third, as a result, prophetic phenomena follow a necessary procedural pattern where ever and when ever they appear.

Uniqueness among prophetic experiences therefore, is generally deemed to be solely a matter of cultural design and preference, and not of divine involvement. Such a conclusion obviously stares in the face of Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism's traditional claim to preeminence based on a unique and interactive relationship with God.

In the eyes of secular science, Israel's prophetic tradition was arguably nothing more than a human response to its own political, social, and economic instability. Any distinction it may have held or still may hold over any other prophetic experience the world over, is of a cultural, ethnocentric value only and irrelevant as a measure of any objective difference.

³Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, 1980. p.90. According to Wilson there are four prerequisites for a society: 1) a belief in a supernatural power(s) whose separation from the natural world requires a "bridge", 2) a belief that supernatural forces are involved in, and can be influenced by human activities, 3) an environment tolerant of prophetic behavior, and 4) a social need. pp.28 ff.

I am of a mind to agree with the scientific view. The biblical prophets were not unique, not when taken anyway as participants in a universal experience. However I hope to conclude that the phenomenon of Israelite prophecy was indeed very unique and even remains unique, and that this is so mostly for the very same reasons normally thought to detract from its originality. In order to reach this conclusion, and to understand the socio-anthropological approach better, this chapter will discuss the two general contentions presented above. Namely, that prophecy appears primarily as a response to communal stress and as a result can be observed universally; and that ultimately it derives its authority from the very people it is meant to address, and therefore follows a basic structural pattern when ever it appears. Additionally, I will present a consideration of "content" as a criterion for prophetic distinctiveness.

A RESPONSE IN TIMES OF STRESS

Psychologist Raymond Prince notes that religious experiences often occur at times when individuals feel helpless and have little self-esteem. The psychological mechanisms involved, "...function not so much as life preserving as preserving a

sense of well-being."⁴ Critical in this observation are three crucial points to our discussion. First, that the religious experience is a response to a human need. Second, that the religious experience in this context is a function of the psyche and not of the divine, and third, that though it is essential that the divine play a part in the experience, it is not essential that the divine in actuality initiate it. What is important however, is that a person in such a crisis perceives that his experience originates in the divine.

On a societal level, Max Weber makes a similar observation. According to Weber, mankind possesses a basic religious need to understand his world as a meaningful and coherent totality. When, as is often the case, this conception runs into conflict with empirical reality, man seeks to reconnect with the supernatural and thus establish for himself a sense of order and theistic presence. Consequently, prophetic revelation functions as a societal mechanism by which a society may restore and preserve its own sense of order and direction.⁵

Therefore prophecy is, one) a response to a human need, two)

⁴Raymond Prince, "Shamans and Endorphins: Hypotheses for a Synthesis" (*Ethos* 10). As cited David Wulff, Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views, p.420.

⁵Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, 1922 p.59; also see Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, 1973 pp.129-141; Kenelm Burridge, New Heaven, New Earth, 1969 pp.6-7.

a function of its society and not its deity, and three) therefore dependent upon a perceived theistic presence, as opposed to a deity's actual participation.

By defining prophecy as a societal response to a societal need, and therefore not as an event originating in any deity in particular, we may entertain the implication that given the proper social conditions and cultural attitudes, prophecy may appear where ever and when ever human beings are come together as a community. Consider an example provided by Robert Wilson, involving the Fipa society of South West Tanzania.

Wilson brings the following example from an article by R.G. Willis.⁶ It involves the prophet Kaswa, who arose at a time when his society's inner stability was on the verge of collapse. He predicted a further decline in traditional values and morality, and similar to the biblical prophets, he prophesied war and an invasion from the East as a result. Not only would the European invaders finally destroy the power of the chiefs, but in the process, he prophesied, Fipa society would be changed forever. This excerpt describes the societal conditions preceding his appearance:

⁶R.G. Willis, "Kaswa: Oral Tradition of a Fipa Prophet" (*Africa* 40), 1970, pp. 248-256. Note: Though I was unable to obtain the article, it would seem by its title that Willis considered Kaswa a prophet and not a medium as Wilson implies. Although for Wilson, a medium is also a valid form of intermediation.

"During the early nineteenth century, Ufipa underwent a great deal of social change as a result of increased political and economic activity. The country was on a crucial trade route between the coast and mineral-rich Katanga farther inland... This trade brought prosperity to Ufipa, and to develop the economy even more, the chiefs of Ufipa demanded from the people increasingly heavy taxes of goods and labor... To support the growing political power of the chiefs, the army was enlarged, and this too required an increase in taxes. As a result of all this activity, the population increased, but social and economic power shifted from the people to the central government.... As dissatisfaction with the government increased, there was a corresponding increase in spirit possession. At this time the medium Kaswa appeared..."⁷

As a matter of record, many anthropologists since the nineteenth century have documented numerous cross-cultural parallels to the Fipa scenario. Accordingly, neither Fipa society, nor ancient Israel for that matter, were alone as societies in crisis or as societies for whom prophecy was a

⁷Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, 1980 pp.31-32.

response. Intermediation has been repeatedly recorded in, "...societies undergoing stress and rapid social change, sudden economic reversals, wars, natural disasters, and cross-cultural contact..."⁸ The reason, primarily, as Thomas Overholt notes, is because the prophetic promise offers men a "new order" when chaos comes breaking in on them.⁹

Certainly prophecy is not the only societal response to communal stress, just as prophecy does not appear every time a society is in crisis. However, according to Wilson and others, without the definitive social need as demonstrated by these two societies, intermediation will not and, "...cannot take place."¹⁰

As regards the Israelite experience, even the most orthodox interpretation of the Bible would affirm that Israelite prophecy arose amidst social turmoil. Samuel, the first of the prophets associated with the monarchy, attained nationwide status as a "trustworthy" prophet of Yahweh exactly at a time when the Philistines were preparing to invade the territory.¹¹

⁸ibid. p.31.

⁹Thomas Overholt, "Prophecy: The Problem of Cross-Cultural Comparison" (Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament), 1985 p.77.

¹⁰ibid. p.28.

¹¹1Sam. 3:20.

Not only was the "Ark of God" returned and peace restored under the prophet's leadership,¹² but it was Samuel to whom the people turned in order to take them from being a vulnerable, socially disorganized tribal confederacy,¹³ into a monarchy of anticipated peace and social stability.

Be that as it may however, from before and during the time of Samuel and the Philistine wars of the eleventh and tenth centuries, to the intermittent warfare with Damascus in the ninth, to the "more critical periods"¹⁴ of Assyrian and Babylonian hegemony from the eighth to the sixth century, political stress, if only on account of foreign invasion or occupation, was a constant worry and threat.

And the fact is, Israel had more than its outside enemies to contend with. There was additionally the oppressive legacy of Solomon's reign,¹⁵ the effects a civil war, religious corruption and assimilation as well as internal class

¹²1Sam. 7:14.

¹³"No they said. We must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles." (1Sam 8:19-20);

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased" (Judges 21:25).

¹⁴Joseph Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 1983 p.45.

¹⁵Wilson comments on the parallel between post-Solomonic rule and the environment facing Kaswa. Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, 1980, p.32 footnote #21.

oppression. Israel's involvement with prophecy paralleled her social need. As Max Weber observed, the worse things became, the greater was the prophets' prestige.¹⁶

AUTHORITY AS A FUNCTION OF PROCESS:

Traditionally, a prophet is considered to derive his authority from the god in whose name he speaks.¹⁷ Consistent with such a belief, are the studies which have shown that prophets, both Israelite and non-Israelite, would often employ a "messenger-style"- whereby they would come "in the name of" or proclaim "the words of" their particular deity or spirit.¹⁸ However, such an impression regarding the source of a prophet's authority, assumes certain things about the prophet and his audience which are in fact far from the social reality of a prophetic encounter.

In the first place, it assumes that the prophetic audience is a passive participant in the prophetic process. Although this is an understandable assumption since an audience neither reveals nor proclaims its revelations, an audience

¹⁶Max Weber, Ancient Judaism, 1952, pp.268-269.

¹⁷Max Weber, Sociology of Religion, 1963 p.46.

¹⁸Bernhard Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, 4th ed. 1986, quoting from Claus Westerman, Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech, 1967 pp.70-91.

nevertheless necessarily interacts with the prophet's message even if it does so only on the most basic level of stopping long enough to hear it. In the second place, it also assumes that the prophetic process is a one-performance event, or in other words, that a revelation is delivered, a prophet proclaims it and an audience then hears it. And only when another revelation is revealed, does the process pick up again.

However, if prophecy originates as a societal response to a societal need, by implication, the parameters by which a prophet and his word are recognized, accepted or rejected must also be considered to be within the purview of a society. And, since in practical terms this means that a prophet's authority does not come from a deity or from his revelation but rather from the society in which the prophet himself is functioning, then, according to some scholars such as Thomas Overholt, the prophetic process must therefore also be a highly interactive event in which an audience is decisively involved. As a matter of fact, depending upon the degree of an audience's acceptance or rejection of a prophet's message, not only may a prophet be compelled to reconsider his "revelation," but he may also be compelled to modify it, or even to run for his life.

