Negative Attributes and Direct Prophecy

Two interdependent principles in Rambam's thought.[1]

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Introduction

The Torah, to accomplish its intent of melding a nation into one unit in the service of G-d, needs to be accepted as an immutable document that can never be changed. The prophecy that Moshe experienced to receive the Torah therefore had to be a unique and supreme prophetic experience never to be repeated. "As for the difference between his [Moshe's] prophecy and that of all those who came after, it is stated in the verse: And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moshe, whom the Lord knew face to face."[2] As Moshe's prophecy was superior and unique, the only one that can be called "face to face," another prophet that will try to negate or change anything in the Torah, will be discredited.

Moshe's apprehension of G-d was also unique. Rambam tells us "Yet He drew his [Moshe's] attention to a subject of speculation through which he can apprehend [G-d] to the furthest extent that is possible for man. For what has been apprehended by Moshe, peace be on him, has not been apprehended by anyone before him nor will it be apprehended by anyone after him" (Moreh 1:54, p. 123). Before Moshe received the second Tablets,[3] during his experience at the "cleft of the rock" (נקרת הצור), he reached a level of understanding of G-d that was unique. Rambam maintains that both Moshe's understanding of G-d and the type of prophecy he experienced were unique and will remain so. Is there a connection between these two unique experiences - Moshe's unique prophecy and Moshe's unique understanding of G-d?

In Rambam's description of the uniqueness of Moshe's prophecy we read: "כל הנביאים על ידי מלאך לפיכך רואים מה שהם רואים במשל וחידה, משה רבינו לא על ידי מלאך שנאמר (במדבר י"ב ח') פה אל פה אדבר בו, ונאמר (שמות ל"ג י"א) ודבר י"י אל משה פנים אל פנים, ונאמר

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(במדבר י"ב ח') ותמונת י"י יביט - All prophets [prophesied] via an angel therefore their vision consisted of allegories and riddles, while there was no angel [when] Moshe Rabbeinu [prophesied] as it says (Numbers 12:8), 'With him I speak mouth to mouth,' it also says (Exodus 33:11), 'The Lord would speak to Moshe face to face,' it also says (Numbers 12:8), 'and the figure of the Lord shall he look upon.'"[4]

The first verse the Rambam quotes in this segment is the beginning of the third quoted verse which reads as follows: פה אל פה אדבר בו ומראה ולא בחידות ותמנת ה' יביט. Rambam (Moreh 2:24) uses this verse in his discussion on whether the world was created. One of the reasons we accept that it was created is because of prophetic revelation. "...and let us give over the things that cannot be grasped by reasoning to him [Moshe Rabbeinu] who was reached by the mighty divine overflow so that it would be fittingly said of him: With him do I speak mouth to mouth." The "mighty divine overflow," is the source of the prophecy through which Moshe received the Torah which states that the world was created by G-d. That prophecy is referred to as "mouth to mouth," which means that it was without the intermediary of an angel and was exclusive to Moshe.

The second verse reads ודבר ה' אל משה פנים אל פנים כאשר ידבר איש אל רעהו. Here too Rambam explains: "In this sense it is said: 'and the Lord spoke unto Moshe face to face,' which means, as a presence to another presence without an intermediary..." (Moreh 1:37, p. 86) Moshe apprehended G-d as the source of speech during the prophetic experience, without the mediation of an angel. The first two verses quoted address Moshe's prophecy and, when properly interpreted, support Rambam's thesis that his prophecy was without the intermediary of an angel.

However the third quoted verse in this Halacha, "and the figure of the Lord shall he look upon," which is the second part of the first quoted verse, describes Moshe's understanding of G-d and, at first glance, has nothing to do with prophecy. In Moreh 1:3 Rambam explains the verse as follows: "Thus it says: And the figure of the Lord shall he look upon. The meaning and interpretation of this verse are: he grasps the truth of G-d." Grasping the truth of G-d is the result of an intellectual quest. As we will see later Rambam uses this verse to describe the level of Moshe's understanding of G-d. It is therefore interesting that as proof-text for his description of Moshe's

prophecy, Rambam uses a statement that describes his intellectual understanding of G-d. Rambam must see the two, understanding of G-d and type of prophecy, as connected and interdependent.

