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**A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON
OF MOSES MAIMONIDES' AND MARTIN BUBER'S
CONCEPTS OF PROPHECY**

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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INTRODUCTION

My thesis explores the nature and mode of the deity-human relationship as put forth by the Pentateuch and magnified by the philosophers Moses Maimonides in his Guide of the Perplexed and Martin Buber in his I and Thou. My analyses will distinguish between Mosaic and non-Mosaic deity-human relationships. In exploring the prophetic experience in the various philosophic systems, I will examine the mode and content of this experience.

In addition to exploring this relationship in the respective religious-philosophic systems of Maimonides and Buber, I will compare and contrast these two different systems. By exploring and comparing these philosophic forms of the deity-human relationship, I will gain a better understanding of the relationship as either a function of the intellect or a function of the life of dialogue.

In the end I will demonstrate that although these two systems disagree in the mode and content of the prophetic experience, they can both be useful to the modern Reform Jew in creating a personal divine-human relationship. In this respect, it is neither intellectual or dialogue but a combination of the two.

MOSES MAIMONIDES

In order to understand Maimonides' view of prophecy as expressed in the Guide of the Perplexed, we must examine how Maimonides unfolds his various teachings in the *Guide* and how the subject of Mosaic prophecy as a separate subject is presented. For some, Maimonides' admonition in the introduction of the *Guide* that he will not speak even "a single word about Mosaic prophecy" in the *Guide* is to be taken literally. Therefore, one should not hope or attempt to better understand Maimonides' view of Mosaic prophecy through the words of the *Guide*, and we should limit ourselves to the general subject of prophecy.

The few scattered references to Mosaic prophecy that Maimonides makes in the *Guide* should only be viewed as references to prophecy in general and not statements about the nature of Mosaic prophecy. In other words, Mosaic prophecy is not one of the "secret teachings" of the *Guide*; it is only secondary to the discussion of prophecy in general. However, for others Maimonides' *Guide* does contain a secret teaching about Mosaic prophecy, and in order to understand one we must try and understand the other.

In the introduction of the *Guide*, Maimonides tells us, explicitly the purpose and the manner in which he wrote his "non-theological treatise." He says,

It is not the purpose of this Treatise to make its totality understandable to the vulgar or to beginners in speculation, nor to teach those who have not engaged in any study other than science of the Law – I mean the legalistic study of the Law. I mean the legalistic study of the Law. For the purpose of this Treatise and of all those like it is the science of Law in its true sense. Or rather its purpose is to give indications to a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief – such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify...He must have felt distressed by the externals of the Law and by the meanings of the above-mentioned equivocal, derivative, or amphibolous terms...Hence he would remain in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider that he has renounced the foundations of the Law. Or he should hold fast to his understanding of these terms and not let himself be drawn on together with his intellect, rather turning his back on it and moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving that he had brought loss to himself and harm to his religion. He would be left with those imaginary beliefs to which he owes his fear and difficulty and would not cease to suffer from heartache and great perplexity.¹

He says that the *Guide* is not intended for the uninformed masses (the vulgar), but, instead, it was written for the intellectual elite of his religious community: the initiated in philosophy and metaphysical-sciences. "My purpose in this Treatise, as I have informed you in its introduction is only to elucidate the difficult points of the Law and to make manifest the true realities of its hidden meaning, which the multitude cannot be made to understand because of these matters being too high for it."² Maimonides intends to bridge the seeming gap between the teachings of the basic texts of Judaism and philosophy for those who

¹ *Guide of the Perplexed*, Introduction, S. Pines translation. The *Guide of the Perplexed* will henceforth be referred to as *Guide*.

seek to harmonize their religious faith with their secular intellectual pursuits, and who have questioned the religious teachings of Judaism based on the grounds of philosophy and reason. "In sum, the person to whom the *Moreh Nebukhim* is addressed is one whose life has become profoundly unauthentic owing to the conflict between his commitment to truth on the one hand, and his loyalty to the Jewish community on the other."³ However, when one finally begins to see Torah in its true light, in the light of the teachings contained within the *Guide*, the differences between it and philosophy are eliminated.

Furthermore, as he says in his introduction, the *Guide* is written under a cloak of secrecy. He did not want to make it easy to understand his "secret teachings", because he did not want to destroy the simplistic faith of the masses. Had he written his *Guide* in a clear and straightforward manner, it would have misled the masses who are neither philosophically prepared nor intellectually endowed to receive the teachings contained within its pages. Instead, Maimonides tells us that he will use many devices to conceal the truths he had written. He says,

Hence you should not ask of me here anything beyond the chapter headings. And even those are not set down in order or arranged in coherent fashion in this Treatise, but rather are scattered and entangled with other subjects that are to be clarified. For my purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has been concealed from the

² *Guide II, 2.*

³ Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy*, p. xvii.

vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite for His apprehension.⁴

For Maimonides there is a practical aspect to a simple meaning of the Torah for the masses, and, as will become clear in the following pages, this practical aspect does not supercede the correct understanding of Torah to those who possess a superior intellect. However, the teachings of the *Guide* are not intended for the wide audience of the masses but a limited audience of the intellectual elite.

Through his process of scattering, omission, and use of language of multiple significance, Maimonides does write about "secret teachings," and, as we shall see, Mosaic prophecy is one of them. In speaking about the "voice" apprehended at Sinai Maimonides says, "I shall draw your attention to this secret, and I shall let you know that this is a matter that is transmitted by tradition in the religious community and that is known to its men of knowledge."⁵

The manner in which Maimonides wrote about his "secret teachings" is correlated to his understanding of Torah. According to Maimonides there are two "meanings" contained in the Torah: one exoteric and the other esoteric. The exoteric or literal meaning of the Torah is the less perfect of the two meanings; the true meaning is the esoteric or hidden meaning. The exoteric meaning may be less perfect, but it is still grounded in the true hidden essential meaning and valuable

⁴ *Guide*, Introduction.

for the uninformed masses in spreading a true belief in God. The masses could not comprehend the philosophical truths contained in the Torah, and, therefore, needed the simplistic biblical text to inculcate them with essential true beliefs. As he says in his introduction, the literal meaning is comparable to silver, but, even more valuable, the hidden meaning is comparable to gold.

Maimonides uses the Torah as a blueprint for the writing of his *Guide* in its style and language. Just as the Torah is written on two levels, so too is his *Guide*. He says, "If you wish to grasp the totality of what this Treatise contains, so that nothing of it will escape you, then you must connect its chapters one with another; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in it in the course of the speech, even if that word does not belong to the intention of the chapter."⁶ We are only given the "chapter headings," and it will take the initiated reader to fully grasp the teachings contained within its pages.

In addition, Maimonides uses the language of the Torah throughout his *Guide* to exemplify and support his teachings. He accomplishes this by deciphering the meaning of the language of the Torah through the use of multiple significance. Like any good form of

⁵ *Guide* II, 33.

⁶ *Guide*, Introduction.

rabbinic literature, it is the words of Torah that best support one's claims.

When Maimonides claims that he will not write a single word about Mosaic prophecy in the *Guide*, firstly, we realize that this sentence, in itself, is a self-contradiction. He says,

I have already explained to all the four differences by which the prophecy of Moses our Master is distinguished from the prophecy of the other prophets, and I have proved it and made it manifest in the Commentary on the *Mishnah* and in the *Mishneh Torah*. Accordingly there is no need to repeat it; moreover it does not enter into the purpose of this Treatise. I will let you know that everything I say in prophecy in the chapters of this Treatise refers only to the form of prophecy of all the prophets who were before Moses and who will come after him. As for the prophecy of Moses our Master, I shall not touch upon it in these chapters with even a single word, either in explicit fashion or in a flash.⁷

The single word is contained in this sentence itself. Also, this statement about future subject omission from the pages of the *Guide*, saying he will not write about this subject, must strike us as odd since we know the secretive nature and process the *Guide* was written under. If omission is one of Maimonides' techniques of concealment, then Mosaic prophecy must strike us as a "secret teaching" contained within the *Guide*. It seems as if Maimonides is drawing our attention to this subject, and, therefore, the few statements we have about it in the *Guide* are vital to our understanding of Mosaic prophecy and prophecy in general. Furthermore, since an omission is absent from the written word of the *Guide*, we must also pay careful to the places where it seems

⁷ *Guide* II, 35.

Maimonides may be addressing the subject of Mosaic prophecy through omission as well.

Doesn't it seem more logical that if Maimonides didn't want to write about this subject then why mention it at all. Why state that you will not write another word, draw our attention to the subject, and then clearly contradict yourself within the pages of the *Guide*? Clearly, in the case of Mosaic prophecy we have a case of omission, scattering, and the use of language of multiple significance, and a case for one of the "secrets" of the *Guide*.