According to Overholt, "...the prophet cannot be effective,

cannot function as a prophet, unless the people (first) acknowledge his claim to authority."¹⁹ Overholt labels this process of acknowledgement, "feedback." He writes:

Though most of the prophet's audience will be members of his own cultural community, we can expect that they will not all be of one mind in their evaluation of his message. But whether individuals accept, reject, or are indifferent to it, they will react to the prophet in some fashion, and it is this "feedback" and the prophet's response to it that defines the dynamic interrelationship between actors that is central to the model.²⁰

Based upon an audience's "feedback," writes Overholt, together with a prophet's own perception of the events going on around him, a prophet will accordingly reevaluate his original message. "Since in his understanding the message he delivers is not strictly his own but is revealed to him by the god...", a prophet may return to the god, his own feedback in tow, with the result that he will receive a new revelation either confirming the original message, or amending it to better meet the perceived expectations of his audience.²¹

¹⁹Thomas Overholt, "Prophecy: The Problem of Cross-Cultural Comparison" (Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament), 1985 p.78.

²⁰ibid. p.65

²¹ibid.

Thus in Overholt's model, there is first a revelation. Then based upon that revelation there is a proclamation. Then based upon that proclamation there is societal feedback- which along with his own observations, a prophet brings back to his deity. A new revelation may then be produced and the process will continue on in a similar fashion. Overholt additionally offers two more considerations for his model. First, there is an almost separate, but nevertheless connected stage in which a prophet's message may be confirmed by extraordinary or miraculous events. Second, these events, as well as the prophet's style and the content of his message, must conform to the general societal expectations, be continuous with cultural tradition, and "...articulate what the people who follow him have themselves begun to feel about their particular situation."²²

For Overholt, his model holds true even across the most disparate of cultures. He demonstrates its universality by successfully applying it to both the prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Handsome Lake of the North American Seneca tribe, (late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries C.E.) The result: "...although the specific *content* of their respective messages is culturally conditioned and, therefore, quite dissimilar, the prophetic *activity* of the two conforms to the

²²ibid. p.78.

same general pattern."²³

Significantly, in his evaluation of the prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Handsome Lake, Overholt found that not only did both prophets receive feedback, but both were threatened by it, both returned to their god on account of it, both received divine affirmation of their original revelation as a consequence of it, and as a further result, both received additional revelations. Even more, a change of emphasis in Handsome Lake's prophecy and a change in the tone of Jeremiah's (31:31-4, 32:1-15) may even have indicated that modification of an original revelation may have taken place as well. In reference particularly to Jeremiah, I have summarized the following:

Although Jeremiah appeared to have had some positive support (26:16-19), the general mood of his audience was predictably negative. His audience had little sympathy for his prophecy concerning Judah's destruction, or for Jeremiah when it failed to materialize (17:ff.) Among other things, the people threatened his life (18:18), he was flogged and jailed (20:1-6), charged with treason (37:ff) and thrown into an abandoned cistern to die (38:1-6). Jeremiah brought his audience's feedback to God (17:15, 20:ff), he expressed his own doubts

²³ibid. p.63.

and observations (15:18), he even complained of his burdens (20:7-9). And when he was faced with a challenge he apparently could not answer, Jeremiah even retreated until God provided him with an additional revelation to offer his adversary (28:10-14).

With these examples, Overholt demonstrates that authority is ultimately the prerogative of a society. As a result, a prophet's ultimate success rests not upon the authority of a personal revelation, but upon his personal ability to translate the needs and expectations of his audience into coherent, familiar, and trust-worthy instruction.²⁴ In failing this, a prophet's authority may be withdrawn, his message is met with ridicule, and ultimately he may be forcibly removed.²⁵

In addition, because of the inherent nature of the prophetic phenomenon, not only is the interaction between prophet, society and "deity" a necessary and universal component, but the process of their interaction universally follows a consistent pattern as a result.

²⁴Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel, 1980 p.87.

²⁵ibid. p.67. Also Max Weber, Economy and Society, 1956 p.242: "...above all, if (a prophet's) leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear."

To this point, the argument has sided predominantly with a secular scientific view which has little regard for the contention that Israelite prophecy was, in particular, a unique and exceptional phenomenon. Indeed the evidence has tended to prove just the opposite. Considering the opinion of Johannes Lindblom and the many others who maintain that prophecy can no more be confined to a special religion or race than it can to a particular part of the world or a specific stage of religious development, that indeed the prophetic endowment is something, "deeply rooted in human nature,"²⁶ what can be said, if anything at all, for the originality, the exception, or even the uniqueness of a prophetic tradition? And, in particular, what if anything can be said for the uniqueness of the prophetic tradition of Israel?

THE DUBIOUS WEIGHT OF CONTENT:

There are of course many scholars who passionately argue that any similarities between Israel and other cultural experiences are simply superficial and do not reflect genuine parallels.²⁷ Among such scholars, Israelite prophecy was unique not because prophecy appeared only within the borders of Israel, but

²⁶J. Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel, 1962 pp.13, 32. See also Thomas Overholt, "Prophecy: The Problem of Cross-Cultural Comparison" (Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament), 1985 p.61.

²⁷Yehezkel Kaufman, The Religion of Israel, 1961.

because the quality and nature of the divine relationship inherent within it was superior to anything else.²⁸ It is not a question for them of whether or not prophecy appeared in relation to communal stress, rather it is a question of how the prophecy dealt with the stress. For scholars such as these, the argument centers around prophetic content for which they claim Israel was uniquely superior.

A major proponent of this kind of argument was, of course, Abraham Heschel. In his opinion, the content of the biblical prophets' message, style and conduct was so uniquely imbued with a sympathy for the divine pathos, that essentially he claims they appeared *sui generis*, "...without significant forerunners, contemporaries or descendants."²⁹ More specifically, in a section entitled, "Prophets Throughout the World", Heschel presented primarily five basic reasons why prophecy of the biblical variety was not only exceptional, but one of a kind.³⁰

First and foremost Heschel spoke of Israel's relationship to the "Holy One of Israel," the "Creator of heaven and earth," "the One and Unique Who transcends the world and Whose wisdom

²⁸Abraham Heschel, The Prophets Volumes I, II, 1962.

²⁹David Peterson, The Roles of Israel's Prophets, 1981 p.28.

³⁰Abraham Heschel, The Prophets Volume II, 1962 pp.227-253.

no one can fathom." For Heschel, Israel's prophecy was filled with the revelation of the One God instead of the word of a "force among many forces" within the world.

Second, Israel's prophecy never promoted the self-interests of its prophets or of its cults. In other words, where prophecy elsewhere reflects the idea that gods and their functionaries are dependent upon their people for maintenance and survival, Israel's prophet stressed that his people's survival was ultimately dependent upon God.

Third, Israel's prophecy only spoke concerning the "total existence" of God's people, bringing messages that have simultaneously transcended the borders of Israel and time. The god's of other lands are said to issue only *ad hoc* commands- consistently proven inconsequential in the broader scheme of the world.

Fourth, Heschel maintained that God was always the sole source of authority for Israel's prophets, and even though at times they may have made use of extraneous methods found in other cultures they were, nonetheless, never dependent upon them.

And fifth, Heschel concluded that whereas other intermediaries often appear as isolated figures in history, Israel's prophets only appeared as part of a chain of tradition linking the

whole of Israel's experience together as one.

To be sure, from a historical perspective, Israelite prophecy was not as consistent as Heschel's interpretation would suggest. In light of the work introduced by form criticism, it is no longer tenable to maintain a single fluid line of tradition, content or style for biblical history. At best, one can only maintain a common agenda among the material's final redactor(s).³¹ Nor can we any longer ignore the reality that both Northern and Southern Israel independently had different traditions and self-interests regarding their own understanding of the "God of Israel"- understandings which inherently influenced the "word of God" they were to transmit.³² (Almost as much as two thousand plus years of post-canon history have come to influence our own acculturated understandings.)

Even more than this however, Heschel's arguments flow from within a theological framework. And the simple fact is, theology makes for poor science. Heschel reasoned out of a strong ethnocentric religious bias for the superiority of the

³¹J.R. Porter, "The Origins of Prophecy in Israel" (Israel's Prophetic Tradition), 1982 p.13.

³²1) Joseph Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 1983 pp.16-17.

2) Example: When Samuel speaks the word of Yahweh announcing the downside of a monarchical system (1Sam.8:7), the more probable understanding would reflect a concern originating in a worried national leader about to loose his own authority.

biblical prophetic experience. Yet for Heschel, there is no other God except the God of Israel, and therefore, all other claims to prophetic truth outside the biblical experience are necessarily faulted from the start.

