

# NEVUAH: WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

*by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene*

## *The Mitzvah:*

The words of true prophets, conveying the "word of G-d", are to be heeded and obeyed by the people. It was forbidden for a prophet to give false prophecy or to prophesize in the name of foreign gods (Devarim 18:15- 22).

Whether Jewish or non-Jewish, man or woman, the task of prophet was as the "mouthpiece" of G-d to reveal His word to the world.

Historically, prophecy flourished up and until the period of the Men of the Great Assembly (beginning of the Second Temple). While there were over one million prophets, only 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses are recorded by the Talmud for posterity (Megillah 14a). So while this concept may be foreign to the modern mind, it is nevertheless a central tenet of Judaism. In fact, the Children of Israel are themselves identified with prophecy: "Even if they [Israel] are not prophets, they are [nevertheless] the sons of prophets" (Pesachim 66b).

Prophecy was the greatest spiritual experience humanly possible. It was not accidentally attained. Quite the contrary! Prophecy was the result of an intense program of spiritual and ethical development to refine the personality of the navi, "prophet" to become the faithful transmitter of G-d's word to man. "I will place My word in his mouth and he will tell them all that which I [G-d] command him" (Devarim 18:18).

What is the underlying principle behind prophecy? It stresses that the relationship between Creator and His creatures exists and endures. G-d created the world and is involved in the running of its affairs. And so, G- d continuously communicates His "word" to man by openly instructing him how to conduct himself in this universe.

The manifestation of the "word of G-d" could take many forms.

Its most prominently display, by far, remains the national giving of Torah, at the hands of Moshe the greatest prophet, to determine the immutable laws of G-d which man would always to live by. All prophecies are considered a "sequel" to that Divine revelation, with every future prophecy originating from Sinai (Berachos 5a). How every prophecy is an extension of Sinai is not vis-à-vis the revelation of Torah (which will not be duplicated and whose laws he has no authority to permanently rescind), but rather in the communication of the true "word of G-d". (Hence to pronounce a false

prophecy or claim one was a representative of a foreign god was such a reprehensible misdemeanor.)

All objectives of the prophet were towards proclaiming the "word of G-d".

\* When the occasion dictated, prophets like Eliyahu and Elisha, performed wondrous miracles to glorifying His Name.

\* The less-than-popular directive of the prophet was to habitually admonish the people to return from their evil ways in repentance (See Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 4, Ran, Nedarim 22b). One famous example of this was Yonah enjoined to journey to Ninveh in Assyria and to inspire the sinful people to undertake a spiritual rejuvenation by taking the "word of G-d" to heart.

\* The prophet was to vividly paint the apocalyptic destruction destined to strike the nation should they not mend their ways and return to G-d. This underscores the divine Providence within the universe.

\* Finally, there are prophecies about the future and the Messianic Epoch (e.g. Yeshayah and Yechezkel) where the "word of G-d" was to comfort and console the Jewish nation should never lose hope about their future. They had the Divine covenant that G-d would never reject them.

Significantly, all prophecies recorded within the canon of Tanach have a timeless quality about them. They are everlasting teachings relevant for all future generations (Megillah 14a) - even today where prophetic inspiration has unfortunately ceased.

That "word of G-d" from a prophet cannot be heard in today's world. But in the world to come, all of Israel will become prophets (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:19). The course is presented by Osher Chaim Levene, author of SET IN STONE (2004: Targum) about the meaning of mitzvah observance and PEOPLE OF THE BOOK (2007: Targum) about the biblical personalities. A London-based writer and educator, he learned at the Gateshead and Mir Yeshivas, holds a Bachelor of Science (Honors) business degree from London's City University, and is a Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.