As is the case with prophecy, one cannot study mosaic prophecy in a vacuum. While Moses achieves a higher degree of prophecy than any other prophet, to understand one you need to understand the other. In Maimonide's *Guide* we see that the subject of Mosaic prophecy is intertwined with non-mosaic prophecy or ordinary prophecy. He uses ordinary prophecy to separate out Mosaic prophecy, and although the two are "amphibolous" terms, they do share non-essential traits in common. He says, "the term prophet is applied to Moses and other prophets amphibolously."⁸ An amphibolous term for Maimonides is defined as "predicated of two things between which there is a likeness in respect of some notion, which notion is an accident attached to both of them but not a constituent element of the essence of either one of

⁸ *Guide* II, 35.

them."⁹ The two are not the same; the prophecy of Moses and all other prophets is of a different nature, which is essential to each one's definition. Prophecy has two definitions: one for Moses and another for all other ordinary prophets, yet there is a non-essential element in common in each one's definition.

In the introduction to the *Guide* when Maimonides says he has addressed the subject of Mosaic prophecy elsewhere, he is referring to his classic distinction of Mosaic and ordinary prophecy in his *Misneh Torah*. There he distinguishes between the two different modes of prophecy in four ways. Firstly, ordinary prophets only prophesied in dreams or visions, whereas Moses always prophesied in a state of full consciousness. Secondly, ordinary prophets only prophesied through the medium of an angel, whereas Moses always prophesied without an intermediary angel; instead he alone prophesied "face to face" with God. As it says, "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses-whom the Lord singled out face to face."¹⁰ Thirdly, ordinary prophets experienced fear or terror when they prophesied, whereas Moses experienced his prophecy peacefully. And finally, ordinary prophets prophesied involuntarily and unexpectedly, whereas Moses prophesied at will. As will become clear in the following discussion, Maimonides uses

⁹ *Guide* I, 45.

¹⁰ The Jewish Bible, the new Jewish Publication Society translation, *Deuteronomy* 34:10.

his *Guide* to elaborate on these distinctions of prophecy and in the process elaborates on his definition of each form of prophecy.

Maimonides' definition of prophecy in his *Guide* appears in book II. There he says, "know that the truth of prophecy in its quiddity is an emanation (or overflow) that flows forth from God through the medium of the Active Intellect, first upon the rational faculty, and then upon the imaginative faculty."¹¹ This definition is based on a Neo-Platonic Aristotelian cosmology that has God as its basis for a created universe. God is the "ground of being" for the created universe; God did not directly participate in creation of our sub-lunar world, but is its ultimate source of creation.

Broadly classified, the universe is divided into three parts: the Intelligences; quintessence, which forms the bodies of the spheres; and first matter, the primary constituent of bodies that exist below the spheres and are encompassed by them. There are ten Intelligences and nine spheres. The creation of the universe takes place through an act of emanation by God that produces the first Intelligence, which in turn produces the first sphere and second Intelligence, a process that is continued until the ninth sphere and tenth Intelligence, or Active Intelligence, are emanated. With the emanation of the ninth (or lunar) sphere and the Active Intelligence, the heavens are complete. The process of emanation continues, however, with the emanation of the sublunar world, the world of man...The universe is not self-sufficient, and would cease to exist without being sustained by God. God, therefore, is the continuing ground of being, eternally emanating and sustaining the first Intelligence. This sustaining process extends throughout the universe. The first Intelligence, and each successive Intelligence in turn, is the continuing ground of the sphere and Intelligence it produces, with the Active Intelligence and the spheres perpetual conserves of the sublunar world.¹²

¹¹ *Guide* II, 12.

¹² Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides' Concepts of Providence and Theodicy*, HUCA, Vol. 43 (1972), pp. 174-175.

For union to occur between the human mind and the Active Intellect, the Intelligence that is responsible for the creation of our sublunar world, the human mind must be endowed with the proper intellectual abilities, the rational and imaginative faculties. The human intellect also needs to have perfected that intelligence through the study and training of philosophy and metaphysical sciences. He must have turned his "hylic" or innate intelligence into an "acquired" intelligence.

At birth, the intellect is a mere potentiality called the hylic intellect. Through learning, the hylic intellect becomes realized by grades into an actual intellect. The highest stage of realization is achieved when the hylic intellect is actualized to a point where it becomes a new entity called the acquired intellect, the various stages of intellectual actualization are produced naturally by different kinds of knowledge. In the case of the acquired intellect, the knowledge required is the abstract science and metaphysics...The realization of the intellect from potentiality to actuality not only requires study by man but action by the Active Intellect, the agent who, as nature, brings all things in the sublunar world from a state of potentiality to actuality...The acquired intellect is nothing other than a new personal being, an emergent structure of self...The person establishes a relation with the heavenly being, the Active Intellect. The abstract concepts that are constitutive of the acquired intellect are the identical intellectual entities present in the Active Intellect. Thus, through his acquired intellect, a person achieves union with the Active Intellect.¹³

At the completed stage of perfect development both intellectually and morally, the human mind unites with the Active Intellect and shares, to the degree possible owing to our finite human capabilities, with its pure abstract knowledge of nature. There is union or prophecy when the human intellect shares the same abstract knowledge present in the

Active Intellect. The Active Intellect is, therefore, not a passive instrument of a divine will; it is an independent agent that possesses freedom of choice and its emanation onto the sublunar world is a product of that freedom. The prophet in no way unites with God; the union is with the Active Intellect alone.

Furthermore, the act of emanation which produces the acquired intellect is the only thing the Active Intellect imparts upon the prophet; there is no knowledge or imagery imparted to the prophet at the time of prophecy. It is the acquired intellect that possesses the knowledge. As he says, "Know that the true prophets indubitably grasp speculative matters; by means of his speculation alone...the overflow renders perfect the act of the rational faculty (and the imaginative faculty), so that its act brings about its knowing things that are real in their existence, and it achieves this apprehension as if it had apprehended it by starting from speculative premises."¹⁴ Once the acquired intellect has been realized by the Active intellect its participation in the act of prophecy is complete; the prophets actualized intellect now takes control of the prophetic process and shares in its abstract knowledge.

Maimonides' definition of Mosaic prophecy in the *Guide*, on the other hand, provides the key to understanding all prophecy. The key is the role of the imaginative faculty in prophecy, since it provides the only

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ *Guide* II, 38.

distinction between Mosaic and ordinary prophecy. As he says in his *Guide*,

You will perhaps raise an objection against me, saying: You have counted among the degrees of prophecy one where the prophet hears speech from God addressing him, as, for example Isaiah and Micaiah. Yet how can this be when our fundamental principle is that every prophet heard speech only through the medium of an angel, except Moses, of whom it is said, "with him do I speak mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8)? Know that it is in fact so, and the intermediary here is the imaginative faculty; for he only hears God speaking to him in a prophetic dream, whereas Moses (heard Him) "from above the arc cover, from between the two cherubim" (Exod. 25:22) without making use of the imaginative faculty. We have already explained in the *Mishneh Torah* the differentia of that kind of prophecy, and we have explained the meaning of "with him do I speak mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8), and "as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Exod. 33:11, and other expressions.¹⁵

The imaginative faculty plays many functions in the mind of an ordinary prophet, and this faculty accounts for the four-fold distinction between ordinary prophets and Mosaic prophecy, which was contained in the *Mishneh Torah* and is enlightened in the *Guide*. Whereas the rational faculty is source of the pure abstract knowledge, the imaginative faculty is the source of our figurative imagery representations of this knowledge. While the Intelligences of the heavens above overflow because of their overabundance of their pure natural knowledge, which is their essence, our sub-lunar world is an imperfect reflection of that overflow or essence. The perfected imaginative faculty of a prophet produces in words and imagery literature, parables, fables, or imaginative representations of the abstract knowledge that the rational faculty shares with the Active

Intellect during prophecy. The prophet creates these imaginative representations to express the "truths" to the uninformed masses in an intelligible level. As Maimonides says in his *Guide* about the "truth" of Ezekiel's chariot ride, the prophet is merely expressing the "truth" of metaphysical cosmology to the uninformed masses in an acceptable manner to their native intellect and still share in the essence of its "truth."¹⁶

As alluded to earlier the imaginative faculty is also the source of the written or spoken word; it is the auditory or physical representation of all knowledge. The imagination gives all knowledge a place in time and space to live. Knowledge cannot remain within the realm of the rational faculty if it is to be shared with others, and this is the task of the prophet.

Lastly, the imaginative faculty also produces parables and fantasies for the mind of the prophet when his rational faculty cannot fully comprehend the abstract knowledge of the union. As can be seen in Maimonides' introduction to the *Guide*, he refers to the imaginative faculty. He says, "matter and habit" overtake him when the "lightening" of understanding ceases; it is the imaginative faculty which carries the prophet through the act of prophecy when he has reached the end of his ability to comprehend the abstract knowledge. An imaginary representation also serves the mind of the prophet when the prophet's

¹⁵ *Guide* II, 45.

rational faculty is unable to comprehend the content of the prophecy himself.