It is simply not within objective propriety to base the validity or quality of another's experience upon one's own ethnocentric values or expectations. As William Goode has written,

"Science can only measure or describe empirical phenomena. It has no way of weighing the soul, or describing the color of a divine revelation. It cannot measure the height of a Divine Being. It cannot even challenge its existence, for there are no empirical techniques to prove the nonexistence of nonempirical phenomena. I must, rather, maintain an agnostic attitude toward such phenomena, and admit the irrelevance of its techniques to such an investigation... Science can not play prophet and claim empirical truth for its domain."³³

It was for this reason that Thomas Overholt proposed to look at process rather than content as a basis for the comparison of the prophetic experience. According to Overholt, since

³³William Goode, Religion Among the Primitives, 1951 p.23.

content is always culture-specific, the result of conclusions drawn from such analyses will always and necessarily tend to impress more concerning superficial differences than anything else. Consequently, he examined instead the prophetic process itself, which in turn notably produced "significant similarities."³⁴

To make perhaps a poor analogy, prophecy is like bread. No matter if it is honey, wheat or rye, prophecy is prophecy. Regardless which way you slice it, or whose oven it comes from, it all starts from dough, it all has to be kneaded, it all has to rise, it all has to bake, it all originates in a human need.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION:

It is, of course, difficult at best to accurately judge something which occurred over 2,000 years ago. It is even more difficult when our data is not entirely beyond reproach. Of the relatively few stories in the Bible about the prophets, the information is "uneven" in its value as source material. As Joseph Blenkinsopp notes, "The prophetic books themselves contain some biographical and autobiographical passages but consist for the most part of *sayings attributed to*

³⁴ibid. p.80.

prophets."³⁵ Objectively speaking, we have little to go on which has not been editorialized in one fashion or another.

Of the scientific opinion that the Israelite experience was far from exceptional, and certainly was not unique... although I would agree that the prophetic phenomenon is itself an event experienced around the world, I would still think to answer that there was something nevertheless distinct and exceptional within the Israelite encounter. Further, it is my opinion that based on the arguments presented to this point, there remains an objective, empirically sound measurement with which to reach such a conclusion.

Let me begin by way of review. I have attempted to show that although prophecy may or may not come from God, what is important is that it is perceived to come from God. The impetus behind such a perception is a basic, human, religious need- a need to feel connected to an infinite, theistic presence and order- especially at times of stress. Since the human element is key, it is possible that prophecy stemming from a host of gods and spirits around the world can indeed exist, and hold simultaneous and equal weight as the word of "God".

³⁵Joseph Blenkinsopp, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 1983 p.40.

Further, the structure of prophecy follows a universal pattern. What differs from one culture's prophetic system to the next, what makes each one unique, is simply its content. Ultimately, content is decided, empowered and promulgated not upon the authority of a deity, or by the "charismatic"³⁶ authority of a prophet or priest, but by the approval of the people it is meant to address.

Such approval is granted when the prophet is able to meet the needs and expectations of a society in a culturally acceptable venue. The power behind such approval however, can also work the other way. An unacceptable prophet may be ostracized, ridiculed, exiled, even executed. Regardless of the direction this authority takes however, the point to be made is that the authority itself rests in the people. A society may surrender its authority to a prophet who speaks in the name of a particular god, but it always retains the ultimate right to take that authority back.

Israel was not the first or the last to suffer national crisis, nor was Israel the first or the last to experience prophecy. It's prophets, and in particular the literary prophets, were not the only ones of their kind to have an intimate relationship with their God, nor were they the only

³⁶See Weber, almost any volume, or, Sociology of Religion, 1963 p.46.

ones to speak out in the name of social justice, nor were they the only ones to suffer abuse at the hands of their society. Regarding process, they tied their prophetic shoes, one shoe at a time, just like everyone else.

What was unique about Israel's prophetic tradition? In my opinion, Israel's legacy lies not in its prophets' role per se, but in the role Israel as a nation was to play.

Given the ultimate power a society has to regulate the message of a prophet through the mechanism Overholt has termed "feedback", especially at the redactory level, it seems exceptional in my opinion that any society would concede to committing to canon any material so often and vehemently filled with loathing for the *totality* of its social institutions, shame and despair regarding the *entirety* of its people.

I realize that this suspiciously smacks of subjective bias, but as an empirically observable fact, Israel is nevertheless unique in this regard. Additionally, Israel has preserved and honored its canon for over two thousand years, which is an empirically measurable fact which to my knowledge has no equal or parallel. Thus for me, Israelite prophecy remains a unique experience. If not for its prophets, than for the authority it allowed them and preserved for them. Unlike in any other

culture, Israel's prophetic tradition has been kept as a light unto the nations.

CHAPTER 3

THE FOUNTAIN OF TRUTH:

Prophecy in the Middle Ages

"Know that the true reality and quiddity of prophecy consist in its being an overflow overflowing from God, may He be cherished and honored, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty. This is the highest degree of man and the ultimate term of perfection that can exist for his species."

Moreh Nebukhim, II, Chapter 36

translation: Shlomo Pines 1963

Chapters one and two approached prophecy from two different perspectives. Chapter one discussed prophecy as a psychological manifestation of some physiological process within the individual human being. Chapter two discussed prophecy as a social response to a society's internal and external pressures. Common to both the psycho-physiological and the socio-anthropological approaches is the primacy of human origination and authority for the prophetic phenomenon and its processes.

As we move away from the "hard sciences" of these two chapters though, and on towards philosophy and latter theology, divine involvement begins to resume more of its traditional role. As regards the prophetic process itself, it had never been sufficient within Jewish tradition to merely perceive divine involvement. Rather, divinity had to make an actual contribution or there could be no process. Accordingly, as medieval Jewish philosophy attempted to come to terms with the "secular" philosophy and science of its day, it staunchly maintained throughout that God was the true source of prophecy, that God was the authority for prophecy, and that prophecy- a wholly supernatural event, only entered into the human scene in accordance with God's plan for humanity- via the activity of the Jewish people.

Although there are always several, if not more exceptions to

every rule, one medieval Jewish philosopher in particular broke dramatically from the mold- in the person of Moses Maimonides. Intriguingly, he combined what we have found to this point as major themes within both the psychological and sociological approaches presented in chapters one and two. Namely, Maimonides understood prophecy as a natural phenomenon, associated with those areas of the brain responsible for reason and imagination. Second, Maimonides was undeniably aware of and subsequently shaped his theory in accordance with the same stage of prophetic-process which Thomas Overholt would centuries latter term "feedback." As far as he would go, however, Maimonides did not avoid the actuality of a God. Yet, even so, his concept of God was nevertheless quite different from traditional rabbinic thought and it subsequently played an essential role in the shaping of his theory.

This chapter will seek to present Maimonides' understanding of prophetic origins. It will begin with a brief consideration of the setting from which medieval Jewish philosophy emerged, as well as a short synopsis of two major medieval Jewish philosophers who preceded Maimonides and who in their lifetimes contributed two different, though "traditional," medieval Jewish understandings of prophecy. It will then focus upon Maimonides himself. Towards this later end I will rely heavily upon the work of Shlomo Pines,

specifically his introduction to and his translation of Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed". In addition, I will be most significantly indebted to the course lectures and elucidation of my teacher Alvin Reines, as well as his scholarship as found particularly in his works, "Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy" and "Maimonides' Concept of Mosaic Prophecy".

THE SETTING:

Lasting from the ninth century to the end of the middle ages, medieval Jewish philosophy was consistently shaped and inspired by its surrounding cultural milieu. In response to the heated philosophical and theological controversy and debate of its time, ninth century medieval Jewish philosophy emerged within the dynamic world of Islamic philosophy- itself involved in a renaissance of Greek philosophy and science.

Early on, the medieval Jewish philosophers were influenced by the Mutazilite school of Kalam which attempted to reconcile Greek philosophy and science with its own theological attachment to revealed, authoritative law.¹ Even under the influence of Neo-Platonism and Aristotelianism, and after having branched into Christian culture during the latter

¹Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, 1980 p.375.

Middle Ages, Jewish philosophy's connection with its early Islamic beginnings were consistently evident.²

Needless to say, medieval Jewish philosophy was less a product of Jewish originality, then it was an adaptation of and to its non-Jewish environment. As Julius Guttman wrote,

"The Jewish people did not begin to philosophize because of an irresistible urge to do so. They received philosophy from outside sources, and the history of Jewish philosophy is a history of the successive absorptions of foreign ideas which were then transformed and adapted according to specific Jewish points of view."³

Until the Middle Ages, Rabbinic Judaism had served as its own system of "philosophy." Within it were all the answers needed to understand the origins of the world, the nature of God's providence and the right path man should pursue. At the same time, Rabbinic Judaism and its adherents were secluded from the mainstream activity of their host societies, so that any differing views from the outside would have raised few if any questions at all.

²Julius Guttman, Philosophies of Judaism, 1964 p.54.

³ibid. p.3.

With the advent of the Middle Ages however, within the Islamic world, Jews were increasingly involved in the market and trade of their larger communities. The resulting creation and expansion of the Jewish middle class meant increased exposure to the new and compelling ideas which flowed from the numerous popular debates of the day- debates involving among other things, philosophical and theological proofs of God and of creation. In addition, an emerging mastery of Arabic among the general population of Jews, allowed the curious open access to translations of Greek philosophical works which were themselves becoming ever more available.