In Moreh 2:35 we read: "The proof taken from the Law as to his prophecy being different from that of all who came before him is constituted by His saying: (Exodus 6:3) 'And I appeared to Avrohom, Yitzchak and Yacov as El Shaddai but My name, the Lord, I made me not known to them.' Thus it informs us that his apprehension was not like that of the Patriarchs, but greater - nor, all the more, like that of others who came before." As proof that Moshe's prophecy is different, Rambam quotes a verse that describes how the patriarchs had a different understanding of G-d then Moshe. Here again Rambam interchanges prophecy with apprehension of G-d.

We will try to demonstrate that according to Rambam, there indeed is a necessary relationship between how Moshe understood G-d and the type of prophecy he experienced. We will show that, according to Rambam, the type of prophecy needed for receiving the Torah could only be experienced once a different understanding of G-d, unknown heretofore, had been developed. The intimate relationship between knowledge of G-d and prophecy is a fundamental principle in Rambam's religious thought and our discussion will help us understand his thinking on the subject.

Avrohom Avinu's Concept of G-d

Man's search for G-d begins in his analyzing his surroundings "כיון שנגמל איתן זה ... והי' תמיה האיך אפשר שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג ומי יסבב אותו As Avrohom grew up... he wondered how it was possible for the sphere[5] to continuously turn without it having a driver or someone to make it turn."[6] As one begins to understand how all things depend on each other, are interrelated, and each thing is brought into being by its precursor, "apprehends their nature and the way they are mutually connected" (Moreh 1:54, p. 124), one arrives at the conclusion that there must be a First Cause, "that there is a mover, which has moved the matter of that which is subject to generation and corruption so that it received its form."[7] What results from this process is the recognition of G-d's attributes[8] (names) אל and שדי. Rambam defines אל as follows: "As for the expressions, the G-d [Elohe] of the heaven and also G-d of the world [El olam] they

are used with respect to His perfection, and theirs [heaven and the world]. He is Elohim - that is He who governs - and they are those governed by Him, not in the sense of domination but with respect to His rank, in relation to theirs" (Moreh 2:30, pp. 358-359). אל is a relative term which indicates a high position in a hierarchy.[9] It is an understanding of G-d as the highest ranked existent in relation to other existents. The concept of rank is the placement of a being as a precursor of another. A parent is higher in rank than an offspring. G-d who is the cause of all being is the highest rank in this type of evaluation.

The other concept of G-d that results from this speculation is represented by the attribute Shaddai. All other existents are necessary due to their position in the hierarchy of things. If there is an offspring there must be a parent thus a parent is necessary by virtue of the offspring's existence. The two are interdependent. There is no offspring without a parent and no parent without an offspring. On the other hand G-d, as the First Cause, is not an "offspring" nor is He necessarily a "parent" until He created of his own free volition the first being. G-d is therefore an independent existent. "Accordingly the meaning [of Shaddai] is he who is sufficient; the intention here being to signify that He does not need other than Himself with reference to the existence of that which He has brought into existence or with reference to prolonging the latter's existence, but that His existence, suffices for that" (Moreh 1:63, p. 155). These two concepts, El and Shaddai, see G-d as an existent, supreme and independent entity. Avrohom and his children developed this concept of G-d as expressed in the verse " וארא אל אברהם אל יצחק ואל יעקב באל שדי - and I appeared to Avrohom, Yitzchak and Yacov as El Shaddai."[10]

Understanding G-d in this way, without further conceptual development, carries with it an inherent risk. "As for the other names [other than Yud Heh Vov Heh], all of them, because of their being derived,[11] indicate attributes; that is, not an essence alone, but an essence possessing attributes. For this reason they produce in one's fantasy the conception of multiplicity; I mean to say that they produce in one's fantasy the thought that the attributes exist, and that there is an essence and a notion superadded to this essence" (Moreh 1:61, p. 148). An attribute understood literally would mean that, for example, when one says G-d is angry, the statement means that G-d is in a state of potential anger at one point and in a state of anger at

