

*Parasha Pinchas*

## Is it Possible to Receive Prophecy Today?



**Dear Rebbetzin Chana Bracha,**

I have a quick question. We learned that the age of prophecy came to an end. I don't remember when that was said to be. I have friends who say there can still be prophets today. I understand there are different levels of prophecy and there is a difference between the prophecy of Moshe and the prophecy of the other prophets in the Bible. I also am aware that there is still *Ruach HaKodesh* (Divine Inspiration) today. What exactly is the different and when did true prophecy end? I meant this to be a simple question but I guess it is not.

**Hannah Furie**

**Dear Hannah,**

It's so nice hearing from you, thank you for your excellent question. You are right that according to the Talmud the era of prophecy has come to an end, yet we are awaiting its return now at the Messianic era. Since the glorious Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, we have lost not just a building, but a more direct connection with Hashem through prophecy. We find ourselves in a time when we are starving to hear the word of G-d. The following prophecy applies perfectly to our time:

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נֹאֵם ה' אֱלֹהִים וְהִשְׁלַחְתִּי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא רָעַב לֶלֶחֶם וְלֹא צָמָא לַמַּיִם כִּי אִם לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶת דְּבַר־יְהוָה: (יב) וְנָעוּ מֵיָם עַד יָם וּמִצְפוֹן עַד מִזְרָח יִשׁוּטְטוּ לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת דְּבַר ה' וְלֹא יִמְצְאוּ: (עמוס פרק ח פסוק יא-יב)  
 "A time is coming, declares Hashem my G-d, when I will send a famine upon the land: not a hunger for bread or a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of Hashem. People shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east to seek the word of Hashem, but they shall not find it" (*Amos 8:11-12*).

This thirst, which we experience today, for the return of prophecy is reflected in your question and in the attempts of numerous people to tune into the word of G-d, in various ways. I believe that prophecy will gradually return to Israel level by level from increased intuition until once again our relationship with Hashem will be expressed through full-fledged prophecy with the rebuilding of the Temple.

### The Temple is the Circuit for Prophecy

Hashem commanded us to build a holy abode for Him in order that He would dwell within us. He didn't say, "I will dwell within it," but "within them." From this we learn that G-d's presence dwells within Israel to a much higher degree when the holy Temple is built. Until that time, when our Temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt, Hashem's presence is hidden and we live in spiritual darkness (*hester panim*). The rebuilding of the Temple will ignite our spiritual light of prophecy, in the same way that plugging a light into the electric outlet will illuminate a dark room. According to most Torah authorities, Malachi was the last prophet (see, for example, *Tosefta Sotah 3:3; Yoma 9b; Sanhedrin 11a*). Although Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied after the destruction of the First Temple, a number of sources consider the destruction of the First Temple as having dealt a fatal blow to prophecy. Even when the Second Temple was built, prophecy never returned full force:

The First Temple differed from the second in regards to five things: The ark, the ark-cover, the Cherubim, the fire, the Shechinah, the Holy Spirit [of Prophecy], and the *Urim v'Tumim* (*Babylonian Talmud Yoma 21b*).

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## The Transition from Prophecy to Wisdom

The destruction of both Temples caused a transition in Israel from the era of נבואה/*Nevuah* – Prophecy to the period of חכמה/*Chachma* – Wisdom. This was the time when the Oral Law was written down. “...the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the wise. Is then a wise man not also a prophet? The meaning is: Although it has been taken from the prophets, it has not been taken from the wise. Amimar said: A wise man is even superior to a prophet, as it says, “A prophet has a heart of wisdom” (*Tehillim* 90:12). Who is compared with whom? Is not the smaller compared with the greater?” (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra* 12a).

The Talmud attributes a superior level to the *chacham* (wise) because a person who has acquired Torah by means of his own wisdom, through Arousal from Below, is superior to one who has received prophecy as a free gift of Arousal from Above. Although the prophet’s connection to Divine knowledge is greater, his relationship to his prophecy overwhelms his free will. The wise does not share such intense spiritual experience, yet, because he has gained his knowledge through his own efforts, it is broader and more grounded. Ever since the destruction of the Temples, we no longer have prophecy that emanates from Arousal from Above. Rather, Israel was now to rediscover Hashem’s will through their own effort, engaging in the wisdom of Torah study and logical inferences through Arousal from Below. This transition was also reflected in the general world with the emergence of Greek Philosophy, and in the pursuit of logic that replaced interest in mysticism and the occult. Likewise, the temptation for idolatry had vanished (*Yoma* 69b), and there was no longer a need for prophecy to counterbalance magic (The Vilna Gaon, commentary on *Seder Olam Rabbah* 30; Rabbi Tzadok, *Divrei Sofrim* 21b).