At the same time, the Karaites were waging renewed attacks as were the Zoroastrians. Islam was asserting its self-proclaimed theological ascendancy over Judaism. And the Jewish laity, exposed as they were to this new world of ideas and challenge, began to ask serious and pressing questions of their leadership at an uncomfortable and even alarming rate. As a result, Rabbinic Judaism found itself facing issues in a way which it had not faced before. Its reliance upon received tradition and Rabbinic interpretation alone, no longer fit the bill.⁴

⁴Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, 1980 p.375.

Although today, philosophy and theology are two separate disciplines, in the Middle Ages they were ostensibly one in the same thing. As Guttman wrote, "...during the Middle Ages - which knew something like a total, all-embracing culture based on religion - philosophy rarely transcended its religious center."⁵ Accordingly, as Walter S. Wurzburger noted in an article he wrote for the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, it is not surprising that prophecy was a "major theme" within medieval Jewish philosophy. He writes,

"Where a religious community defines itself by a divinely revealed law, the character of that law, the manner of its transmission, and the qualities of the human promulgator are all problems of importance. It would be overly simple, but not wrong, to say: no prophet, no Torah; no Torah, no Israel."⁶

In a reemerging world wherein human reason was sufficient to obtain universal truth, wherein the rationality of naturalistic explanation significantly challenged anthropomorphic descriptions of supernatural intervention, and in a world where powerful religious systems relentlessly reasoned against the philosophic-theological continued

⁵Julius Guttman, Philosophies of Judaism, 1964 p.4.

⁶Walter S. Wurzburger, "Prophets and Prophecy" (Encyclopedia Judaica Volume 13), p.1177.

viability of Judaism, the rabbis correctly perceived that Israel was in trouble. They fought fire with fire. They entered the ring with reason and rational argument- justifying Jewish doctrines of revelation, attempting to close the widening gap between religious and scientific truth.

SAADYA GAON (892-942)

Saadya, "...inaugurated the medieval school of Jewish Philosophy..." with his Book of Doctrines and Beliefs in 933.⁷ He wrote in Baghdad during the height of its theological and philosophical debate. He wrote in defense of Jewish doctrine, utilizing philosophical strategies adapted from the Mutazilite Kalam.⁸

According to Saadya, God created the world to manifest His wisdom through the order of creation, and to bestow happiness upon those beings to be created through the medium of the Law.⁹ Thus prophecy, or revelation of the Law, provided the means by which humanity might achieve its happiness. In response to those who asked why God chose not to create human

⁷ Alexander Altmann, ed. "Saadya Gaon: Book of Doctrines and Beliefs" (Three Jewish Philosophers), 1969, introduction p.9.

⁸Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, 1980 p.379.

⁹*Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Saadya Gaon, (Altmann, pp.72-73, 93).

beings in a perpetual state of happiness right out, reason urged that one was happier having earned merit for oneself, rather than being created with it from the beginning.¹⁰

For Saadya, there were two types of law, that which can be adduced by human reason alone and that which cannot. As regards the former, had God not revealed such laws, humanity would eventually have come upon them on its own. However, by placing them before us, God has enabled us to reach the right path sooner.¹¹ Additionally, even though human reason may be sufficient enough to indicate a need for a particular moral law, it could not provide the particular mechanics necessary to fulfill that law, at least in a way in which all of humanity could agree to. Therefore God provided the authoritative voice, vis-a-vis rational law, in order that we might also know how to fulfill them correctly.¹²

Because a person's happiness is greater if merited by obedience to God's laws, and since rational law is valid in its own right by virtue of reason, Saadya also taught that God provided for a second type of law -revelational law- of which human reason could not attain. Because there is no humanly

¹⁰ibid. p.94.

¹¹ibid. p.95.

¹²ibid. pp.103-104.

understandable reason for fulfilling revelational law, other than for the sake of obedience, reward is doubly enjoyed. First there is the reward of meriting one's own accomplishment and second the reward of obeying God's command.

For prophecy to have been deemed credible it had to have been attended by miracles which defied the laws of nature, for only God is capable of such things. Miracles, however, could only serve as proof for those revelations which were in accordance with reason, since, "...no miracle can prove the rationally impossible."¹³ To further the strength of miraculous proof, a prophet, in Saadya's opinion, was always human and did nothing out of the ordinary by way of ritual or diet so that people should not have had the occasion to say that it was on account of this or that... that the miracle occurred. Rather the miracle was such, that only God could have caused it to be,¹⁴ Further, prophets received revelation and made signs only occasionally, rather than continuously, in order that others might not think that they were simply born with some gift that they innately controlled.¹⁵

¹³ibid. p.113.

¹⁴ibid. pp.107-108.

¹⁵ibid.

JEHUDA HALEVI (1705-1141):

Halevi was a product of Muslim Spain, writing around the time of the first crusade. His book, The Book of Argument and Proof in Defense of a Despised Religion, better known as *Sefer haKuzari*, takes the form of a dialogue between a Kuzarite king, uncommitted to any one faith, and a Rabbi, presumably Halevi, who defends Judaism against Islam and Christianity and most outspokenly against Aristotelian philosophy.¹⁶

Unlike Saadya, Halevi posited that a prophet was not a normal human being. As animal is one ontological step above plant life, and man is one ontological step above animal, a prophet was one ontological step above everyday man.¹⁷ The latter has the potential to reason, the former had the potential to receive divine revelation. In addition, this degree of ontological perfection was a function of heredity, rooted in Adam, passed down in singular transmission- father to favored son- until Jacob wherein it was passed on to his twelve sons and from there outward, until at Sinai all the Israelites became worthy of this special trait and were endowed suddenly

¹⁶Isaak Heinemann, ed., "Jehuda Halevi: Kuzari" (Three Jewish Philosophers) 1969, introduction.

Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, 1980 pp.386-392.

¹⁷*The Kuzari*, Jehuda Halevi, 1:31-43 (Heinemann pp.36-37).

along the lines of a divine creation.¹⁸

Further, just as a superior vine must be planted in good soil and receive special cultivation to produce its ultimate best, a prophet produced prophecy only in or in connection to the land of Israel and only when it was "cultivated" through purity, worship, the sacrificial cult and the presence of the Shekinah.¹⁹

Additionally, Halevi put considerable weight upon the belief in Israel's revealed tradition and the belief in its respective miracles rather than upon the reasoned proofs of Aristotelian philosophy. In his opening remarks, Halevi had the Rabbi state the basis of his belief: the God of Israel, "...who led the Israelites out of Egypt with signs and miracles, who sent Moses with His Law, (revelation is itself a miracle) and subsequently thousands of prophets who confirmed His law..."²⁰ The supremacy of Israelite miracles, over and against false miracles, was to be found in their public and therefore verifiable nature.²¹ The way to knowing God, then, did not rest upon the strength of human reason but

¹⁸ibid. 1:95 (pp.45-47).

¹⁹ ibid. 1:25, 2:10-16 (pp.64-68).

²⁰ibid. 1:11, 1:25 (pp.33, 35).

²¹ibid. 1:8 (p.32, p.56 notes 80-87).

rather only upon the truth of divine revelation.²²

MOSES MAIMONIDES (1135-1204):

Moses Maimonides, born in Cordoba, Spain, fleeing as a young child with his family to eventually settle in Cairo, Egypt, where he would continue and finish his monumental works, was according to some, "...the greatest figure in the intellectual history of medieval Jewry, both for the quality of his thought and for the influence he exerted for centuries afterwards."²³ Needless to say he had his supporters. However, his radical views, both in relationship to philosophy and halakha, also brought their share of detractors. One such individual, though of the most respectful variety, was Isaac Abrabanel (1437-1508), born as it was two hundred years after the death of Maimonides.

Abrabanel, in the Commentary on the Moreh Nebukhim which he would eventually write, set about to refute the opinions of his teacher. He does so though, only after first offering a clear and just exposition of Maimonides' views and philosophic system. Ultimately, though he brings Maimonides to life, his concluding critique, for all intents and purposes, falls back

²²ibid. 1:98, (p.49, p.58 note 92).

²³Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, 1980 p.393.

upon tradition-centered opinion.

In 1970, Alvin Reines produced an exceptional work entitled Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy, in which he brought together the most cogent thought of master and student. He also included a significant and lengthy introductory essay in which he further enlightened the reader not only on Maimonides' philosophy, but Abrabanel's interpretation of it as well. In as much as I will be relying heavily upon this work, in those places where I quote this source, it should be understood that it primarily reflects Maimonides' theory as it has been explained by Abrabanel and is then captured and elucidated by Reines.