Now when we return to the four-fold distinction Maimonides made in his *Mishneh Torah*, and view the distinctions through the lens of the role of the imaginative faculty, our understanding of Mosaic prophecy and ordinary prophecy are greatly enhanced. Since we recall Maimonides' words in his *Guide* that the only distinction between Mosaic prophecy and ordinary prophecy is that Moses prophesied without the use of his imaginative faculty, this then becomes the essential difference between the two types of prophecy. Where the term prophet could not be used to compare the two groups before, it now can be when we consider the role of the imaginative faculty.

As we recall, ordinary prophets are not fully conscious during the prophecy, because their imaginative faculties are part of their prophetic experience. They must use their imaginations when prophesizing according to Maimonides' *Guide* and this creates an unconscious experience for the prophet. The angels now can be seen as self-induced fantasy in the mind of the prophet or a parable created in his imagination for the benefit of the masses. The fear that they feel is also rooted in the imaginative faculty; when the imaginative faculty is in use, recall that it can be necessary due to a deficiency in the human intellectual capabilities. If ordinary prophets could fully comprehend the

¹⁶ *Guide* III, 1-7.

abstract knowledge of the Active Intellect, then they would have no reason to be fearful of the pure abstract knowledge. Finally, the imagination is a corporeal faculty; we are human and our physical and emotional states have an effect on us and can effect the outcome of prophecy for the ordinary prophet.

Moses' prophecy, on the other hand, is deficient in none of these ways since his prophecy is not dependent on his imaginative faculty. His prophecy flows from the Active Intellect directly to his rational faculty. For Maimonides, Moses was the most perfected human being whose prophecy was of a different kind due to the perfection his intellectual ability; his rational faculty, alone, was able to fully comprehend the abstract knowledge of the Active Intellect. Without his imagination Moses was able to achieve a level of prophecy that was peaceful, unmediated, in full consciousness, and self-willed. His prophecy possesses a higher content, because it is of a higher kind; it is unimaginative.

Now that we have a better understanding of how the term prophet can be applied to both Moses and ordinary prophets, we will further investigate the phenomenon of Mosaic prophecy in its nature, style, and content.

According to Maimonides, prophecy is a natural event, as opposed to a supernatural event. God causes both; the natural event is caused by the general will of God that is always found working in nature.

However, the supernatural event is created by the special will of God, which interrupts the general will of God and supplants it with a miracle. Thus Israel is God's chosen people, because they are under the special will of God. Miracles fall under the class of special will, for when God enacts His special will on the world, it is a miracle. In II, 32 of his guide, Maimonides identifies three different opinions about prophecy: the plain meaning of Scripture, the view of the philosophers, and his correct view of Scripture. "It is not Maimonides intention, therefore, in his presentation of prophecy to conceal entirely his naturalistic position, but rather to obscure the grounds for concluding that it is essentially incompatible with rabbinic Judaism."¹⁷ This is the reason, apparently, miracles play a role in his 'correct' view of prophecy, but, as we shall see, on a more careful examination of this definition, miracles do not play any role in Maimonides' understanding of prophecy.

According to the plain meaning of Scripture, "God selects any person He pleases, inspires him with the spirit of Prophecy, and entrusts him with a mission. It makes no difference whether that person be wise or stupid, old or young; provided he be, to some extent, morally good."¹⁸ This definition of prophecy is a miraculous one; the prophet needs no training for his prophecy to occur or innate ability, because it is all in the hands of God to bring it about.

¹⁷ Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy*, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Guide II*, 32.

The next view is that held by the philosophers. They believe that "prophecy is a certain faculty of a man in a state of perfection, which can only be obtained by study...But if a person, perfect in his intellectual and moral faculties, and also perfect, as far as possible, in his imaginative faculty, prepares himself in the manner which will be described, he must become a prophet; for prophecy is a natural of man."¹⁹ Prophecy, therefore, must occur if all of the natural prerequisites and training are found according to the philosophical definition.

Maimonides, on the other hand, says that neither of these two views are correct, but that the view held by the philosophers is correct in all but one respect. He says, "For we believe that, even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually prophesy. It is in that case the will of God."²⁰ On the face of it, Maimonides' definition seems to indicate that prophecy will not, naturally, occur if God performs a miracle and withholds the natural event of prophecy. This definition seems to bridge the gap between the view the philosophers and of the literal meaning of prophecy found in the Bible; it allows for nature in the form of innate ability and proper training, and accounts for a miracle from God in the final outcome of prophecy. However, Maimonides' position about the acquisition of prophecy becomes less clear when we look at the examples he uses to strengthen his position.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

First he quotes the Talmud to strengthen his position that preparation, and then he quotes the Bible to show an example of God miraculously withholding prophecy from someone who was prepared. "That those who have prepared themselves may still be prevented from being prophets, may be inferred from the history of Baruch, the son of Nerijah; for he followed Jeremiah, who prepared and instructed him; and yet he hoped in vain for prophecy; 'I am weary with my sighing, and rest have I not found.' He was then told by Jeremiah, 'Thus saith the Lord, Thus shalt thou say to him, Thou seekest for thee great things, do not seek.' It may perhaps be assumed that prophecy is here described as a thing 'too great' for Baruch."²¹ This example is so important because of what it does not do, and not what it demonstrates. It does not show an example of God miraculously withholding prophecy from someone who was prepared and able to receive it. Instead, it shows that Baruch was not prepared or properly endowed to receive prophecy. It was "a thing to great for him" and not a miracle that he didn't receive prophecy in spite of his ability and training. Our conclusion must be that, perhaps, Maimonides' view of prophecy agrees with the view held by the philosophers on all accounts; prophecy is a natural event for the gifted and trained. Prophecy will naturally occur if all of the requirements are met.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Maimonides understanding of preparation consists of three kinds of perfection: mental perfection, perfection of the imagination, moral, and courageous perfection. Since perfection of these natural endowments is the only prerequisite for prophecy to occur, we need to have a clearer understanding of what Maimonides means by perfection of these causes of prophecy. He says,

A person must satisfy the following conditions before he can become a prophet: the substance of the brain must from the very beginning be in the most perfect condition as regards to purity of matter, composition of different parts, size and position; no part of his body of his body must suffer ill-health; he must in addition have studied and acquired wisdom, so that his rational faculty passes from a state of potentiality to that of actuality; his intellect must be as developed and perfect as human intellect can be; his passions pure and equally balanced; all his desires must aim at obtaining a knowledge of the hidden laws and the causes that are in force in the universe; his thoughts must be engaged in lofty matters; his attention directed to the knowledge of God, the consideration of His works, and such other things our belief ascribes to Him...A man who satisfies these conditions, whilst his fully developed imagination is in action, influenced by the Active Intelligence according to his mental training, such a person will undoubtedly perceive nothing but things very extraordinary and divine, and see nothing but God and His angels.²²

In addition to the perfection of the intellect, prophets must also have perfected moral and courageous faculties. It is these faculties which give the prophet the strength and character to prophesies. "It is the outcome of the emanation that forces the prophet to take an active role in leading others, and is an integral part of his perfection. For this reason, Maimonides maintains that the faculty of courage is

²² Ibid.

exceptionally strong among the prophets."²³ The faculty of courage allows the prophet to maintain his sanity in the wake of the union with the Active Intellect, and go out amongst the people with his prophecy in the face of danger.

As we see, prophecy is a natural event in the eyes of Maimonides, but what about Mosaic prophecy? Was his prophecy of a different kind or to such a degree that it appears as two different entities? For Mosaic prophecy to achieve this higher status in the Maimonidean tradition, he must have had a superior degree of preparation and endowment, because the natural essence of prophecy does not change with the prophecy of Moses. In fact, the higher degree of Moses' preparation strengthens the case for prophecy as a natural event; it is a natural causation that a higher degree of preparation will result in a higher degree of prophecy. For as regards to Mosaic prophecy Maimonides says, (The prophet) He rather should feel awe and refrain and hold back until he gradually elevates himself. It is in this sense that it is said, "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exod. 3:6). (Moses), peace be on him, was commended for this, and God, may he be exalted, let overflow upon him so much of His bounty and goodness that it became necessary to say of him: "And the figure of the Lord shall he look upon" (Num. 12:8)."²⁴ Moses' training was so thorough that the

²³ *History of Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Frank and Leaman. *Mose Maimonides*, Howard Kreisel, p. 266.

²⁴ *Guide II*, 45.

overflow he received was superior. It is a natural causation that a higher degree of potentiality and preparation will naturally result in a higher degree of prophecy.

Another example we have of the natural nature of Mosaic prophecy is the improvement it underwent in the Torah as seen by Maimonides: from the burning bush to Sinai his prophecy improved. "Moses himself was initiated into his prophetic mission by an angel: 'And the angel of the Lord appeared to him out of the midst of the fire' (Exod. 3:2)." In the beginning of Moses' prophecy it was at a lower level. As we read before, an angel is an imaginative representation of the Active Intellect in the mind of a prophet. While later in his prophecy, Moses was granted the superior "face to face" union with God, prophecy without the aid of the imaginative faculty.²⁵ Only in a natural event would we see natural improvement over time.