another, implying a relationship between G-d and time and, depending on the situation, place. "There is no relation between G-d and time and place; and this is quite clear. For time is an accident attached to motion.... Motion, on the other hand, is one of the things attached to bodies, whereas G-d, is not a body" (Moreh 1:52, p. 117). Seeing G-d as having a body automatically implies multiplicity. "There is no profession of unity unless the doctrine of G-d's corporeality is denied. For a body cannot be one, but it is composed of matter and form, which by definition are two; it also is divisible, subject to partition" (Moreh 1:35, p. 81) In Aristotelian physics every body is composed of matter and form. For example a wooden chair, the matter is the wood and the form is the shape of the chair whether it is square, round or rectangular.[12] We therefore have two separate and individual components which when combined make up a chair. This no longer is unity as there is matter separately that can potentially be given a form and there also is a form that can be added to matter. Furthermore, a body is divisible and therefore it is conceivable that one body will be made into two. Understanding G-d's attributes literally, negates the concept of unity which is the basic idea developed by Avrohom. The very method used to develop an understanding of G-d carries within itself the seeds of misunderstanding and reversal.

How does one therefore understand attributes without developing a flawed understanding of G-d? How does one avoid anthropomorphizing when the only way to find G-d is through nature? Accepting unity as a matter of faith is not an alternative. "Know thou who studiest this my Treatise, that knowledge[13] is not the notion that is uttered, but the notion that is represented in the soul when if one holds it to be true[14] that it is in fact just as it has been represented" (Moreh 1:50, p. 111). It is not enough to declare that G-d is unique; a person has to be able to demonstrate it rationally so that it is a certainty in his mind. And the only way that type of certainty is attainable is "If, together with this belief (knowledge), one realizes that a different understanding is impossible, and the mind cannot reject it nor can it accept a different supposition, there is certainty." When one searches for G-d through nature one ends up using attributes to translate the conclusions arrived at in one's thoughts. Hence "If, however, someone believes that He is one, but possesses a certain number of essential attributes, he says in his

words that He is one, but believes Him in his thought to be many" (Moreh 1:50, p. 11). Understanding attributes in a positive sense does not allow for the certainty needed to internalize the uniqueness of G-d and causes a schism between what is professed and believed.[15] Eventually this schism will shatter the belief in unity and idolatry will return. Furthermore, "As for someone who thinks and frequently mentions G-d, without knowledge, following a mere imagining or following a belief adopted because of his reliance on the authority of somebody else, he is to my mind outside the habitation [the king's palace in the parable] and far away from it and does not in true reality mention or think about G-d. For that thing that is in his imagination and which he mentions in his speech does not correspond to any being at all and has merely been invented by his imagination, as we have explained in our discourse concerning attributes" (Moreh 3:51, p. 620). That is exactly what happened to the Jewish people in Egypt. "עד שארכו הימים לישראל במצרים וחזרו ללמוד מעשיהם ולעבוד עבודה זרה כמותן .... וכמעט קט היה והעיקר ששתל אברהם נעקר וחזרו בני יעקב לטעות העמים ותעייתם[16] . As time went by for the children of Israel in Egypt, they once more learned their ways [of the Egyptians] to serve idols like them ... and it almost came to pass that the tree [literally: root] planted by Avrohom was uprooted and the children of Jacob returned to the errors and misguided ways of the nations." Although Avrohom taught his children the ways of finding G-d through observing nature, the process could not withstand the challenges of time and exile. The internal contradictions that came about from describing G-d based only on His attributes eventually erased the memory of the Unique[17] Creator. Clearly the understanding of G-d as אל שדי was not sufficient.

I am that I am - a New Concept in Understanding G-d

The Torah, when telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, introduces a new approach to how one must understand the attributes developed in the mind for describing G-d which we will call Negative Attributes. Rambam devotes most of the first part of the Moreh to develop this idea[18]. In Moreh 1:5 he deals with Moshe's first encounter with G-d at the burning bush. He discusses it in the context of an admonition to people who engage in philosophical speculation, to be careful and not accept the first opinions that occur to them during that process. "When doing this [engaging in the