Maimonides' Theory on Prophecy, an Overview:

In Maimonidean philosophy, God is not the interactive, providential and personal God as is interpreted within the Rabbinic literature. Although God is eternal and existed alone before the universe, and although the universe exists only on account of a conscious act on the part of God, God did not "create" the universe in any Genesis-type sense²⁴ nor has God been directly involved in any of its affairs. Consequently, God has not, does not, and would not be involved

²⁴Alvin Reines, Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy (M/A) 1970 p.xxiii; Moreh Nebukhim (Moreh) II 13:27a-:28a; Shlomo Pines, The Guide of the Perplexed, 1963 pp.281-282.

in revealing prophecy to human beings.

Prophecy, according to Maimonides, did however occur. Only it did so according to a completely different working of the traditional rabbinic concept in which prophecy appeared as a supernatural and providential act. Indeed, according to Maimonides, prophecy is a natural event.²⁵ Far from being limited to Israel, or dependent upon geography, prophecy is the realization of human potential to an exceptional degree and will occur whenever, wherever and in whomever such potential is sufficiently prepared.²⁶ The only thing supernatural about prophecy, is when assuming all the requisite conditions are present, it does not occur.²⁷

More specifically, prophecy is the realization of the human intellect. It is the closest human beings come to acquiring the ultimate nature of their form- a form we are given at conception.²⁸ When experiencing prophecy, human beings participate in the universal continuum of knowledge, grasping those universal ideals which otherwise lie beyond our

²⁵Reines(M/A) pp.xxxi, 15 ff.; *Moreh* II 32:73b; Pines p.361.

²⁶Reines(M/A) pp.1-12, 86 ff.; *Moreh* II 32:73b; Pines p.361.

²⁷Reines(M/A) pp.17-19; *Moreh* II 32:73b; Pines p.361.

²⁸Reines(M/A) pp.xxxix, 86 ff.

comprehension.²⁹ With the aid of the imagination, a prophet is able to translate the universal truths he has perceived into language and concepts that both he and the common population are able to accept and understand. Since the purpose of prophecy is to extend universal natural law to human society³⁰ -in the most effective, least disruptive way possible- prophecy takes the form of parable. Accordingly, a general population will benefit from a venue best suited to their sensibilities, while at the same time, a more educated elite will simultaneously benefit- perceiving the core truth within the prophetic parable.³¹

Prophetic Origins, Maimonides' "Naturalist" Explanation:

Central to Maimonides' theory of prophecy was the concept of causation. Building upon this, Maimonides posited an intricate cosmology based upon neo-Platonized Aristotelian philosophy³² wherein his major departure from the latter allowed for the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, rather than

²⁹Alvin Reines, "Maimonides' Concept of Mosaic Prophecy" (HUCA Volume 40-41) (M/P) 1970, pp.26, 28.

³⁰ibid. p.28.

³¹Reines(M/P) p.20; Reines(M/A) pp.xliv, lii-lvi; *Moreh* intro. I :7a, I 34:39b ff., II 43:90b-91b; Pines pp.12, 75 ff., 391-393.

³²Reines(M/A) p.xxii.

accepting that it had existed eternally.³³

As Alvin Reines explains, Maimonides accordingly instructed that everything in the world, indeed the universe, is the product of causation. And, that every causation could be traced back until eventually it was shown to originate in a First, or ultimate Efficient Cause.³⁴ This applies to all things, corporeal and incorporeal. This being said, there are two basic systems of causation, corporeal and incorporeal. The latter, in particular, is essential to understanding Maimonides' concept of prophecy.

Beginning however with the former, Reines explains that "Corporeal causes are transient and variable; they come into existence, grow strong, weaken, and pass away..." They occur "...either directly, when a body acts on another body through contact, or indirectly, when a body acts on another body through the medium of other bodies."³⁵ Accordingly, changes affected by corporeal causation are influenced by distance and direction, and occur "gradually by degrees," rather than instantaneously.

³³Reines(M/A) p.xxii; *Moreh* II 6:18b, 12:25a, 13:-25:56a; Pines pp.265, 277, 281-330.

³⁴Reines(M/A) p.xxii, *Moreh* I 69:88b ff., II 12:25a; Pines pp. 166 ff., 277.

³⁵Reines(M/A) p.xxiii; *Moreh* II 12:25a-b; Pines pp.277-278.

Incorporeal causation on the other hand is exactly the opposite. It is constant and uniform. It "endures in time." Change which is affected by incorporeal causation appears or disappears instantaneously. In contrast to the former system, "caused change" itself is fundamentally different. It is incorporeal, or form, and unhindered by the restraints of time and or space. Though it originates from the action of an incorporeal being, it can affect both incorporeal and corporeal agents. In the case of the latter, incorporeal causation results in the bestowal of form- the actualization of a corporeal object's potentiality- when that object has attained all the necessary conditions requisite to receiving that form.³⁶

Within Maimonidean philosophy, incorporeal causation is synonymous with emanation. And, emanation is the process through which the universe was first brought into being and is subsequently sustained. Emanation originates in God. God is simple incorporeal perfection to a superabundant degree. The activity of God's perfection is pure thought about the most perfect of thoughts- God. As a result, God possesses such incorporeal perfection that He has more than is necessary for His continued being, and as a result His perfection

³⁶Reines(M/A) p.xxiv; *Moreh* II 12:25b ff.; Pines pp.278 ff.

overflows (emanates).³⁷ The immediate product of God's overflow is the first of a series of ten incorporeal beings, or intellects, and nine corporeal bodies, or spheres- wherein each succeeding intellect and its corresponding sphere is somewhat less perfect than its predecessor.³⁸

The activity of each intellect, in descending degrees of perfection, is also thought. Additionally, down until the Tenth Intellect, each intellect receives more than enough emanation to sustain its own self and in turn overflows- emanating a corporeal sphere and yet the next intellect in line. As such, an intellect is the "creator" of its respective sphere through the bestowal of form (emanation), and it is the sustaining force of its sphere by virtue of its perpetual emanation.³⁹

As the creation of its creator, a sphere seeks to emulate its intellect, thinking continually about it, about the higher intellects, and about God. The product of its activity is motion. Since it seeks to emulate that which is perfect in abundance, its movement is the most perfect it is capable of-

³⁷Reines(M/A) p.xxv; *Moreh* II 12; Pines p.279.

³⁸Reines(M/A) p.xxvi; *Moreh* I 72:99 ff., II 4:-11:24b; Pines pp.184 ff., 254-276.

³⁹Reines(M/A) p.xxvii; *Moreh* II 11:24a; Pines p.275.

pure circular motion.⁴⁰

Needless to say, because the heavens, (i.e. the intellects and the spheres) are the by-products of the emanation of a living God, they are also alive. As we have discussed, they are capable of rational thought and they are animate. They also possess free choice. Their choice of activity however is guided by the rationality of their thought and bound by the nature of their incorporeal causation. It necessarily reflects what is "right" and "good" in a universal sense, and as a result is always uniform and constant.⁴¹

The actions of the intelligences and the spheres translate as the laws we associate with nature.⁴² Nature, as the system by which the universe and events within it are governed, is therefore also regular and fixed. Anything which abrogates the regular sequence of natural law is therein the equivalent of a miracle.⁴³

The process of emanation, in which the intellects and the spheres are brought into being, moves from God to the First

⁴⁰Reines(M/A) p.xxvi; *Moreh* II 4:12b; Pines p.225.

⁴¹Reines(M/A) pp.xxix-xxx; *Moreh* II 7:19a; Pines p.226.

⁴²Reines(M/A) p.xxvii; *Moreh* II 5:15b-:16b, 6:16b-:17a, 10:21b; Pines pp. 260-261, 262-263, 271.

⁴³see p.13 footnote 26 *infra*.

Intellect and then down through to the ninth sphere and the Tenth Intellect. The ninth sphere is called the lunar sphere, because the moon is found within it and the Tenth Intellect is called the Active Intellect.

Near the bottom of the chain of emanation, the Active Intellect does not possess enough perfection to produce a sphere. It does however emanate one more corporeal body and one more (albeit minor) incorporeal intellect. The body exists within the lunar sphere, and it is referred to as the sub-lunar world, or namely, earth. It is the world of first matter, comprised of the elements fire, air, water and appropriately, earth. These elements, are for the first time in the emanation process, subject to constant corporeal change. Consequently, we are the last, least perfect and the lowest point of the heavens, positioned at its center.⁴⁴

In as much as God starts the process from which the universe ensues, and in as much as God's emanation is the ultimate ground of being of all the universe, and in as much as God's perpetual emanation sustains the universe in turn, God is said to have a part in the creation and continued being of the sub-lunar world. But, God did not directly "create" the sub-lunar world or for that matter any of the intelligences or spheres

⁴⁴Reines(M/A) p.xxvi, *Moreh* II 11:24a-b; Pines pp.275-276.

after the First Intelligence.⁴⁵ The sub-lunar world in particular, receives its existence from and is governed primarily by the Active intellect, secondarily in conjunction with the rest of the heavens.⁴⁶

This means that God does not send His word to prophets and prophets do not receive the word of God. God, solely involved with thinking thoughts about Himself, has no idea that the prophets or the sub-lunar world even exist. How then does humankind achieve prophecy?