Furthermore, we have the incident of the wandering in the desert when Moses didn't prophesy at all. This too lends itself to a naturalistic understanding of Mosaic prophecy. Maimonides says,

You know...that prophetic revelation did not come to Moses, peace be on him, after the disastrous incident of the spies and until the whole generation of the desert perished, in the way that revelation used to come before, because seeing the enormity of their crime he suffered greatly because of this matter. This was so even though the imaginative faculty did not enter into his prophecy, peace be on him, as the intellect overflowed toward him without its intermediation.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid.

It is a natural event because it is effected by the physical and emotional stress Moses was under as he led his people through the desert. If Mosaic prophecy was a miracle, then it could not have been effected by either of these human conditions just as it would also not have progressed or needed the proper training to occur.

Although it is difficult to say what notion of the Mosaic prophetic experience Maimonides had in mind since we hold this to be one of the "secrets", but in our analysis of the *Guide*, we can arrive at a working definition. In reading the *Guide* we see that two types of intuition arrive at prophetic knowledge: gestalt and premise intuition.

Gestalt intuition is information that comes to the prophet through a flash. The knowledge apprehended by the prophet is reached when the knowledge the prophet already possesses is coalesced into a new prophetic revelation without the aid of discursive reasoning. There is an immediate apprehension of a conclusion of information the prophet already possesses. The prophet has reached a new conclusion through a flash of gestalt intuition. Maimonides says in his *Guide* that he arrived at a new understanding of book of Job through "something similar to prophetic revelation."²⁷ His interpretation of the Book of Job was "prophetic", because it was a flash of gestalt intuition he had. He didn't arrive at it through the normal paths of discursive reasoning, from the knowledge of past rabbinic interpretations, or by way of a hidden

²⁶ *Guide* II, 36.

teaching he had found, but he did arrive at one through a "flash." This new insight to the Book of Job was immediately revelatory for Maimonides; its source was unexplainable, but its essence was divine.

As for premise intuition, it is the original act of knowledge acquisition in prophecy. While gestalt intuition works on knowledge the prophet already has, premise intuition is new or original knowledge gained in the act of prophecy. This new knowledge is integrated into the mind of the prophet. It is the conjunction of these two forms of intuition, which form the quintessential act of prophecy for Maimonides.²⁸ As Maimonides says in the *Guide*, "Know that there undoubtedly come to the true prophets speculative perceptions (immediate cognition or intuitive cognition) that man by his speculation alone is unable to comprehend the premises from which what is known (to the prophets) necessarily follows."²⁹ Just as the imagination of the prophet imagines sense data that did not come from one of the senses, so too does knowledge of the prophet come from an external force other than the prophet's intellect or five senses. As Maimonides goes on to say, "How then can the imaginative faculty be perfected in so great a measure as to apprehend what does not come to it from the senses, without the rational faculty being affected in similar way as to apprehend without having

²⁷ *Guide* III, 22.

²⁸ Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides Concept of Mosaic Prophecy*. HUCA, Volume 40-41 (1969-1970), pp. 341-342.

²⁹ *Guide* II, 38.

apprehended by way of premises, inference, and reflection."³⁰ Gestalt and premise intuition takes place within the rational faculty of the prophet, but only premise intuition represents new knowledge for the prophet. "It is the prophets unique power of intuition, which enables him to grasp the truth more quickly and thus more comprehensively than others."³¹

So with Moses, all of his prophetic knowledge that he arrived at through premise and gestalt intuition took place without the aid of his imagination. It all took place within the rational faculty and was totally intellectual and abstract. However, the ordinary prophet uses the same intuitive devices, but does so with the aid of his imagination. Therefore, the ordinary prophet's knowledge obtained through gestalt and premise intuition is filtered through their imagination and not completely intellectual or abstract.

Now that we have looked at the nature and essence of Mosaic prophecy, we will attempt to gain a better understanding of the content of that prophecy. As we have already seen, Mosaic prophecy is of a different kind than ordinary prophecy. Mosaic prophecy was entirely rational; therefore, it consisted of scientific and metaphysical knowledge in its purest and most abstract form. As Maimonides says in the introduction to the *Guide*,

³⁰ Ibid.

Do not imagine that these most difficult problems can be thoroughly understood by any one of us. This is not the case. At times the truth shines so brilliantly that we perceive it as clear as day. Matter and habit then draw a veil over our perception, and we return to a darkness almost as dense as before. We are like those who, although beholding frequent flashes of lightning, still find themselves in the thickest darkness of the night. On some the lightning flashes in rapid succession, and they seem to be in perpetual light, and their night is as clear as day. This was the degree of prophetic excellence attained by (Moses) the greatest of the prophets to whom God said, "But as for thee, stand thou here by me" (Deut. 5:31), and of whom it is written "the skin of his face shone," etc. (Exod. 34:29).³²

What Moses knew of the "secrets" of the universe, Maimonides tells us we can never fully understand, but we do know that the content of Moses' prophecy was superior to that of any other prophet. It was as if he was always "standing in the light."

You should not think that these great secrets are fully and completely known to anyone among us. They are not. But sometimes truth flashes out to so that it is day, and then matter and habit in their various forms conceal it so that we find ourselves again in an obscure night, almost as we were at first. We are like someone in a very dark night over whom the lightning flashes time and time again. Among us there is one for whom the lightning flashes time and time again, so that he is always, as it were, in unceasing light. Thus night appears as day. That is the degree of the great one among the prophets, to whom it is said: But as for thee (Moses), stand here by Me.³³

Moses also had the highest degree of knowledge of God. In the Exodus account of the revelation at Sinai Moses requests two things of God; One to see God's face, and the other to see all of God's ways. Moses

³¹ Barry-Kogan, *What Can We Know*, CUA press, p. 129.

³² *Guide*, Introduction.

³³ *Ibid*.

is denied the first request, but granted the second. Of this Maimonides says,

Moses asked for knowledge of the (action) attributes...then he asked for the knowledge of God's essence in the words "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory" whereupon he received, respecting his first request...the following favorable reply, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee;" as regards the second request, however, he was told, "Thou can not see my face." The words "all my goodness" imply that God promised to show him the whole creation...I mean to imply that God promised to make him comprehend the nature of all things, their relation to each other, and the way they are governed by God both in reference to the universe as a whole and to each creature in particular.³⁴

In this same section of the Guide, we learn that Maimonides' opinion about why Moses requested such intimate knowledge about God. According to Maimonides, Moses desired such knowledge of the divine attributes for the proper government of the people. As he says, "This was Moses' ultimate object in his demand, the conclusion of what he says being: *That I may know Thee, to the end that I may find grace in Thy sight and consider that this nation is Thy people* – that is, a people for the government of which I need to perform actions that I must seek to make similar to Thy actions in governing them."³⁵ The divine Law of Moses is in accord with the divine Law of nature, and, therefore, the law's intent is for the well-being of the people's body and soul. "The former goal lies in the attainment of social harmony by means of laws preventing people

³⁴ Guide I, 54.

from harming each other, and by training them in the moral virtues. The latter, and more noble, goal lies in inculcating correct opinions to all members of society, each in accordance with his or her respective capacity."³⁶ Moses' perfection is translated to a perfect legislative system; only a perfected human being can devise a perfect legislative system. Just as the prophets receive an overflow, so do they overflow with parables, metaphors, and laws, as is the nature of superior and generous individuals.

And in another passage in the *Guide*, Maimonides points out the same distinction again, that Moses was limited to learning the action attributes of God; those actions in the universe that have God as their "ground of being." "The Lord withheld from Moses that perception which is termed "the sight of the face" and substituted for it another gift, the knowledge of the acts attributed to God."³⁷ All of this lends itself to Maimonides' theology of negative attributes.

We can never hope to have any knowledge of God, only his attributed actions in nature, God is other than any thing in this universe. According to Maimonides, we can only improve upon our knowledge of the divine through a process of elimination; anything in this universe is what God is not. The more we learn, through the sciences and metaphysics, the more we can negate as an aspect of the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kriesel, pp.27-28

³⁷ *Guide* I, 21.

divine and come closer to a true understanding of God. Moses, on the other hand, was granted that most perfect knowledge of the natural universe, and, therefore, had the most perfected knowledge of God through his causal knowledge of the universe. "Thus the Sinaitic revelation for Moses consisted of the negative theology and the theology of action attributes."³⁸ In each passage Maimonides has maintained the use of multiple significance while revealing the hidden meaning of Scripture.