investigation of metaphysics] he should not make categoric affirmations in favor of the first opinion that occurs to him and should not, from the outset, strain and impel his thoughts towards the apprehension of the deity; he rather should feel awe and refrain and hold back until he gradually elevates himself. It is in this sense it is said, And Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon G-d."[19] Rambam, in 1:37 gives the word, פניו – face - five possible meanings. We have already discussed one meaning in our explanation of "face to face", namely, a prophecy that does not involve an angel. "Yet another meaning applies to our verse. Face is also an adverb of place that is rendered in Arabic by the words: "in front of thee" or "in thy presence." It is often used in this sense with regard to G-d. Thus: In the face of the Lord."[20] A person, when in a state of deep metaphysical speculation and concentration can see himself in front of an entity he perceives as G-d. In our verse Moshe hiding his face means that while seeing himself in front of G-d, he did not accept his current perception of Him. The burning bush was the first experience Moshe had of a prophetic vision. The experience can be described as follows: Moshe is deeply involved in metaphysical speculation and he apprehends an angel inside a fire burning on a bush that is not consumed. He then has a vision where he starts to receive a message from G-d through this angel. As he investigates the angel's source of this message he starts to form in his mind a picture (sees) of that source. He realizes that he is jumping to conclusions based on an incomplete fund of information. He then stops himself from reaching any conclusion and is commended for it.[21] Moshe has proven that he has the ability and the temperament to deal with metaphysical issues. He will not jump to hasty conclusions and thus will eventually have a true understanding of G-d. "...and G-d let overflow upon him so much of His bounty and goodness that it became necessary to say of him: and the figure of the Lord shall he look upon - ותמונת ה' יביט. The sages, may their memory be blessed, have stated that this is a reward for his having at first hidden his face so as not to look upon G-d." (Moreh 1:5, p. 29) The term - תמונת ה' יביט - is explained in Moreh 1:3 "The term [תמונה] is also used to designate the true notion grasped by the intellect... The meaning and interpretation of this verse are: he grasps the truth of G-d." Moshe will be able to grasp a true understanding of G-d. According to Rambam, Moshe introduces us to the idea that being cautious when

one engages in metaphysical speculation is a necessary prerequisite so as not to believe what we "see" at first glance. Searching for G-d through nature leads one to describe G-d with attributes such as great, powerful, just and so on, which when interpreted positively, lead to anthropomorphism[22] and eventually cause one to forget the existence of the one G-d. The Torah introduces Moshe, the central figure responsible for the redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian exile, as having the insight to realize that continuing with the current understanding of G-d and taking it to its logical conclusion will lead to assigning positive attributes to G-d. This approach was the cause for " וכמעט קט היה והעיקר ששתל אברהם נעקר וחזרו בני יעקב לטעות העמים ותעייתם - and it almost came to pass that the tree planted by Avrohom was uprooted and the children of Jacob returned to the errors and misguided ways of the nations."[23]

Having understood the limitations of his current understanding of G-d and therefore refrained from speculating further about the source of the message and also having understood the rest of the prophecy, which was for him to tell the Jewish people that he is G-d's messenger and has been ordered to take them out of Egypt, Moshe now addresses G-d. "Moshe said to G-d, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them the G-d of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask me, what is His name? What shall I say to them?"[24] Rambam explains as follows: "the first thing that they will ask of me is that I should make them acquire true knowledge that there exists a G-d with reference to the world; after that I shall make the claim that He sent me." (Moreh 1:63, pp. 153-154) Moshe's question was, what is the concept of G-d that is consistent with my claim that you sent me to redeem them? "For at that time all the people except a few[25] were not aware of the existence of the deity,[26] and the utmost limits of their[27] speculation did not transcend the sphere, its faculties, and its actions, for they did not separate themselves from things perceived by the senses and had not attained intellectual perfection [in other words, they only could conceive of positive attributes consistent with the experience of their senses]. Accordingly G-d made known to [Moshe] the knowledge that he was to convey to them and through which they would acquire a true notion of the existence of G-d, this knowledge being; I am that I am" (Moreh 1:63, p. 154). What does אהיה אשר אהיה - I am that I am mean? "This makes it clear that <u>He is existent not through existence</u>. This notion may be summarized and interpreted in the following way: the