We have already discussed near the beginning of this section that mankind receives the form of his species at conception. The form of the human species is that which, "...endows man with a capacity for rational thought, and the power of imagination."⁴⁷ It is also that which separates and distinguishes humanity from the rest of the sub-lunar creation. The bestowal of human form is an emanation of the Active Intellect. As such, it is consistent and uniform among all human beings. However, actualization of human form is dependent upon in the first place, the quality of the

⁴⁵Reines(M/A) p.xxvii; *Moreh* I 52:-53:64a (*see :60b); Pines pp.114-123 (*see 117).

⁴⁶repeated references, for example, Reines(M/A) p.xxvii; *Moreh* II 11:24a; Pines p.275.

⁴⁷Reines(M/A) p.xxxix.

embryonic material-"sub-stratum" upon which the emanation flows- in particular the brain, and in the second place, upon the moral, emotional and intellectual development of the now grown person.⁴⁸ A prophet, therefore, not only possesses a superior brain, but his intellectual, moral and emotional development is also far superior to that of the average man.⁴⁹

At the moment that a prophet has achieved sufficient intellectual preparation, and simultaneously his physical, moral and emotional development are in line, the form of his being, (barring a miracle,) is automatically actualized. His rational faculty can now receive and is endowed with emanation from the Active Intellect. When it has received more than enough perfection for its own being, it too overflows - in the direction of the prophet's own imaginative faculty. Thus the Active Intellect produces the last intellect in the emanation chain, which in turn bestows incorporeal perfection upon the corporeal matter of the prophet's imagination.⁵⁰

Once a prophet's intellect has been perfected through emanation, it is able to perceive true knowledge. However, it only perceives universal knowledge since this is the only

⁴⁸Reines(M/A) p.xxxv; *Moreh* II 36:79b ff.; Pines pp.371 ff.

⁴⁹Reines(M/A) pp.l-li.

⁵⁰Reines(M/A) pp.xxxv-xliiii; *Moreh* II 37:80b ff., II 38:83a; Pines pp.373 ff., 377.

type of knowledge which incorporeal intellects possess. A prophet at no time receives particular information or instruction.⁵¹ To translate universal knowledge into particular knowledge, that he and latter his audience will understand, a prophet relies upon his now perfected imagination.

In emanating upon the imaginative faculty, the prophet's Acquired Intellect bestows continuing "rational guidance" upon the former's propensity for fantasy. Thus, "When the intellect attains its highest degree of perfection and emanates upon the imagination, the result is phantasy structured by reason. This rational phantasy is prophecy."⁵²

In other words, a prophet- prepared by way of personal study and preparation- is dependent upon the faculties of his own reason and imagination to translate the general universal knowledge he has perceived into particular knowledge he can disseminate to his audience. Clearly, from a modern psychological perspective then, prophecy might be seen as a function of inspired genius, utilizing a developed imagination -almost as an art- to disseminate religious "universal good" to one's fellow human beings in a way that is simultaneously

⁵¹Reines(M/P) p.11; Reines(M/A) pp. xli, xliii, 129; *Moreh* I 65:84a-:85a, II 38:83a; Pines pp.158-160, 377.

⁵²Reines(M/A) p.xliii.

both simple and complex without detracting one from the other.

Mosaic Prophecy According to Maimonides, a Response to Social Reality:

The prophecy of Moses was unlike any other prophet's. That is, although prophecy came to Moses in a natural way, Moses' intellect and physical constitution were such that he uniquely perceived "divine" truth directly without recourse to the imagination.⁵³ It was therefore qualitatively superior.⁵⁴ Consequently, a discussion involving the differences between Mosaic and regular prophecy would be a worthy and deserving addition to this chapter. For the purposes of this heading however, we shall suffice it to limit our observations to the following.

Uniquely perceiving true knowledge directly, Moses had no need of the imagination to interpret for himself the abstract concepts contained therein. Rather, Moses used his perfected imagination to interpret for others the knowledge he had already perceived and understood.⁵⁵ Second, because divine knowledge only speaks in terms of universal abstracts, the

⁵³Reines(M/P) pp.8-7.

⁵⁴ibid. p.17.

⁵⁵Reines(M/P) pp.22, 24-26.

Torah as a work of parables, myths and specific regulations is obviously not an exact transcription of the knowledge Moses perceived. Rather, it was his interpretation of that knowledge. Though Moses perceived the essence of the Torah, the Torah in its literary form is in reality the product of Moses' imagination- transforming the essence of universal governance (nature) as perceived by his intellect into language and form that everyone else could understand and conform to.⁵⁶

Understanding the dangers inherent in introducing divine truth to an uneducated or ill-prepared individual or community, Moses produced the Torah as a document of simultaneous multiple meanings, thereby assuring that the uneducated masses obtained the principles and regulations of societal government they needed, without becoming overwhelmed, and those who deserved instruction worthy of a more advanced capacity, received their due as well- according to their abilities.

Specifically in I chapters 32 and 33 of the Guide, Maimonides explains that the danger of providing divine truth to those who are not prepared for it is similar to,

"...feeding a suckling with wheaten bread and meat
and giving him wine to drink. (It) would

⁵⁶Reines(M/P) pp.24-25.

undoubtedly kill him, not because these ailments are bad or unnatural for man, but because the child that receives them is too weak to digest them so as to derive a benefit from them.⁵⁷

At the very least one is likely to loose faith, pursue evil ways, or simply go insane.⁵⁸

Looking back on chapter two of this thesis, it would seem that according to Maimonides' understanding, Moses not only perceived beforehand the potential effects of his prophetic knowledge, but he anticipated the "feedback" of his audience and moved to preempt it by providing for it accordingly. In an interesting aside, Maimonides also recognized the inherent danger his own work might hold for the "masses." The Guide to the Perplexed therefore, was not only written in such a way as to guide the intellectual elite, (its main objective,) but to lay down a smoke screen so that one who was insufficiently prepared might be safeguarded from inadvertently sustaining theological harm.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION:

Truth apparently, is a subjective thing. It overflows upon us like water from a fountain. Each in his time dips into the

⁵⁷*Moreh* I 32:37a; Pines p.71.

⁵⁸*ibid.* 32:36a; Pines p.69.

pool collected at our feet, and yet, though we drink the same drink, it appears different to each one. Affected by the peculiarities of our individual thirsts, the physiology of our individual faculties for taste, the water at times appears sweet, at times bitter, at times satiating, at times as if there is not enough water in all of the heavens.

If there is a constant, it is that the water flows, and that we thirst. Saadya, Halevi, Maimonides, the hosts throughout our history, each sought to quench the thirst of their age—a thirst for God and for God's word. To the extent that they quenched their thirsts, the water's life was sweet upon their lips, yet it is paradoxically clear that the same water, in but another's cup, would bear the bitterness of death.

The search for truth as it pertains to prophetic origins is not, I feel, to be realized in any one philosopher's design, but in the process by which he brought his design to life. We too, stand beneath the fountain. Truth will come, in taking up the cup, to quench our thirst.

CHAPTER 4

THE SILENT VOICE:

A search within

"The words of the prophets are written on the subway
walls...and whisper'd in The Sounds Of Silence."

Paul Simon,

The Sound of Silence, 1964

For me and I believe for the majority of theological inquiry, the existential launching point of an investigation into prophetic origins has been and remains, directly related to the immediate absence of prophetic experience. Accordingly, if prophecy were experienced as part of daily routine life, there would be, essentially, no existential need to raise the question of prophecy's origins at all. It is only in its absence, in trying to ascertain where it has gone, that it becomes critical to determine from where it had come.

Perhaps then, from the beginning, I have found myself looking for an answer explaining where prophecy comes from in order that I might explain where prophecy has gone. I have sought to understand why the voice of one such as Isaiah no longer fills our streets or why the tender of vineyards no longer leaves his vines. If I am to accept that God at any one time entered history through the voice of His prophets, then by the same token, the subsequent silence of that voice bids me to accept a most terrible conclusion- that God no longer is moved to talk to His people, that God no longer cares enough to continue the conversation.

In response to those who likewise may have reached this point, Abraham Heschel has argued that prophecy was an event in time which transcends the boundaries of spacial existence. And thus that prophecy once having entered the world, stands as

a marker, perpetually relevant and continually speaking. The "word" once having been spoken is therein sufficient in itself to last throughout our eternity- there is no need, so to speak, to reinvent the wheel.¹

But I find this reasoning less than satisfying. I do not presume to understand the ways of God, but it is nonetheless difficult to fathom that God should choose to remain silent in what must by now be the obvious vain hope of our ever learning how to use the "wheel" soon enough.

Indeed the problems addressed by the prophets of our tradition are still the problems we face today. Social conditions, if anything, have only taken on proportionally gargantuan dimensions since the time of our forebears. Our advances in technology have brought us to the brink of our own global annihilation- our own destruction of God's very creation. Why then should God not speak to us still? And *davkah* why should He be silent now of all times? Where is the active presence of God which so intensely filled our ancestors lives? It is simply inconceivable to me that God, if ever once so intimately involved in His people's well-being, should have all of a sudden decided to leave us to ourselves.