The Sinaitic experience is a unique event. As we have already mentioned, prophecy is a natural event; each person experiences what is appropriate to his innate ability and level of training; Sinai is no different since it too was a natural event for Maim. As he says in the *Guide*,

As for the Gathering at Mount Sinai, though through a miracle all the people saw the great fire and heard the frightening and terrifying noises, only those who were fit for it achieved the rank of prophecy, and even those in various degrees. Do you not see that He says; "Come up unto the Lord, thou Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel?" (Exod. 24:1). He...had the highest rank, as He said: "And Moses alone shall come near unto the Lord, but they shall not come near. Aaron was below him; Nadab and Abihu below Aaron; the seventy elders below Nadab and Abihu; and the other people below the latter according to their degrees of perfection."³⁹

Furthermore, Sinai was also the product of Moses' imagination, and, therefore, it is also considered a "sub-prophetic"⁴⁰ experience. Let

³⁸ Reines, *Maimonides' Concept of Mosaic Prophecy*, p.351.

³⁹ *Guide* I, 33

⁴⁰ Reines, *Maimonides' Concept of Mosaic Prophecy*, p. 349.

us recall that prophecy for Moses at this late stage of development is totally a product of his imaginative faculty. Yet, the Sinaitic revelation is also the work of the imagination of Moses; it contains images and parables for the masses. Because the knowledge Moses received in prophecy was entirely abstract, pure, and rational it does not contain any particulars, that is a product of the imagination. It is deemed sub-prophetic since its essence is the knowledge of Moses' rational faculty, but his imagination was not an element of the prophetic event. Only Moses knows the true essence of the revelation at Sinai, which means this revelation has a unique relationship to prophecy. However, the revelation all of Israel received at Sinai was not prophetic, but a reproduction that occurred outside of prophecy of the pure abstract rational knowledge Moses received during prophecy.

According to Maimonides, the purpose of this request by Moses and the product of his revelation were to create a legislative system for the good governance of society.⁴¹ The purpose of the Law of Moses was to create the best possible representation of the universal providence of the Active Intellect in a human society. In this way, our Law could have as its essence the divine law of nature. As Maimonides says,

It has already been explained that man is naturally a social being, that by virtue of his nature he seeks to form communities...But the well-being of society demands that there should be a leader able to regulate the actions of man; he must complete every shortcoming,

⁴¹ *Guide I*, 54.

remove every excess, and prescribe for the conduct of all, so that the natural variety should be counterbalanced by the uniformity of legislation, and the order of society be well established. I therefore maintain that the Law, although it is not natural, enters in certain respects, into the category of the natural. It being the will of God that our race should exist and be permanently established, He, in His wisdom, gave it such properties that men can acquire the capacity of ruling others. Some persons are therefore inspired with theories of legislation, such as prophets and lawgivers...I only wish to instruct you about such laws which are proclaimed as prophetic...You will...find laws which, in all their rules, aim...at the soundness of the... body and also the soundness of belief, to create first correct notions of God, and of angels, and then to lead the people, by instruction and education, to an accurate knowledge of the universe: this guidance comes from God; these laws are divine.⁴²

As we see, the Law of Moses has two functions for Maimonides. Firstly, to teach true theological beliefs to the masses, and, secondly, to establish a moral and just society, however the Torah is not a product of Moses' prophecy. It is merely the product of a supreme prophet.

The giving of the Torah in the form we have it must be reckoned as foremost among these accidental features of the Mosaic prophecy. This because the Torah as we have it is an imaginative, narrative work, full of parables, and riddles in anthropomorphic language which constantly requires interpretation. The conclusion to which we are forced to accept is that Maimonides believes the Torah as we have it is the result of Moses' religious imagination, his interpretation of the purely intellectual experience which he underwent but could not describe in its own terms, it being indescribable in the language of man. It is this indescribable experience, however, which directs Moses' imagination to choose that discourse which is most appropriate and true to it. The discourse itself cannot do more than persuade one of its efficacy; the appropriateness of its symbols and the utility of its laws are matters for which no decisive proofs can be offered. The proof for

⁴² *Guide II*, 40.

the veracity of Scripture and for Mosaic prophecy lies outside the text and tale as told.⁴³

This is precisely why the Torah has been described as sub-prophetic. The Torah is not a product of Mosaic prophecy but it bears a close relationship to it; the Torah could not exist without the former.

In the text of the Torah a distinction is made between the first two commandments and the last eight. The first two were 'heard' by the entire Israelite community, whereas the final eight were apprehended by Moses alone. Firstly, we realize that appending characteristics such as 'voice' and 'speech' to God are anthropomorphic and, therefore, merely parables to the true meaning of the Torah. So what does it mean to say the Israelites 'heard' God? As has already been demonstrated, people apprehended what was appropriate to their level of understanding. Moses alone was able to 'hear' God; he alone was able to comprehend the 'voice' in terms of an intelligible communication owing to his acquired intellect and his union with the active intellect without the aid of his imagination. All others were left to their varying degrees of comprehension; the 'voice' the Israelites heard was nothing more than a blast from heaven. The Ten Commandments supply no validity of divine authorship, they are, as Maimonides says, demonstrateable by human speculation; we did not need prophecy to demonstrate the validity of the laws of the Ten Commandments, because our own reason could have

⁴³ Reines, *Maimonides' Concept of Mosaic Prophecy*, p. 350.

demonstrated them. However, it is the phenomenon of the 'voice' which is 'seen' (Exod. 20:15) which supplies this authority, and not its apprehension as a 'voice' by everyone present. The essential truth of the experience at Sinai is that God exists and His will is emanated upon the world. It is the prophecy of Moses who translates these universal truths in intelligible, figurative, and symbolic particular commandments.

The revelation at Sinai is the essential act of prophecy for Judaism; we learn through our rabbinical tradition that we too were there as the covenant was established. For Maimonides, we see that Sinai plays a significant role in his theology; it is the essence of God on earth through a legislative system, which transmits universal truths to the masses. Mosaic prophecy and the revelation at Sinai represent the "ground of being" for the Jewish people just as God is the "ground of being" for the entire universe.

MARTIN BUBER

Martin Buber's book I and Thou has been one of the most influential works of a philosopher in the twentieth century. Although Buber is a member of the Jewish community and sought to strengthen the bonds of Jews to the "prophetic faith," his philosophy of dialogue has reached a wider audience than merely the Jewish literary world. The encounter of dialogue, which is contained in the book I and Thou, is not limited to one particular religious community, and Martin Buber has influenced countless people to begin their quest for relationship within the parameters of a meeting of an I with a Thou.

I and Thou reads like a poem; it is not a philosophical treatise in its strictest sense. In fact, "To the reader who finds the meaning obscure at a first reading we may say that *I and Thou* is indeed a poem. Hence it must be read more than once, and its total effect allowed to work on the mind; the obscurities of one part will then be illuminated by the brightness of another part. For the argument is not as it were horizontal, but spiral; it mounts, and gathers within itself the aphoristic and pregnant utterances of the earlier part."⁴⁴ I and Thou is an attempt, in itself, to create a dialogue of relation with the reader.

In the philosophy of Martin Buber's I and Thou the world of relationships is divided into two different primary word structures: the

word I-It and the word I-Thou. In these two primary words of dialogue man expresses his relationship to the world around him and, ultimately, to himself.

The primary words are spoken as a conjunction of words because they express a relationship: I to my Other. The word I, according to Buber, is never said in isolation; it is always part of a relationship to something outside oneself since each primary word contains a reference to the Other and to the self. The spoken Thou or It always contains the unspoken I. As Buber says,

There is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It.

When a man says I he refers to one or other of these. The I to which he refers is present when he says I. Further, when he says Thou or It, the I of one of the two primary words is present. The existence of I and the speaking of I are one and the same thing.

When a primary word is spoken the speaker enters the word and takes his stand in it.⁴⁵

The primary words are words of dialogue, and the emphasis is not on either side of the word pair but on the relationship that exists between the two. The emphasis of the dialogue lies in the space between them, in the region of the dialogue. As Buber says, "Word is thus the sphere of the between of the primary relatedness binding man to the Other. It is the region of the Spirit grounding man and yet capable of being articulated according to the way man takes his stand in it. Out of

⁴⁴ *I and Thou*, Second Edition by Martin Buber, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, p. xi.

this stand the grammatical expressions arise."⁴⁶ A primary word is said not out of the self or the Other but out of the relationship between them; the two are indivisible in relationship.

As Buber says, the primary words are not spoken only between two humans, and sometimes it isn't even a spoken word. The primary words are said between the three different spheres of relationships that a human can have a relationship in.

The spheres in which the world of relation arises are three. First, our life with nature. There the relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech. Creatures live and move over against us, but cannot come to us, and when we address them as Thou, our words cling to the threshold of speech. Second, our life with men. There the relation is open and in the form of speech. We can give and accept the Thou. Third, our life with spiritual beings. There the relation is clouded, yet it discloses itself; it does not use speech, yet begets it...We speak the primary word with our being, though we cannot utter Thou with our lips.⁴⁷

A primary word does not have to be spoken by means of our vocal tracts to be elicited. It is not just in the world of language that a primary word is spoken, but in the world of relation, which is beyond sight and sound. As is quoted above, only in the sphere of humans is the language of dialogue able to be presented in the real speech of mankind.

