

# A PROMISE OF GOOD WILL NOT BE RETRACTED

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"And G-d spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying, 'so shall you bless the children of Israel...' [6:22-23]"*

In the beginning of Parshas Mattos (Num. 30:2), the commentator Rashi quotes the Medrash (Sifri) which says "Moshe prophesied with 'So says HaShem, ('At about midnight...') (Ex. 11:4)', and the other prophets also prophesied with 'So says HaShem', but Moshe had the additional ability to prophecy with 'This is the statement'."

The Torah V'HaMitzvah explains as follows: every prophet could "see" G-d with an "unclear" vision, meaning that the prophet became G-d's appointed representative (Shaliach) to deliver the Divine message in his own words. We see that Moshe as an individual could also prophecy in this way: before Israel left Egypt, he said "so says HaShem, 'At about midnight...'", and when Israel fell from their heights during the incident of the Golden Calf, Moshe again used the language of "so says HaShem" when speaking to the tribe of Levi (Ex. 32:27).

Moshe, however, reached a unique level as leader of the Nation of Israel when G-d gave the Torah. He also could have a "clear" vision, a more absolute contact with HaShem. In those cases, Moshe was not G-d's representative, delivering a message, but rather it was as if G-d Himself was speaking. "The Divine Presence spoke from within his throat."

In Maimonides' introduction to the Mishnah, Seder Z'raim, he says that when HaShem tells us good news (for those familiar with non-Jewish preachers, forgive me the terminology - would you prefer "good tidings?") about our future by way of a prophet, it is impossible for it not to actually happen, for otherwise prophecy could never be substantiated. We would worry that every prophet was false. Thus the Talmud says (Brachos 7a) "every statement which came from HaShem for good, even conditionally, He will never retract."

On the other hand, we see that when HaShem Himself promised our forefather Yaakov that "I will be with you and guard you wherever you go," nonetheless Yaakov "was extremely fearful and his courage left him," because, according to our Sages (Brachos 4a), he was afraid that because of his sins he was no longer worthy of protection. The Rambam (Maimonides) explains that this can only occur between HaShem and the prophet directly, for the prophet himself (or herself) will of course

not come to doubt either G-d's existence or his own prophecy as a result. But concerning a prophecy given over (by way of a prophet) to the people at large, we would be unable to rely upon or trust in prophecy if the words of even true prophets were to never come to pass.

Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Hertzberg zt"l uses all of the above to explain the unusual language of the verses in our parsha. G-d tells Moshe, "Speak" to the Cohanim, the Priests, using the same root (Davar) as the word for "statement." But what shall Moshe say? "so shall you bless..." using the language of "so" HaShem says, the language used by the prophets as G-d's representatives. What the Cohanim then say is G-d's message: that G-d should bless us and guard us, that He should show us mercy and give us peace, can then never be retracted. "Let them place my name upon the Children of Israel, and I shall bless them" (Num. 6:27) - this blessing must certainly come to pass!

Good Shabbos!