

Ruah HaKodesh & Torah Law The Match Made in Heaven

By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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“Would that the entire people of HaShem be prophets, that HaShem should give of His Spirit upon them.” Bamidbar 11:30

Most people are under the impression that the reception of Divine Inspiration (Ruah HaKodesh) and the practices of prophecy are things very remote and distant from the experiences of the modern religious layman. Since the destruction of the First Temple some 2,500 odd years ago, prophecy ceased as a daily occurrence of practice amongst the Jewish people. Prophets remained active up until the early days of the Second Temple period. Yet, with the passing of Haggai, Zekharia and Malakhi, the last of the prophets, prophecy ceased as a daily reality in Israel. So much for Moshe Rabbeynu's desire that all Israel, regardless of individual differences should attain a spiritual level where all could talk to and hear from HaShem directly!

Long ago our holy Sages have taught that while prophecy may have ceased Ruah HaKodesh has not ceased. Ruah HaKodesh is the reception of Divine inspiration (lit. the holy spirit). It is a very high level, akin to prophecy and often indistinguishable from it. The only difference is that in prophecy one receives a message to communicate to the nation of Israel at large. Ruah HaKodesh, on the other hand, is a private communication that provides for its receiver wisdom and enlightenment about matters of Torah and life in general. While the prophet can be said to be possessed by the spirit of HaShem as he prophesies, so is the one possessed by Ruah HaKodesh.

Ruah HaKodesh is such a significant factor with regards to Torah revelation that the largest section of the TaNaKh (Bible), the Ketuvim was written under its influence. Indeed the TaNaKh is divided up according to the level of revelation of the books therein. This is why the books of Daniel, an apparent book of prophecy and Chronicles, an apparent complimentary text to Shmuel and Melakhim, are placed as Ketuvim and not in the N'vi'im. Their source of revelation came through Ruah HaKodesh, instead of through prophecy. There is a very fine line, almost a razor's edge that separates prophecy from Ruah HaKodesh. Only those on the “inside” of the experience are qualified to tell the difference.

While prophecy and prophet ceased centuries ago, the “science” of prophetic training that teaches one how to receive both prophecy and Ruah HaKodesh has been preserved to this day. The ancient Biblical techniques used by the Biblical prophets themselves were first orally passed down as part of the Oral Torah tradition and then later written down in numerous texts, some more revealing than others. These techniques are today referred to as the “Prophetic Kabbalah.” Throughout the centuries, using the Biblical techniques for cultivating Ruah HaKodesh many holy Torah Sages have acquired Divine Inspiration. Indeed, over the centuries, those Torah Sages who have written holy texts have done so under the influence of the Ruah HaKodesh.

In Biblical times, when David HaMelekh was writing Psalms, he was temporarily “possessed” by Ruah HaKodesh. This spirit permeated his being and actually guided his thoughts what to think, his heart what to feel and his hand what to write. Centuries later, we find that his descendants followed in his footsteps. Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, of the tribe of Judah and the House of David, the leader of the Jewish people some one hundred years after the destruction of the Second Temple, was guided by the Ruah HaKodesh to commit to writing the holy Oral Torah. This was an act without historical precedent. Up until this time, the writing down of the Oral Torah was a criminal offense of the most serious nature. Yet, Rabbi Yehudah, guided by the Ruah HaKodesh, foresaw the needs of collective Israel and made an earth shattering decision that only one on the level of being a Navi (prophet) could make.

Rabbi Yehuda’s compilation of Oral Torah, we call the Mishna. It was written with the same Ruah HaKodesh as was Psalms, Proverbs, Iyob (Job) and Daniel. Just as these books are authoritative literature in Judaism, so is the Mishna! Yet, Ruah HaKodesh did not stop with Rabbi Yehuda. Many other texts were written after his time, all of them to one extent or another inspired by Ruah HaKodesh. This is why the works of our Sages are called Sifrei Kodesh (holy writings), for the spirit of holiness possessed them enabling to receive their revelations and record them for posterity. When Rav Ashi, centuries later compiled the Gemara, thus forming our holy Talmud, he was inspired and possessed by the same Ruah HaKodesh as was David HaMelekh and Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi before him.

We must understand that when a Rav is under the influence of Ruah HaKodesh, everything that he writes takes on tremendous significance. Granted, while the individual writings of these Divinely inspired Rabbinic authors might not agree with (and sometimes contradict) the Divinely inspired writings of other Rabbinic authors, this is all by the Hand of G-d with precise Divine Purpose. The apparent differences found in the writings of our holy Sages are a gift to us from G-d to teach us profound lessons. While one Rav receives Divine revelation assisting him to understand and ordain Halakha in one form, another Rav is receiving the same Ruah HaKodesh that enables him to understand Halakha and ordain practices of a very different nature. As our Sages have long ago taught, “elu v’elu divrei Elohim Hayim” (these are all the words of the Living G-d).