¹Abraham Heschel, God in Search of Man, 1955 pp.211 ff.

Early on, our rabbis intuitively sensed the disastrous consequences which God's silence held for their people. Left to ponder the origins of prophecy, faith would be hard put to come out ahead. Doubt might even go so far as to question the validity of God's covenant having ever existed at all. In the throws of exile, such was a plausible worse-case scenario. The rabbis, however, had a card to play. Faith was still a medium subservient to dogmatic manipulation. All that was required was a system in which God's silence could be explained while remaining inside the context of covenantal authority.

The Rabbis in due course invented the medium of the *Bat Kol*.² They had to acknowledge that the age of prophecy had come to an end, but, as they explained, it did not have to mean the end of God's concern. With the fall of the Temple and the departure of God's people from the land, God's *Shekhinah*, the vehicle of God's prophecy, had also been made to leave. But it left along with God's people. In this way, God was still the source of prophecy, He would still be present among His people, and would even from time to time still intervene by allowing a *Bat Kol* to descend. Prophecy, as a medium of God's concern, had ended for the time being but it would reappear once again when Zion and its cult were restored and the people

²Yoma 9b.

were gathered home once more.

In the twentieth century however, the tables at which the Rabbi's card can still be played are significantly fewer in number. We have ostensibly outgrown, even rejected outright, the world of dogmatic faith. We accept only what we see with our own two eyes and we trust only in what we hear with our own two ears. Empiricism has become the standard of our science, and science has become the Torah of our belief.

Consequently, amid the new and expansive sea of modern science and technology, assiduous scholarly efforts have put such an abundance of evidence upon the popular communal tables as to prove beyond reasonable doubt that prophecy is indeed perhaps not the product of divine intervention, but is rather the child of our own human invention.

Mordecai Kaplan wrote insightfully on this point,

"Too much has been learned about various religious traditions, with their myths, legends and wonder tales, to permit the average thoughtful person, who is accustomed to integrate his knowledge into a coherent pattern, to place any more credence in the miracles recorded in the Jewish tradition than in those of any other. ...For most people who are thus influenced by the spirit of modernism there seems

to be no alternative but an unqualified secularism."³

Secularism, as such, offers a sobering, though some would argue heartening, modern solution to the question of prophetic origins and ultimately the absence of prophetic revelation. Prophecy is absent because prophecy, as the actual transmission of divine providence, never existed in the first place! Since what we know as prophecy derives from man, there is no subsequent need to feel a loss over that which never was! Even more, learning the "hows and whys" of our role in creating the prophetic myth may eventually help us in solving, on our own, the problems we could only have hoped would be solved secondarily through divine guidance. Accepting our natural role as the creator and ultimate custodian of our own destiny- we may empower ourselves to affect the world-wide healing and growth necessary to survive as a species.

It is a thought, however, that I must reject. Empowering in potentia as it may be, humanity has proved autonomy to be its own worst enemy. Even more abhorrent than the evil committed in the name of God, the evil perpetrated in the name of human supremacy has proved manifestly more hideous. The thought that we are alone to the wisdom of our own intuition is

³Mordecai Kaplan, Judaism Without Supernaturalism, 1958 p.24.

exponentially more disturbing to me than the thought that we must continue in a world where God's voice remains silent. At least in the latter, in our longing and striving to reunite with God's word, we may achieve some form of ideal behavior. We would still be dependent upon ourselves, but we would be beholden to a higher morality which transcends the weakness of human vanity.

On a more philosophical note, it occurs to me that the issue of human autonomy raises a further, more unique question regarding our perception of prophetic origins- namely, whether our secular response is a reaction to God's silence or whether God's silence is a result of our secular response. The question I think, is more significant than it may appear at first glance.

In the first case, it does not seem unreasonable in the light of existentialism that man, facing the chilling reality of aloneness, should respond defensively to those threats ensuing from what he perceives to be his abandonment by God. At stake are his emotional and social well being. If we understand prophecy as essentially a relationship between man and God, the abrogation of that relationship evokes no less a sense of loss or pang of emotion than is normally attendant upon the abrogation of any intense, long-term relationship we may have amongst ourselves. Indeed, to argue *kal v'homer*, the effect

should be all the more profound.

To the extent with which we put faith in modern psychology, is it unreasonable to assume that the same stages of grieving demonstrated to apply to the termination of human relationships, should not also apply when we grieve what we perceive as the loss of our relationship with God?⁴ More specifically, may it not be argued that humanity, in dealing with God's silence, finds itself in process- moving from denial (i.e. rabbinic interpretation,) to acceptance and an ultimate sense of autonomy? The secularist approach in which we reject the very existence or significance of God Himself, may reflect our reaction to God's departure from our lives vis-a-vis a natural stage of grief normally characterized by anger.

The natural conclusion to this, of course, would be that if our process is a healthy one, we will eventually abandon our anger and our secularism- integrating the true reality of our loss- and move on into full autonomy with the peace of mind such healing would bring. The difference between this autonomy and one in which God has had no part at all is that this autonomy, at the very least, affords us an established

⁴As generally adapted from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's well known five "Stages of Dying" in which one moves from Denial to Anger, Bargaining, Depression and then Acceptance.

foundation from which we may hope to go out to seek our own way.

What of the idea, however, that reverses the situation wherein God's silence is the result of our involvement with secular ideology instead of the other way around? If we were to understand the individual as a microcosm of the larger entity we call humanity and yet at the same time leaving cultural variation aside, we were to assume that humanity's development on a whole parallels essentially the same cognitive/psychosocial development of an individual, we might be able to trace the silence of God's voice, as a phenomenon, to a natural unfolding of our own species growth.

It is certainly clear that humanity's ability to reason, (though present in an ontological sense from the very start,) is a function of acquisition over time. Accordingly, we have developed as a species once dependent upon explanatory myth into a species now capable of scientific extrapolation. The difference in knowledge between biblical man and the person of the twentieth century reflects not only a quantitative, but a qualitative advancement in favor of the latter.

Such an observation corresponds with Jean Piaget's famous theory of cognitive development. According to Piaget's theory, an able child in the course of normal development will

advance through a set sequence of predetermined cognitive stages. These stages represent the qualitatively different levels by which he will come to process information about himself and his world. Piaget held that the process of cognitive development was universally the same, varying only in the rate at which an individual might move from one stage into the next.⁵

A table adapted from John Santrock's Adolescence,⁶ will be helpful for our purposes. These then are the four stages of development as identified by Piaget:

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Age Range</u>
Sensorimotor	An infant constructs an understanding of the world by coordinating sensory experiences with physical actions. As they manipulate objects, and observe the consequences, they associate patterns, and begin to recognize primitive symbols.	Birth to age 2
Preoperational	Language appears. A child begins to understand the world with words and images. He can now manipulate symbols in addition to objects. Imagination plays a large role. They can imagine that things are what they are not.	2 to 7

⁵Audrey Haber and Richard Runyon, Fundamentals of Psychology, 2nd ed. 1978 pp.334 ff.

⁶John Santrock, Adolescence, 4th ed. 1990 p.60 also, Audrey Haber and Richard Runyon, Fundamentals of Psychology, 1978, pp.334 ff.

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Age Range</u>
Concrete - Operational	A child begins to reason logically about concrete events. Manipulation of symbols replaces that of objects. In distinguishing between how things look and how things are, a child increasingly resorts to a cognitive structuring of the world.	7 to 11
Formal - Operational	Moving beyond concrete experiences, an adolescent is able to reason in more abstract, idealistic and logical ways.	11 to 15

Again, if we assume that humanity's development parallels what Piaget and others have proposed for the individual, we might understand that humanity also progresses through set stages of specific cognitive development as it comes to understand itself and its world. In applying the above definitions, it seems plausible, if not intriguing, to relate Piaget's four stages of growth to humanity's relationship with biblical prophecy.

Regarding the first stage- sensorimotor development, we may with a fair degree of confidence look upon it as representing that period of growth up to and including the pre-literary prophets. In this interpretation, I would also include the perception of supernatural activity as it appeared within Israel's surrounding cultures. What should be of specific note for us is that concentration on coordinating sensory

experience with physical action, the manipulation of objects, the observation of consequence and pattern and the primitive use of symbol.

From a form-critical perspective, if we were to separate out what may very well be latter redactory attempts to harmonize early prophetic activity so that it would be more in line with deuteronomic philosophy, (i.e. and less in line with the activity of Israel's neighbors,) can it be denied that what Piaget offers as characteristic of sensorimotor development significantly represents the character of pre-literary prophecy and by the same token then, the cognitive stage of its audience? Even if we took the pre-literary accounts at face value, significant parallels are nevertheless present. We may cite the relative absence of visions characteristic of latter stages of development, the relative abundance and reliance upon physical manipulations- including magic and divination- or the primitive use of the ark as a symbol of God's power and protection.