## Halachic Petition Through Arousal from Below

The antecedent of this transition- from having a relationship with Hashem through Arousal from Above to relating to the Divine through Arousal from Below, which eventually led to the metamorphosis from Prophecy to Wisdom, begins in this week’s parasha. The daughters of Tzelafchad brought down a new law in Israel through Arousal from Below. Their story takes place at the end of the 40-year wandering in the wilderness, on the verge of entering into the Land of Israel. The land was to be divided into portions according to tribes and families. Until then, the law of land inheritance dictated that family plots would be passed down from father to son. Yet, Tzelafchad had passed away leaving five daughters but no sons. This is when his daughters rose to face Moshe, Elazar and the entire congregation stating their petition:

**במדבר פרק כז פסוק ד-ז** למה יגרע שם אבינו מתוך משפחתו כי אין לו בן תנה לנו אֶחְזָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָי אֲבִינוּ: וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִשְׁפָּטָן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ז) כֵּן בְּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד דְּבַרְתָּ נָתַן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲחֻזֹּת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָי אֲבִיהֶם וְהֵעֲבַרְתָּ אֶת נַחֲלַת אֲבִיהֶן לָהֶן:

“Why should our father’s name be eliminated from his family because he had no son? Give us a portion along with our father’s brothers So Moshe brought their case before Hashem. Hashem spoke to Moses, saying: Tzelafchad’s daughters speak justly. You shall certainly give them a portion of inheritance along with their father’s brothers, and you shall transfer their father’s inheritance to them” (*Bamidbar* 27:1-7).

## The Wisdom of the Daughters of Tzelafchad Pulled Down a New Torah Law

Although Moshe’s prophecy was superior to all other prophets in several ways, (see Rambam, *Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 7:6), now, as the Israelites were about to enter the Land and Moshe’s life was coming to an end, his level of prophecy was waning. Therefore, he didn’t have a ready answer to the daughters, but needed to bring their case before Hashem. Thus, it was the daughters, through their

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wisdom, learnedness and righteousness (*Baba Batra* 119b), who had the merit to pull down a new Torah law into the world. As Rashi states, their eye saw what Moshe's eye did not see (cf. Tanch.). Through the daughter's arousal from below in wisdom, they were credited with an even finer perception of this part of the Torah than Moshe himself.

This chapter ought to have been written by Moshe, but for the fact that the daughters of Tzelaḥ had so much merit. It was therefore written through them (*Baba Batra* 119a; *Sanhedrin* 8a).

### A Tzaddik May Possibly Receive Prophecy Even Today

According to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubawitz, the belief that prophecy ceased after the destruction of the First Temple is a misconception. He holds that, although The Talmud states that the era of prophecy ceased, it only means that prophets are no longer as common as they used to be. Yet, prophecy itself continues to exist (*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, p. 72ff; *Sefer HaSichos*, 5751, p. 788; p. 790, fn. 101). Even today, we may still find exceptionally righteous people endowed with special spiritual gifts. A *tzaddik* possesses the ability to see and perceive spiritual realities concealed from the ordinary eye and mind. Although we don't find many prophets today, a *tzaddik* possessing *ruach hakodesh* is much more common in our time. Just as people have different levels of intelligence, there are many different levels of prophecy. Since the destruction of the First Temple, the higher level of spiritual perception (prophecy) is found in only a select few exceptional individuals in each generation. *Ruach hakodesh*, which is a lesser level of spiritual perception than prophecy, is much more commonly found. Those with the divine gift of *ruach hakodesh* are able to perceive reality on a much higher spiritual level than the average person. Many Torah authorities attest to the existence of *ruach hakodesh* in our current era, particularly the writings of the Arizal – one of Jewish history's greatest authorities on the Kabbalah ([Shloma Majeski, The Rebbe-Chassid Relationship, chapter 5](#)).

### The Return of Prophecy to Sons and Daughters

Since Arizal's time in the sixteenth century, a new shift has been happening in the world at large as well as in the Jewish world. While Reason had been dominant for generations, we have gradually been moving into an era with more interest and attraction towards the mystical and spiritual realms. The popularity of various neo-Chassidic movements is an expression of the yearning for spirituality and Divine inspiration, so prominent today. As we come closer to the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of prophecy, the search for the inner dimension of the Torah, spiritual healing, mystical experience, and divine inspiration is rapidly growing. Through various meditative practices, people are beginning to open their intuition to experience a deeper level of reality. Even without such practices, there are those who receive prophetic messages in their dreams or just intuitively know hidden things about others. Redemption is like a sunrise. It starts with a small ray, which gradually increases until the Divine Presence is revealed like the bright daylight (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* chapter 3). As the clouds of exile evaporate one by one, the dawn of redemption returns flashes of prophetic spirit to Israel. I truly believe we are entering the era described so beautifully by the prophet Yoel:

וְהָיָה אַחֲרָי כֵן אֲשַׁפּוּךְ אֶת רוּחִי עַל כָּל בֶּשָׂר וְנָבְאוּ בְנֵיכֶם וּבְנֵי־בָנוֹתֶיךָ זְקֵנֶיךָ חֲלֹמוֹת יִחְלְמוּן בְּחֻזֵיכֶם חֲזִיּוֹת יֵרְאוּ:  
(יואל פרק ג פסוק א)

“It shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your elders shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (*Yoel* 3:1).