How can this be? How can there be this apparent lack of consistency? If the Rabbis are all writing under the influence of Ruah HaKodesh, should they not all be saying the same thing? Indeed, the answer to this question reveals to us much about the nature of Ruah HaKodesh itself.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 14:28 states, “B’rov Am Hadrat Melekh” (in the multitude of the people is the glory of the King). This pasuk is also hinted to in an episode found in Parashat B’ha’olo’tekha. HaShem took from His Spirit that was on Moshe Rabbeynu and “poured” it onto the Seventy Elders, thus forming the first Sanhedrin. (Bamidbar 11:25) Moreover, what did all Seventy Elders first do? They prophesied! Only then did they settle down into their new offices as legislative leaders of the Jewish people.

Now, here is the secret of Ruah HaKodesh. It is a known legal principle of Torah Law that no Halakha is ordained or revealed through prophecy. The Torah “is not in Heaven” (Devarim 30:12). It is here amongst us. The holy Sages must decide Halakha based not upon ethereal spiritual visions, but rather based upon practical human needs. The unenlightened often misunderstand this and consider Halakha (Jewish Law) to be boring and “dry” of any spirituality. They could not be more wrong!

The Gemara (Talmud Bavli, Berakhot 8A) teaches us, “Rabbi Hiya Bar Ami said in the name of Ulla, that from the day the Holy Temple was destroyed the only place the Holy One, blessed be He has in

His world is the four amot of Halakha alone." Indeed, Halakha (Jewish Law) is not void of spirituality; on the contrary, it is THE place on Earth that is the dwelling place of G-d. This is why the spiritual and prophetic masters of Torah Judaism, since the destruction of the Second Temple have been involved with Halakhic discussions and exegesis. For it is within the ways (Halikhot) of the Torah that the Master HaShem is to be found. Moreover, no one will find Him without Ruah HaKodesh.

In ancient Israel, we had the Twelve Tribes each of who observed the 613 mitzvot with unique minhagim in accordance to each tribe's individual character. So today, we have their descendants, the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim, the Temanim and others. Each follows in the footsteps of their forefathers. Each with Ruah HaKodesh directing their communal leaders, express the multiple layers of glory and beauty that there is in the Torah of HaShem by each community observing the mitzvot, each according to their own minhagim.

Ruah HaKodesh, unlike the spirit of man, sees the greater picture of both the Torah and the collective Jewish super-soul (Knesset Yisrael). Although we have our differences in how we learn Torah and observe Halakha. All practices that are firmly based in Kedusha, with HaShem at their center have their places in the greater picture of Torah observance.

When Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote the Shulkhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law) in the 1500's and Rabbi Moshe Isserles wrote the Haga'ot (Additions to the Shulkhan Arukh) often contradicting Rabbi Karo's Halakhic rulings and ordaining contradictory practice, both authors, nonetheless, were Divinely inspired, writing under the influence of same Ruah HaKodesh. How great a lesson is this for us to learn today - to learn about and to respect the different "kosher" and authoritative Halakhic practices as practiced in the various Torah communities worldwide.

The Gemara (T.B. Baba Batra 12A) says, "Hakham Adif M'Navi" (a Rav is preferable over as prophet). The prophet can only receive the spirit of prophecy when HaShem so ordains it. Prophecy is intermittent at best. Whereas a Rav is cloaked in Ruah HaKodesh all the while that he scrupulously observes the mitzvot and studies the Torah. Through the study of Torah (especially Helek HaSod) one bonds with the Ruah HaKodesh concealed within the texts of learning. As one candle lights others without diminishing itself, so the Ruah HaKodesh is passed on from Rav to Rav, from holy Sefer to holy Sefer, in an unbroken, never ending chain. We call this chain - Mesorah (the authoritative tradition).

The Mesorah defines Torah Judaism. The Mesorah defines a Sage. Today, we can still fulfill the dearest desire of our teacher Moshe, upon him be peace. When Moshe Rabbeynu wishes, "that HaShem should give of His Spirit upon them" (i.e., upon us) we can receive that spirit and do, every time we open a Sefer and study Halakha. As the Gemara (T.B. Megillah 28B) has taught, "Tana D'vei Eliyahu, whoever studies Halakha everyday will be assured a portion in the world to come."

"Leave it to Israel, although they are not prophets, they are the children of the prophets."

Hillel HaZaken, Pesachim 66A