existent that is the existent, or the necessarily existent. This is what demonstration necessarily leads to: namely, to the view that there is a necessarily existent thing that has never been, or ever will be, nonexistent" (Moreh 1:63, p. 155). The term "necessarily existent" is defined as follows: "Everything that is necessarily existent in respect to its own essence has no cause for its existence in any way whatever or under any condition."[28] Every thing that we humans perceive is defined as "possible with regard to existence," meaning that at some point in time, past or future, it may not have existed or will not exist. Therefore every thing that we perceive must have something outside itself that caused it to exist. An entity that was not caused to exist by something outside itself cannot be grasped by us as it is beyond our experience. That Existent, which we call G-d, is "existent not through existence." We can only describe what that Existent is **not**, namely **not** caused by another and therefore exists **not** through existence, but we cannot say what that Existent's essence is. Even the word existent is not accurate with regard to G-d; one can only say that He is **not** nonexistent.[29] Neither mathematics, nor physics, nor biology, nor chemistry nor any other scientific discipline can help us in describing the essence of G-d. All we can hope for is to understand and prove what He is **not**. "For this reason a man sometimes labors for many years in order to understand some science and to gain true knowledge of its premises so that he should have certainty with regard to this science, whereas the only conclusion from this science in its entirety consists in our negating with reference to G-d some notion of which it has been learnt by means of a demonstration that it cannot possibly be ascribed to G-d" (Moreh 1:59, p. 138). The method one should use in the search for G-d is to "in every case in which the demonstration that a certain thing should be negated with reference to Him becomes clear to you, you become more perfect... It is from this point of view that one ought to come nearer to an apprehension of Him by means of investigation and research: namely in order that one should know the impossibility of everything that is impossible with reference to Him" (Moreh 1:59, p. 139). Isaac Franck describes this doctrine as follows:

> "Without knowing the nature or essence of G-d, we know that G-d exists because we know from our experience that things, contingent things exist. If *anything* exists, and

> obviously finite, contingent things, such as you and I, do exist, then it cannot be the case that *everything* that exists is *contingent*. To be contingent means that the existence of the contingent thing is *contingent upon, depends upon,* some *other thing* or being. But not *everything* can be dependent on something else, i.e., *not everything* can have been *caused by,* or brought into being by, something else. At least *one entity* must be in existence *by itself, independent of anything else,* must have come into being (if it did not exist eternally) by itself, must be *its own cause,* i.e. must *exist necessarily not contingently,* and its non - existence is inconceivable.[30] This *necessarily existent being* is what we call G-d... G-d is the absolute existent, to whom existence is so essential as to be His very essence. Accordingly His very existence is different from the existence of contingent things. The very term "existence" "can only be applied equivocally to His existence and to the existence of things other than He" (Moreh 1:35, p. 80). We *know that* G-d exists, that His absolute essential existence is radically different from our existence, and our knowledge *that He exists* is utterly independent of any affirmative attributes we may be tempted to ascribe to Him."[31]

This concept, Negative Attributes, is represented by G-d's name Yod Heh Vov Heh, which is explained as אהיה אשר אהיה, I am that I am.[32] "All the names of G-d, that are to be found in any of the books, derive from actions...The only exception is one name: namely, Yod, Heh, Vov, Heh" (Moreh 1:61, p. 147). A name that derives from action is a human mind's representation of what it perceives as G-d when contemplating nature. Such a description (or attribute) is circumscribed by human experience and does not describe G-d's real action which is beyond our comprehension. The name YHVH "no commonly accepted derivation of it is known and none other than He has a part in it....is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between G-d, and what is other then He... Generally speaking, the greatness of this name and the prohibition against pronouncing it are due to its being indicative of the essence of Him, in such a way that none of the created things is associated with Him in this indication" (Moreh 1:61, p. 148). This name is called שם המפורש, the articulated name, "this means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be blessed" (Moreh 1:61, p. 147). The essence of G-d is unknowable therefore the

name that represents that concept is unutterable; it is prohibited to express it except in very controlled situations.[33]