When a man speaks the primary word I-It, he is in the world of time and space. The primary word I-It denotes the world of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *Martin Buber's Ontology*, Robert E. Wood, p. 38.

⁴⁷ *I and Thou*, p. 6.

objectification, and the world of use. The Other is not seen as the thing as it really is⁴⁸, but as the Other through me, used by me, and objectified by me, and not over against me as it really exists.

In the world of I-It there is only one center of consciousness, that of the I. The Other has become an object to the self; it is seen as an object of usefulness for me and through me. The scale of relationship is tipped toward the side of the self; there is no meeting of the minds, but one mind seeing and using an object in some respect.

There also is no present time in the world of I-It, there is only the past. The relationship has been implanted into the mind of the self and the Other has been organized and classified into an It, and this process can never take place in the present only in the past. Once an object has been classified it automatically exists in the past.

The I of the primary word I-It, that is, the I faced by no Thou, but surrounded by a multitude of "contents," has no present, only the past. Put in another way, in so far as man rests satisfied with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no present content. He has nothing but objects. But objects subsist in time that has been.

The present is not fugitive and transient, but continually present and enduring. The object is not duration, but cessation, suspension, a breaking off and cutting clear and hardening, absence of relation and of present being.

True beings are lived in the present, the life of objects is in the past.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ This is a reference to the Kantian conjectural notion of the presence of the object as it really is without any subjectivity of external influences affecting the nature of the object.

⁴⁹ *I and Thou*, pp. 12-13.

By contrast, the primary word I-Thou confirms the Other in the present as it really is; this is the world of meeting and not use. There are two centers of consciousness present in the relationship between the I and the Thou, and neither one can become the object of the other if the primary word I-Thou is spoken. The center of the relationship does not lie on either side of the between of the relation, but in the center of the between. When Thou is spoken, there is no reflective categorizing, separating, or dividing; one encounters the incomparable Thou of the present as it really is not through the self but over and against the self.

For the primary word I-Thou to be spoken there must be a meeting between two distinguishable selves. The relationship of dialogue occurs when both "will and grace" meet. I must "will" the relationship, but "grace" or luck must also be present. This notion of "will and grace" is central to the formulation of an I-Thou relation, but it is not clearly defined by Buber. Like much of Buber's theology of relation it is left solely to the individual who experiences such a relation to fathom its true essence. "Will and grace" may be essential to the I-Thou relation, but they are still mysteries that are undefined. The primary word I-Thou cannot be spoken unless I "will" it and "grace" allows it to occur, yet we have no clear understanding of how "grace" operates.

If we look at the example of the tree Buber uses to illustrate the differences in the two primary words, we see how these two modes of dialogue differ in their relationships to the self and Other. Buber

demonstrates the various ways in which a tree can enter an I-It relationship with a human. It can enter into the relation as an artist, as a biologist, as a chemist, and as a mathematician, however in all of these different ways one can "consider" a tree, the tree is still an object of use, and they represent the primary word I-It. "In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution."⁵⁰ No matter how we come to see a tree if we classify it in some way it is an object of my use. Yet,

It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer It. I have been seized by the power of exclusiveness.

To effect this it is not necessary for me to give up any of the ways in which I consider the tree. There is nothing from which I would have to turn my eyes away in order to see, and no knowledge that I would have to forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and type, law and number, indivisibly united in this event. Everything belonging to the tree is in this: its form and structure, its colors and chemical composition, its intercourse with the elements and with the stars, are all present in a single whole.⁵¹

The I-Thou relationship occurs not when we put off all of the various forms of classification, but when we unite all objectification into a single whole and meet the Other through a dialogue as it really is. It is not a different tree than the one of the world of I-It, but a tree that takes into account all of the possible ways a tree can be "considered" into a single whole. Furthermore,

When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every It is bounded

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

by others; It exists only through being bounded by others. But when Thou is spoken, there is no thing. Thou has no bounds. When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation.⁵²

However, although there is relation in the spoken primary word I-Thou, the relation is not identical to the mystical union of two objects or the mystical union of a human and the divine. In the mystical experience there is either a loss of self or the Other during the union; the two join to become one in some way. But as was previously stated, the I-Thou relationship consists of two independent entities that dialogue in the between of the meeting. In the between of the I-Thou relationship, there exists two wholly different objects: the self and the Other, and both become wholly whole through the dialogue.

The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting.⁵³

Furthermore, every finite Thou is destined to become an It. In the world of mankind it is our response to the I-Thou relation which binds the Thou into the world of It. The world of It is man's source of knowledge and lives in time and space; man is bound to the realm of time and space, the world of It. The world of I-It is necessary and useful to the world of mankind.

⁵² Ibid., p.4.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 11.

Moreover, just as the object of the relationship is not the same in either of the two primary words, neither is the spoken I. While we are speaking of the same I, there is a difference in the two I's of the two primary words.

In the I-It relationship otherness is always manifest as other-for-me, but since otherness is not completely manifest as it really is, then neither is the self. Therefore, "The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being. The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being."⁵⁴ In the combined primary words, all awareness is a manifestation of otherness. In addition, the sense of self is also manifest in the relationship. There is no I without a spoken It or a spoken Thou, and there is no whole self unless the primary word I-Thou is spoken.

This brings us to our main concern, namely God. For Buber, the life of dialogue is the road one must take to find God in their lives. He says,

The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou. Every particular Thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou; by means of every particular Thou the primary word addresses the eternal Thou. Through this mediation of the Thou of all beings fulfillment, and non-fulfillment, of relations comes to them: the inborn Thou is realized in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the Thou that by its nature cannot become It.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

When man steps into the I-Thou relation, the spirit of the between is a reference to the eternal. Only in response to our full unique self, which can be achieved only in the between of the spoken primary word I-Thou, can an individual hope to establish a relationship with God, because "in every relation the primary word addresses the eternal Thou." God is present in all true dialogical I-Thou relations; God makes the I-Thou relation possible. God is the ultimate source of relation. Yet, God is the one Thou who can never become an it.

God will always be present to us, and although as humans we make God into a sense object for our use through the language of man, God can never really be experienced in such a manner. God cannot be "inferred or sought" according to Buber. Yet, we cannot hope to come into a relation with the Eternal Thou, God, without a proper amount of preparation. Since each meeting of a finite Thou is a glimpse into the Eternal Thou, the former is the necessary preparation to the latter relationship to occur. As Buber says, "Hence, only through meeting can one gain one's own unity; only one who meets the finite Thou has the self-unity requisite for meeting the Eternal Thou."⁵⁶ Or as he says in Between Man and Man, "Through many meetings with the finite Thou's it can come to pass that one begins to recognize a single Voice that speaks to us through many occurrences."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁷ *Between Man and Man*, Martin Buber, p. 15.

This process of preparation or priming through meeting finite Thou's to create a dialogue with the Eternal Thou is necessary, because the world is the created universe, and, as such, every finite Thou is a piece of that created universe. Being drawn into the between of an I-Thou relationship allows man to glimpse the Eternal, if only for a moment since all finite Thou's are destined to return to the world of I-It. However, man must also learn to live in the present if he is to dialogue with the Eternal Thou.

To go out to the meeting with the eternal Thou, a man must have become a whole being, one who does not intervene in the world and one whom no separate and partial action stirs. To go out to this meeting he need not lay aside the world of sense as though it were illusory or go beyond sense-experience... Only the barrier of separation must be destroyed, and this cannot be due through any formula, percept, or spiritual exercise. The one thing that matters is full acceptance of the present... But this does not mean giving up the I, as mystical writings usually suppose, for the I is as essential to this as to every relation. What must be given up is the self-asserting instinct that makes a man flee to the possessing of things before the unreliable, perilous world of relation.⁵⁸

In the world of the primary word I-It, objects become Other in their separateness and exclusiveness to others, but "in the relation with God, unconditioned exclusiveness and unconditional inclusiveness are one."⁵⁹ This is because God is wholly other and God is closer to any thing as it really is than they are to themselves, and God is the only Thou that can never become an it.

The eternal Thou can by its nature not become an It; for by its nature it cannot be established in measure and bounds, not even

⁵⁸ Martin Buber *The Life of Dialogue*, Maurice Friedman, p. 70.

⁵⁹ *I and Thou*, p. 78.

in the measure of the immeasurable, or the bounds of the boundless being; for by its nature it cannot be understood as a sum of qualities, not even as an infinite sum of qualities raised to a transcendental level; for it can be found neither in nor out of the world; for it cannot be experienced, or thought; for we miss Him, Him who is, if we say "I believe that He is" – "He" is also a metaphor, but "Thou" is not.⁶⁰

For Buber God can only be addressed and not expressed. We address God as the Eternal Thou, as the supreme partner of dialogue. It is the ultimate and highest form of dialogue mankind can hope to achieve. Again, it is not a mystical union with the divine, but the highest form of relationship. Buber uses the relationship of Jesus and God to express this highest and purest form. In this relationship, as Buber understands it, the sense of fullness of the self is not in the two becoming one, but in a transcendence that goes beyond the self and the Other in the between of the two.

