

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Re'eh

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shraga Feivel *ben Yechiel a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

The Difference between Prophets and Professors

Beginning with this week's *parshah* (and continuing with next week's), the Torah delineates the laws associated with prophets and prophecy (see, e.g., *Devarim 13:2-6*). As such, this affords us the opportunity to delve somewhat into this remarkable subject. Focusing on one of the most well-known of all prophets – Eliyahu Hanavi – can prove quite enlightening for the overall concept of prophecy.

Missing Prophet

The episode of Eliyahu's disappearance is recorded in the second chapter of *Melachim II*. The narrative relates how – on this final day of Eliyahu's sojourn on earth – he journeyed from place to place with his faithful disciple, Elisha. Arriving at each location, Elisha was met by a group of "B'nei Hanevi'im" ("the Prophets' Disciples," who were prophets in their own right). The group would proceed to inform Elisha that Eliyahu's final departure from this world was imminent (a fact apparently related to them through prophecy). Each time, Elisha would silence them.

When the dramatic moment finally arrived, a fiery chariot appeared and collected Eliyahu. As his mentor ascended Heavenward in a whirlwind, Elisha cried out and then rent his clothing.

When the B'nei Hanevi'im later encountered Elisha, they offered to organize a search party. Elisha attempted to dissuade them, but they were quite persistent. Eventually, he relented, and they did search for the missing prophet – but to no avail. Elisha's original assertion was confirmed: Eliyahu had vanished without a trace.

One matter that deserves some scrutiny is the somewhat mysterious behavior of the B'nei Hanevi'im. They had foreknowledge that Eliyahu was taking leave of this world on that very day, as they consistently related to Elisha. Yet, when the news circulated of Eliyahu's disappearance, they seemed perplexed. They were sincerely unsure of his whereabouts, to the extent that they even spent days searching for him. *But hadn't they themselves informed Elisha that Eliyahu was leaving them!?* How could they have so quickly forgotten?

Addressing this issue, Rashi (*Melachim II 2:16*) explains that Eliyahu's presence had a significant impact on the power of prophecy at that time. Most of the contemporary prophets derived their abilities from the strength of Eliyahu's stature. Once he exited the scene, their prophetic abilities were suspended.

But the matter still seems to demand clarification. True, the other prophets may no longer be able to attain prophecy in the wake of Eliyahu's absence, but they still had knowledge of his departure! Why would their inability to prophesy further cause them to "magically" forget what they already knew?

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sichos Mussar, Devarim, 5733*) extrapolates from here a key idea about the nature of prophecy. Knowledge one attains through prophecy differs significantly from all other types. Normally, of course, when someone "knows" something, he knows it – regardless of how or why he attained the information. But prophetically-generated knowledge is of an entirely different sort and remains permanently connected to and

reliant on the spiritual entity of prophecy. What occurred with the B'nei Hanevi'im was that their knowledge of Elyahu's fate had been communicated to them through the office of prophecy; once they lost their prophetic ability – even on that very day – the information itself was deleted. They truly lacked, at that point, the knowledge of Elyahu's disappearance, and so they set out searching.

This idea is relevant to yet another area of spiritual knowledge: namely, Torah wisdom. R' Chaim explains that Torah knowledge operates in a similar fashion. One prominent example took place with Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal tell us (*Vayikra Rabbah 13:1*) that there were three occasions where the teacher of all Yisrael was unable to transmit the *halachah* (ruling) properly on his own. The hallmark of these occasions was that – to a certain extent – something had raised Moshe's ire. (For example, upon the conclusion of the war against Midyan, Moshe became upset over a certain aspect of how the war was conducted. Consequently, he forgot the laws relating to the purification of vessels that were exposed to defilement in the course of battle. These laws had to be transmitted by Elazar, the son of Aharon). Undoubtedly, Moshe had been apprised of the correct law; but due to the fact that he experienced a level of (even justifiable) anger, he “forgot” what the ruling was.

The Legacy of the Ethics Instructor

Such a phenomenon is the product of the Torah's uniqueness. In no other discipline is one's scholastic aptitude dependent on one's personal behavior or character. A certain professor of some renown taught a course in ethics. People were understandably astounded when it came to light that this same professor of ethics was involved in a certain sordid scandal. But when approached by the public about the inconsistency of his conduct, he offered a most shameless and telling reply.

“How could you, of all people, be involved in such behavior?” people asked.
The professor replied: “You don't have to be a square to teach geometry.”

The intent of this “luminary,” obviously, was to convey that his personal conduct and the material he taught were two distinct entities. Who cares how he acted, as long as his students mastered the curriculum, he claimed.

But with Torah, no such contradiction is viable. If one's morals are not in consonance with the Torah's ideals, then Torah knowledge itself cannot be retained by the individual. The incidence of a trait that is antithetical to the perfection that Torah demands will render one incapable of holding onto the Torah's words. Thus, even someone on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu could not recall his teachings when experiencing sentiments of anger.

This notion is expressed in the words of Chazal, as the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (2:12) states:

הַתְּקַן עֲצֻמְךָ לְלִמּוּד תּוֹרָה, וְשִׂאִינָה יְרֵשָׁה לְךָ.

“Prepare yourself to study Torah, for it is not given to you as an inheritance.”

The Medrash Shmuel explains that the “preparation” referred to by the Mishnah is the purging of negative traits from one's character. Such a process is a necessary precondition for successful Torah study, as undesirable traits are an inherent contradiction to the retention of Torah knowledge.