In describing G-d in a positive way, one cannot escape using one's imaginative faculty. In his introduction to Pirkei Avot (שמונה פרקים פ"א) Rambam explains that the imaginative faculty operates using a person's memory of past experiences and is therefore limited to human experience. In Moreh (1:73, p. 209) Rambam defines the consequent limitations one encounters when using the imaginative faculty. "For the imagination apprehends only that which is individual and composite as a whole, as it is apprehended by the senses; or compounds things that in their existence are separate, combining one with another; the whole being a body or the force of a body... In its apprehension, imagination is in no way able to hold itself aloof from matter, even if it turns a form into the extreme of abstraction.." The limitation of the imaginative faculty is its inability to apprehend something that is not matter.[34] When the search for G-d is based on His actions and their result, it is limited to the perception of human senses which perceive those actions and results. The internal process consists of comparing the result of the perceptions of the senses to past experiences of those same senses. One then tries to differentiate this apprehension from matter but is unable because there is no frame of reference outside matter - "For that reason there can be no critical examination in the imagination" (Moreh 1:73, p. 210). For critical examination one needs the intellect - the rational faculty that only man has. "For the intellect divides the composite things and differentiates their parts and makes abstractions of them, represents them to itself in their true reality and with their causes, and apprehends from one thing very many notions..."[35] To understand something outside an experiential frame of reference, one needs to "make abstractions and apprehend from one thing many notions." This is only possible when the rational faculty is used. The challenge is to keep the imaginative faculty from interfering as the rational faculty too uses it and bases its deductions on what the senses experience. As much as one tries to think beyond matter, there is only so far that a human can aspire. "...שאין כח בדעת האדם החי שהוא מחובר מגוף ונפש להשיג אמיתת דבר זה על בריו - man who is composed of body and soul cannot apprehend the complete truth of this matter [true essence of G-d]."[36] When man accepts the mind's limitation and realizes that apprehending the essence of G-d is

beyond a human's mental capacity, he resigns himself to perceiving the traces of G-d by defining what He is not. This is pure abstract thinking and past experience only plays a supportive role by giving a frame of reference to what He is **not**. It can be said that the question is never answered it is only defined. The more the imaginative faculty can be kept in the background, the more critical examination is possible.[37]

We can summarize by saying that the ultimate goal of man in his quest for G-d, is to develop his ability to understand G-d in a purely abstract manner without ascribing any positive attributes to Him. The process starts with man observing and contemplating G-d's actions in nature by using both the imaginative and rational faculties. Subsequently man develops his rational faculty to such a point that he can think in abstracts with the least interference of the imaginative faculty. Moshe was able to reach the ultimate level of perfection in which he kept the imaginative faculty completely in check. No other before him nor anyone after him reached this level nor will they.

Inspirational Prophecy

There are two kinds of prophecies. The one referred to here as Inspirational Prophecy is a state in which the prophet finds himself in as a result of his metaphysical contemplation and speculation, allowing him to tap into the overflow emanating from the Active Intellect - שכל הפועל.[38] All prophets experienced this type of prophecy including Moshe Rabbeinu at certain times. In explaining Moshe's request to G-d - הודיענו נא את דרכיך[39]- Rambam comments, "whereupon he [Moshe] received a favorable answer with regard to what he had asked for at first - namely, show me Thy ways. For he was told: I will make all my goodness pass before thee - אנכי אעביר כל טובי על פניך -... This dictum - all my goodness - כל טובי - alludes to the display to him of all existing things, of which it is said: - וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאוד - and G-d saw everything that He had made [the universe and its natural laws] and behold it was very good. By their display I mean that he will apprehend their nature and the way they are mutually connected so that he will know how He governs them in general and in detail...." (Moreh 1:54, p. 124). The process that allows for this type of prophecy consists of the prophet studying, contemplating and understanding the world he is surrounded by and

how it works, and is the exact same one used in the search for G-d through nature, described earlier. As he engages in this speculation and as he attains an understanding of nature and its First Cause, the prophet now feels an overwhelming[40] need to act on this insight and to emulate G-d's actions. Rambam explains the verse – "כי אם בזאת יתהלל המתהלל השכל וידוע אותי כי אני ה' עשה חסד משפט וצדקה בארץ כי באלה חפצתי נאם ה'"[41] – 'But only in this should one glory: in understanding and knowing Me. For I G-d act with kindness, justice, and equity in the world; for in these I delight, declares G-d.' – But he [ירמיהו] says that one should glory in the apprehension of Myself and in the knowledge of My attributes[42] by which he means His actions, as we made clear with reference to the verse: הוֹדיעני נא את דרכיך - Show me now Thy ways. In this verse he [ירמיהו] makes it clear to us that those actions that ought to be known and imitated, are: loving kindness, judgment and righteousness."[43] The actions that the prophet is compelled to engage in to imitate G-d which are a result of his contemplation cover a large spectrum. In Moreh 2:45 Rambam lists eleven levels of prophecy, beginning with two "steppingstones to prophecy" such as acts of extreme courage or inspiration, followed by nine others described as prophecy, ending at the highest level with the example of Avrohom Avinu at the Akedah. All these acts are the result of the prophet's overwhelming need to emulate G-d's actions. When Moshe asked to know the ways of G-d, his ultimate objective was: "ואדעך למען אמצא חן בעיניך וראה כי עמך הגוי הזה - That I may know Thee, to the end that I may find grace in Thy sight and consider that this nation is Thy people[44] - that is, a people for the government of which I need to perform actions that I must seek to make similar to Your actions in governing them" (Moreh 1:54, p. 125). The prophet's vision that results from his contemplation upon how the world is run by G-d, informs him on how to lead people so that his leadership meets the criteria of emulating G-d. For this type of prophecy the prophet employs a mixture of the rational and the imaginative faculties just like in his search for G-d through nature where he uses the same faculties. "Know that the true reality and essence of prophecy consists in its being an overflow overflowing from G-d, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect, toward the rational faculty in the first place and thereafter toward the imaginative faculty."[45] The interplay of the rational and imaginative