So, is there any content to the revelation one receives in the philosophy of Martin Buber? He says,

What is the eternal, primal phenomenon, present here and now, of that which we term revelation? It is the phenomenon that a man does not pass, from the moment of the supreme meeting, the same being as he entered into it. The moment of meeting is not an 'experience' that stirs in the receptive soul and grows to perfect blessedness; rather, in that moment something happens to the man. At times it is like a light breath, at times like a wrestling-bout, but always – it happens. The man who emerges from the act of pure revelation that so involves his being has now in his being something more that has grown in him, of which he did not know before and whose origin he is not rightly able to indicate. However the source of this new thing is classified in scientific orientation to the world, with its authorized efforts to establish an unbroken

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

causality, we, whose concern is real consideration of the real, cannot have our purpose served with subconsciousness or any other apparatus of the soul. The reality is that we receive what we did not hitherto have, and receive it in such a way that we know it has been given to us.

Man receives, and he receives not a specific "content" but a Presence, a Presence as power. This Presence and this power includes three things, undivided, yet in such a way that we may consider them separately. First, there is the whole fullness of real mutual action, of being raised and bound up in relation...Secondly, there is the inexpressible confirmation of meaning. Meaning is assured. Nothing can any longer be meaningless. The question about the meaning of life is no longer there...Thirdly, this meaning is not that of "another life," but that this life is ours, not one of a world "yonder" but that this world of ours, and it desires its confirmation in this life and in relation with this world. This meaning can be received, but not experienced; it cannot be experienced but it can be done, and this is its purpose with us.⁶¹

This revelation cannot be transmitted and made into intelligible knowledge for others. The meaning of the revelation is left to the singleness of the being that received the Presence as power. The true revelation takes place within the between of dialogue and there it remains. The revelatory experience is neither knowledge nor experience, but it is a dialogue that is deemed the "supreme meeting." Some may argue that the content is the experience of the "Presence as a power," but how can we denote as content that which is indescribable. What prophetic content is there in experiencing a "Presence as a power?"

Buber is not unaware of the prophetic religious experience, but the experience is wholly different from that of the Biblical text. For Buber revelation has no content other than the experience of a "Presence as a

power." Buber's revelation is an encounter with God's presence and not information about God's essence. It is a theology of dialogue and not of specific content; there are no words, images, or parables in the revelation of a "Presence as a power."

God according to Buber revealed Himself to Moses and all other prophets, and God continues to reveal Himself to us. It is through "will and grace" that we create any dialogue. Those who are attentive to the Presence in the world of finite Thou's and find "grace" may come into a relation with the divine. In every sphere of relationship we have the ability to "glimpse the Eternal"; each time we are in the I-Thou relation we address the Eternal. "When I turn toward another human being in openness I receive the world in him. When the other turns and faces me in the fullness of his existence, he brings the 'radiance of eternity' to me."⁶²

Revelation in Judaism, therefore, has no fixed "midpoint" for Buber since that would lessen the power of the dialogue in the present. The ability to create a dialogue did not begin or end at Sinai; it continues to be present for us when we have an I-Eternal-Thou relation.

While he does believe in a communal revelation that took place at Sinai, it is not the central to Judaism for Buber. Although Sinai does provide a unique example of communal dialogue with God, God addresses Israel as the Thou and God is the I; yet, Buber does not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

identify the "midpoint" of revelation as Sinai. This notion completely contradicts the biblical text. He says,

The Jewish Bible does not set a past event as a midpoint between origin and goal. It interposes a movable, circling midpoint which cannot be pinned to any set time, for it is the moment when I, the reader, the hearer, the man, catch through the words of the Bible the voice which from the earliest beginnings has been speaking in the direction of the goal. The midpoint is this mortal and yet immortal moment of mine. Creation is the origin, redemption the goal. But revelation is not a fixed dated point poised between the two. The revelation at Sinai is not this midpoint itself, but the perceiving of it, and as such is possible at any time.⁶³

Revelation is a process that continues. True, "the teaching of Judaism comes from Sinai; it is Moses' teaching. But the soul of Judaism is pre-Sinaitic...the soul itself is not the law."⁶⁴ As Buber says, "he who enters on the absolute relation (relation with the eternal Thou)⁶⁵ is concerned with nothing isolated any more, neither things nor beings, neither earth nor heaven; but everything is gathered up in the relation. For to step into pure relation is not to disregard everything but to see everything in the Thou, not to renounce the world but to establish it on its true basis."⁶⁶ Our search for God is not found outside this world but in it, and once this is accomplished it does not lead man to abandon the world but to enter into a more profound relation with it. First we are summoned to meet the eternal Thou, then we are sent into the world of man to continue the dialogue. "Meeting with God does not

⁶² Martin Buber *Prophet of Religious Secularism*, Donald J. Moore, p. 120.

⁶³ Buber, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," *Israel and the World*, p.94.

⁶⁴ Buber, "The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul," *Israel and the World*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ Parenthesis added for emphasis.

come to man in order that he may concern himself with God, but in order that he may confirm that there is meaning in the world. All revelation is a summons and a sending."⁶⁷ Yet, if there is no content in the revelation of Buber, then what can be the content of the "summons and sending?" Moreover, since the experience is entirely unique to the individual, then to whom and for what is he summoned and sent?

⁶⁶ *I and Thou*, pp. 78-79.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.115.

A COMPARISON

On first glance the prophetic systems of Moses Maimonides and Martin Buber do not seem to resemble one another. Maimonides is a rational thinker schooled in Neo-Platonic Aristotelianism, and Buber is a modern philosopher whose religious view reflects existentialism. One values the rational intellect as a means of divine insights, and the other values the life of dialogue. So, what could these two religious philosophers have in common? What binds them together other than their allegiance to Judaism? What similarities do we see in their concepts of prophecy? Are they bound to the same Judaism?

To answer these questions, it must be acknowledged that both Buber and Maimonides wrote works to combine their philosophical and religious beliefs. Neither the Guide of the Perplexed nor I and Thou are straightforward philosophical treatises, yet both contain the philosophy of the author presented in a unique style. While their methods of undertaking such a task are different, this is due to their respective philosophical belief systems.

For example, Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed is written in disguise for many reasons. In mirror-imaging the Torah, The Guide of the Perplexed reflects Maimonides outlook on the duality of Torah. He implies that there is a plain and a hidden meaning to each text. It was Maimonides' desire in the Guide of the perplexed to conceal from the

uneducated masses the hidden truths the *Guide* contains. This cloaking prevents unrest among the masses with explicit statements about the nature of his true beliefs. Obscurity also serves to conceal his secret teachings from his adversaries and those who guarded the rabbinic tradition. By writing in this manner Maimonides in the Guide of the Perplexed paralleled his understanding of the Torah.

Similarly, Buber wrote I and Thou. I and thou was attuned to his philosophical belief system. However, I and Thou is not written in as a straightforward manner like the *Guide*. It is written in the language of dialogue and not multiple significance. I and Thou has often been described as a poem, and this is because Buber wrote it in the manner of his philosophical system. Yet, in both Buber and Maimonides, and despite the fact that Buber is more direct in his prose, the reader needs to be attentive to grasp the full content of the written word. The Guide of the Perplexed requires the reader to decipher its scattering of secret teachings. For I and Thou the reader is required to be sensitive to the nature of the dialogue, and analytical enough to uncover the scattered subjects of Buber.

Unlike Maimonides, Buber wrote I and Thou as a dialogue. He chose a dialogue format because it was the basis for his philosophy; namely, that all meaning is relation or dialogue. One meets the Other in the between of the dialogue. This is the crucial element in Buber's attempt to commune with the reader. On the other hand, for

Maimonides all meaning is found on two levels, and the true meaning is hidden. Therefore, Maimonides hid the true essence of the *Guide*.

Furthermore, Maimonides values the intellect above all else. The *Guide* is not only an expression of his intellect as a mastery of scattering, omission, and use of language, but it also, if properly understood, reaches the mind of the reader through the reader's rational intellect. In short to grasp the *Guide* one has to be an attentive reader; Maimonides only gives us the "chapter headings." Buber, on the other hand, emphasizes interaction. He tries to create a dialogue with the reader where both "will and grace meet." Buber's reader must be open to the dialogue if he is to grasp the I-Thou relation contained within the pages of his work I and Thou.

Moreover, in the context of these two works Maimonides and Buber express very different views of religion and prophecy. Maimonides' religion and prophecy is the outcome of an intellectual content. There is no meeting that takes place between the prophet and God or any direct relation between the prophet's prophecy and the intellectual essence of God. The prophet and God share the same perfect abstract information, but the prophet receives this knowledge from the Active Intellect and not God. Buber, on the other hand, bases his philosophy of religion and prophecy solely on a life of dialogue. While there is no intellectual content in prophecy, there is a direct relation between the prophet and

God. The experience is wholly a relationship between the prophet and the divine, yet it is void of any real content.