Imagination, as a sophisticated faculty, only appears with the introduction of the literary prophets. And, I would propose, that their entry into history would seem to correspond with humanity's advance into the next level of its own development. Of critical note in Piaget's second stage is not only the appearance of language but the use of images and the

manipulation of symbols. Most noteworthy though, is the use of imagination. Though a child is still tied to concrete objects and actions, he can now use imagination to understand things in relationships other than as they appear in reality.

Is this not also the case with the period of literary prophecy? Although the prophets remain physically visual in style, there is much more emphasis upon the symbolism of their action than upon the physicality of the act itself. Consequently, their actions, when they occur, are representative of relatively complex associations requiring the use of a fairly sophisticated imagination. It is because of this newly developed imaginative ability, that the images woven by the prophet are sufficiently understood by their audience to communicate the desired meaning. Imagination, therefore, may be said to have been the operative mechanism by which ancient Israel, during the time of the latter prophets, understood their connection to God and their world--much as imagination and fantasy-play help the child at stage two to understand his connection to the world around him.

What of stage three? Piaget submits that a child now learns to reason logically, though admittedly only about concrete events. The ground work is laid in which a child increasingly resorts to a cognitive structuring of the world. The most significant concrete event in the latter life of ancient

Israel, an event that strikingly marked the end of prophecy per se, was the Roman exile in 70 C.E. What ensued was ostensibly the beginning of Rabbinic Judaism or, in other words, the cognitive structuring of the Jewish world.

In stage four, a child moves beyond concrete experiences. Now an adolescent, he reasons in the abstract, in idealistic and logical ways. Is it not feasible to suggest that such a stage of development might correspond to the rise of medieval philosophy? And that, as a stage, it continues on, achieving more and more complexity even into today? Certainly, although Piaget held that the final stage of growth is achieved by age fifteen, studies as early as 1972 have suggested that "...cognitive development may extend way into adulthood."⁷

This of course, may all be a simple flight of fancy, but on a conceptual level, it seems to me to offer a certain logic. Namely, that as a species we progress not only in the quantity of knowledge that we achieve, but in the quality of the thought processes we use to attain and process that knowledge. Further, it allows that not all segments of a general population are going to advance at the same rate or speed. Still further, it suggests that early use of imagination and

⁷Audrey Haber and Richard Runyon, Fundamentals of Psychology, 1978 p.339.

fantasy as realistic tools for understanding our world, naturally give way to more grounded cognitive methods of discernment. And thus, we can perhaps begin to understand the advent of secularism and its approach to God as well as to God's word.

What it does not mention, however, though I consider it a crucial factor, is the irreversibility of the process by which we develop our cognitive abilities. That is, once we are able to establish by reason that prophecy is not a supernatural event, then by virtue of our reaching that stage of reasoning ability, barring an actual miracle or the persuasive appeal of a more rational proof to the contrary, we cannot return to understanding prophecy as anything but a natural event. In other words, there comes a point when the Santa Claus of our childhood is forever after only the wishful product of our once child's imagination. We can fondly recall believing in him at one time, but we will never be able to accept him in that same child's-way again.

What the above discussion boils down to, is the suggestion that the reason we no longer hear the voice of God is because we have progressed to a point in our natural development where we can no longer accept the biblical perception of that voice as realistic. Our cognitive tools for understanding the world have evolved from imagination to reason- a progression that

is irreversible.

And, there is yet another issue intimately related to cognitive development. It too affects the silence of God's word, or more succinctly put, our weakened ability to hear it.

As cognitive development theory traces the natural progression of operational thought-processing in an individual, psychosocial development theory traces the stages of social/psychological growth and adaptation in an individual. Various theories abound, and I do not wish to enter into a discussion of their many particulars. I would, however, like to address the specific concept of autonomy as a developmental stage of independence.

As a technical term, autonomy is understood differently and applied at different stages of development depending upon the theorist at hand. For our purposes, I would like to define autonomy as that stage of development in which an individual may assert and maintain his own independence- in relation to, but not in reliance upon, any outside force or control. Again, for our purposes, I would like to suggest that autonomy is not represented by any age bracket in particular but reflects more of a state of mind which may in fact never be achieved throughout the entirety of a lifetime.

Nevertheless, seen as a natural state of healthy development, once achieved, it is fair to say that any return to a previous state would represent- in the language of psychoanalysis- an unhealthy regression.

This said, humanity in the modern age has achieved a level of autonomy previously unknown in its development. The age of our enlightenment has dawned. By virtue of our new liberated human reason, we have come to believe that nothing is beyond our own infinite capacity. Therefore, given the proper time and resources, no mystery is unsolvable, no need is beyond our ability to satisfy it. As a result, humankind has assumed the responsibility of determining its own destiny, and to a significant extent, has determined that God, as such, is no longer necessary.^b Autonomy, in and of itself, is after all, a jealous god.

A crucial dynamic of autonomy then, is a profound reluctance to give it up. To do so would threaten our sense of self esteem and accomplishment. As with the young adult on the threshold of leaving his parent's home, we as a species have matured to a point where independence and self reliance are

^bFor an insightful discussion on the effects of the Enlightenment, see: Eugene Borowitz, The Mask Jews Wear, 1973, specifically the chapter entitled "Ethics Without Roots" pp.66-88. See especially, Alvin Reines, "Ontology, Demography, and the Silent Holocaust" (Judaism Issue 151, Volume 38, no. 4) 1989.

critically more important to our effective survival in the new world of our own creation, than is the maintenance of old ties to the dogma of our "childhood."

We have, in other words, effectively left our Parent's house. It frightens us to consider giving up our autonomy, to consider giving up what we have achieved. And so, I would suggest that our fervent strides in the fields of sociology, psychology and form-criticism, etc., may represent a subconscious theological effort on the part of humanity to in large part affirm our fledgling sense of identity and our will to independence, as well as to shore up the break-water which keeps God at a safe and respectable distance from our lives. We have in point, reached such a stage of autonomy that if we were to ever accept an emergence of prophecy again, it would have to be based upon our own terms- upon terms which from our perspective would not threaten our recent, yet hard won gains.

This speaks as well for our emotional development. Such terms would have to ensure that we would not be left again to feel the sense of anger, betrayal and abandonment engendered by such events as the Holocaust. For many, our trust has been shattered and it is tragically far more easier, psychologically speaking, to leave the barricade up, to assume that God has gone than it is to accept that He stood silently by the tragedies of our lives.

Unless, perhaps, God's voice was there. And it was we who somehow could not hear it.

It is perhaps unfortunate that we do not have an intermediary of sorts, one with a Phd. in psycho-dynamic counseling. (An Isaiah or an Amos?) On the other hand, empowered as we are in our new found self-reliance, it should not be beyond our ability to initiate a new discussion of terms on our own. Dialogue between people and God is undoubtedly a casualty of our enlightenment. Yet discussion is such a critically crucial key to hearing another's voice.

A CONCLUSION:

Ultimately, the only answer that would ever sufficiently settle the question, "Where has prophecy gone?" would be a publicly verifiable, miraculous revelation on perhaps the scale of a Sinai itself. Because for all of our best intentions, no matter what the reasoning or the insight, human answers regarding the origins of prophecy are in the end just that...human answers. And even the poetry and spirituality of Heschel, or of Buber, are in the end only a human response to a human need.

If we are to find peace in God's silence at all, it must come from ourselves. To such an extent, we may share in those

traditions and interpretations which speak to us, striking a chord of spiritual realness deep within, but ultimately it will remain an individual and personal exercise, one with which we must be intimately involved.

Regardless if prophecy originated in man seeking God, or in God seeking man, or in the mutual meeting of the ways,⁹ prophecy was and undeniably is still a product of process, a product of active engagement. If we accept as an outgrowth of our own developing maturity, humanity's changing relationship to the prophetic word, then the greatest sin which we could ever commit would be to fall lackadaisical in the greatness of our old age. Healthy maturity is a process, a cycle of continuous movement.

For my own part, the concept of a maturing humanity makes sense. It allows for natural growth and new understandings, it allows for more profound and lasting relationships. It does not necessarily rule out the possibility of God or the transmission of His word. On the contrary, it points us back to a time of theological innocence, to a time when the innocence of age could open the window to worlds latter erased by reason.

⁹Kaplan, Heschel and Buber respectively.

Those worlds, if they ever existed, must exist yet today for our children perceive them still. If in our age, we no longer hear the voice of God, it is perhaps because we have not learned how to hear it in an adult way. Its silence does not mean it has stopped, for it has always been silent. It is we who have stopped listening, mistaking the silence for absence.

If we are to ever hear the voice again, it is we who must take the initiative, we who must begin to talk with God. It is we who must strive to strike the balance between the profound wisdom of our new age and the profound insight of our youth, hearing in the echo of our elevated dialogue the clarity and the resonance of God's silent voice.

"...And lo, the Lord passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind- an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake- fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire- a still, small voice."

I Kings 19.11,12

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