The underpinnings of Buber's philosophy are embodied in a twofold structure of relationships: the world of the primary word "I-It" and the world of the primary word "I-Thou." Again, one world is the world of time and space, the world of I-It, and one is the world beyond time and space, the world of I-Thou and the present. It is the prophetic experience when one crosses the world of I-It into the realm of I-Thou and glimpses the Eternal. Oddly, Buber does not tell us what this means. In addition, Buber claims that one cannot remain in the realm of I-Thou for all finite Thou's are destined to become Its; this is due to the nature of man and the purpose of the relation. There is the notion of "summons and sending" in the thought of Buber's I-Thou relation. However, Buber does the question where does the message, and what is the content of the message if the I-Thou encounter is ineffable.

Maimonides, on the other hand bases his prophetic system solely on intellectual knowledge. The prophet's mind leaves the world of time and space of our sub-lunar world and shares in the perfect abstract knowledge with the Active Intellect. While the prophet has no relation to God, he does have a prophecy that is full of transmittable content.

More importantly, the divine is indescribable by both authors. For Maimonides God is totally unknowable; the best we can hope for is to "negatively" define what God is not through the theory of negative

attributes. The more we learn about the universe the more we learn to distinguish what God is not, and, therefore, we come closer to a truthful theology.

For Buber, God is the Eternal Thou that can never become an It. We can glimpse the Eternal through the finite world, but this is just a glimpse; we have no direct information about the divine. This is contrary to Maimonides where there is no possible way to experience the divine. For Maimonides there is absolutely no possible way to create a relation between the divine and man. Buber further suggests that humans can "meet" the "Eternal Thou" in the dialogue of relation, but they would have no way of sharing any information about that meeting.

Despite these differences, both Martin Buber and Moses Maimonides stress the importance of preparation as a necessary component for a prophetic experience to occur. For Maimonides the various aspects of the prophet's intellect must be sufficiently prepared through the study of metaphysics and science before he can achieve prophecy. By doing this, he transforms his hylic intellect into an actualized intellect, and, thus, achieves the level of prophecy. In the case of Buber, the prophet is someone who has prepared himself to meet the eternal Thou through meeting many finite Thou's. He must become familiar with the process of creating an I-Thou relation for prophecy to occur; he cannot meet the eternal Thou without practice; it leads him to the Eternal Thou.

However, for Maimonides there is something internal within the prophet that enables him to achieve prophecy; one must be born with the natural intellect, have it actualised, have a perfected imaginative faculty, and have moral perfection for prophecy to occur. Buber, in the meanwhile, describes no such innate ability as a necessary requirement for prophecy. While both speak about preparation, only Maimonides speaks about fitness for prophecy. According to Buber, anyone can have an I-Eternal-Thou relation.

Yet, for Maimonides we have described prophecy as a natural event if the prerequisites and training are present. There is no action taken by the Active Intellect in the act of prophecy; the overflow comes naturally. Buber, on the other hand, stresses the role of both parties as a necessary component of dialogue. "Will and grace" must meet for the I-Thou relation to occur. There is movement from the prophet towards the divine that is the prophet's will, but there is also the role of the divine, the role of grace. This is not a natural phenomenon if we understand a natural phenomenon as having no part of divine action necessary to bring it about.

In addition to the role of the divine in the act of prophecy being different, the role of Sinai and, therefore, Moses is also different in their respective philosophical systems. For Maimonides, Moses is the ultimate prophet whose prophecy consisted of concepts and laws unique in its quality and content. Buber sees no difference in the quality in any

dialogue with the Eternal Thou. Each person experiences a unique event. Buber has described the experience at Sinai as a communal dialogue where each person present witnesses the Presence as a power, which is quite different to the various degrees of apprehension that Maimonides describes for the same event.

For Maimonides Sinai remains central to his philosophy; it is the cornerstone of the negative theology. He may dismiss the biblical account as untrue, but he does not dismiss its efficacy for the masses. Buber completely disregards the biblical account as a central theme in his philosophy.

While a "Presence as a power" was witnessed at Sinai, it does not play a central role in Buber's philosophy. Maimonides and Buber relate to Moses on different levels. Moses is not mentioned in I and Thou. In fact, it is Jesus who best exemplifies the I-Eternal-Thou relation for Buber. Perhaps, we could read into Buber's I-Thou relation and view Moses in a similar light, but that would be assigning something to Buber's philosophy that he didn't intend. Yet, for Moses Maimonides Moses remains the supreme prophet. Moses gains the highest form of intellectual development a human can attain for Maimonides. The Bible and its message retain a higher degree of relevance for Maimonides, and while we could argue that this is caused by their respective time periods, the fact remains that Maimonides' philosophy maintains a stronger commitment to Judaism than the philosophy of Buber.

CONCLUSION

The prophetic experience, as described by Maimonides and Buber, respectively, is singular; each philosophy is laden with its own ideology and discourse. Indeed, it appears to be impossible to integrate the two philosophies. However, a careful study of these two ideologies has led me to believe that it is both possible and necessary to create an alternate philosophy using strands of each.

As a Reform Jew living in the modern world, both of these philosophies are necessary to my being. To fully understand all that it is to be a Jew, one must understand the prophetic processes that encompass the best aspects of both Moses Maimonides and Martin Buber. Namely, one must strive to meet the divine through the perfection of one's innate intellectual abilities and also seek the divine through a life of dialogue.

As a Reform rabbi, I have been educated under the banner of "higher criticism." It is the study of the Bible in a scientific and critical manner which sets us apart from our co-religionists. Indeed, knowledge and understanding remain one of the hallmarks of our movement to this day. Yet, our tradition, strong with the power to "vote", still lacks the

authority of a "veto" over our practice of worship and *halakha*.

Congregants

At the same time, we are confronted by a growing need for "spirituality" among our congregants. Seeking to find a presence of God in their lives, this growing thirst for "spirituality" demands us to look toward the life of dialogue as one of many ways Jews can find the personal relationship they seek with the divine. In the life of dialogue, every encounter exists as a possibility to meet with God. Another human being, an aspect of nature, even a piece of art can create the opportunity for a Jew to let God into their lives. Yes, according to Buber, this is all possible, provided that the searcher is open to the encounter with the Eternal Thou.

To rely solely on the rational basis of prophecy as put forth by Maimonides, one would never have to enter the world of mankind to seek the divine. Forced to concentrate all energies on the pursuit of knowledge found within the natural universe, one would utilize their imagination in this process of learning and self-perfection. There is only one Moses. Therefore, one would be left to seek out the necessary training to turn the hylic intellect into an actualized one. In fact, one could shut himself off from the rest of the world and still find God. Yet, understanding prophecy to be a matter of community as much as it is a matter of personal growth, we are forced to seek God within the community as well.

Conversely, Buber stresses the role of dialogue. In our attempt to hallow every moment on earth through our interaction with man, nature, and the arts we can come to meet the divine. As we strive to create a more profound religious community for Reform Judaism, engaging in this task is a way of meeting the Eternal along the way. One cannot remain hermit and enter the life of dialogue with manind.

In this age of an increasing understanding of our universe, earth, biological, and chemical compositions, one is confronted with the realization that he can never hope to fully understand all of science let alone all of Jewish literature. Accepting Maimonides philosophy alone, one is left with the realization that a union with the Active Intellect is beyond almost anyone's reach. However, Buber's notion that intellectual ability and actualization are not necessary requirements for meeting the divine, provides hope for my congregants and me.

However, this does not give free license to disregard our need for learning as a way of approaching the divine. Just as one cannot hope to find God solely in the realm of the intellect, neither can one hope to find God solely in the realm of dialogue. Furthermore, if we do not acquire a modicum of intellectual ability, then words have no meaning; even in the world of dialogue, we use our intellect with each word we utter. As Buber says, preparation is needed in order to achieve a dialogue with the divine. Consequently, before we can achieve an I-Thou relationship, we

must prime ourselves through the relations of I-It, which is Buber's world of the intellect.

As a Reform Jew we live in two worlds simultaneously. We cannot abandon the secular for the religious or the religious for the secular; this is our great challenge as well as our history. As a rabbi I have made the religious world a part of my secular world; it has become my vocation. Despite this, I will serve a community that must struggle to do the opposite. The challenge is to educate today's Reform Jews to reintegrate the Divine into daily life. Gleaning aspects from both Maimonides and Buber, creates the means to make that transition from ancient to modern, while creating a holy one opportunity for all Jews.

I have found a great deal of comfort in the philosophies of both Martin Buber and Moses Maimonides, and as a Reform Rabbi I will continue to value the intellectual pursuits that have created our history and strengthened the bonds of dialogue that hallow all moments. Who among us is a prophet? Is it the scientist or he who is able to dialogue with his fellow man? For the modern Jew incorporating the best of Maimonides and Buber, they are both prophets. Indeed, there is an inherent equality among Jews when these two philosophies are integrated, for all are able to obtain a pathway to the Divine.