faculties allow for a certain kind of apprehension of G-d. That same interplay also lets the prophet interpret his vision and understand how to put it into practice.

This method for understanding G-d and the resulting prophecy are legitimate, necessary and central in Jewish thought. Rambam establishes the belief in this type of prophecy as dogma. It is the sixth of the thirteen central doctrines of Judaism he enumerates in his introduction to the tenth chapter of tractate Sanhedrin. However, because of the involvement of the imaginative faculty, this approach and the resulting prophecy cannot be used to transmit Laws and direct orders from G-d. When the imaginative faculty is used, the resulting vision is במשל וחידה - allegories and riddles, which require interpretation. The interpretation can be part of the vision or the prophet grasps it instinctively.[46] However the fact that interpretation is needed is reason enough for it not to be acceptable for the giving of the Torah. The Torah had to be given verbatim by G-d.

האומר שאין התורה מעם ה' אפילו פסוק אחד אפילו תיבה אחת אם אמר משה אמרו מפי עצמו הרי זה כופר בתורה - "If one says that the Torah was not received from G-d, if one says that Moshe himself [rather then repeating verbatim what G-d said to him] said one word or even one letter, that person denies the legitimacy of the Torah."[47] A prophecy that requires interpretation does not live up to this criteria as it cannot be deemed as received verbatim from G-d.[48] A different kind of prophecy is needed for Torah.

Direct Prophecy[49]

The prophecy required for receiving the Torah, or Moshe's Prophecy, will be referred to as Direct Prophecy. This prophecy does not require interpretation but is understood clearly by the prophet, is perceived by him as a direct order[50] and is a prime requirement for the giving of the Law. "After we have spoken of the essence of prophecy, have made known its true reality, and have made it clear that the prophecy of Moshe our Master is different from that of the others, we shall say that the call to the Law followed necessarily from that [Moshe's] type of prophecy alone" (Moreh 2:39, p. 378). Without Direct Prophecy, the Law (Torah) would be no more than a prophetic inspiration just like circumcision which was passed on by Avrohom to his children. "Even the commandment of circumcision

was laid upon him, his sons, and those who belonged to him, he circumcised only them and he did not use the form of prophetic call to exhort the people to do this" (Moreh 2:39, p. 379). For the Torah to be mandatory, it requires Direct Prophecy where the prophet who transmits the Law can say unequivocally, without the use of interpretation, that G-d has ordered him to tell the people to follow the specific law. Only Moshe Rabbeinu attained that type of prophecy and it was used in giving the Torah. Rambam in Yesodei Hatorah 7:6 lists four characteristics that differentiate this prophecy from the standard ones:

1. Moshe received the prophecy while standing and wide awake as opposed to the other prophets who received their prophecy either in a dream or a vision.

2. Moshe received his prophecy clearly without need for interpretation while other prophets received theirs in the form of an allegory or riddle.

3. All prophets became frightened, losing control of their bodies during prophecy while Moshe was in his normal state as a person talking with a friend.

4. Moshe was always ready for prophecy, while other prophets only at certain times.

These characteristics were the result of Moshe's unique ability to use only his rational faculty during prophecy. Rambam in his introduction to פרק חלק[51] lists Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy as the seventh dogma. He describes it as follows, ...ושהוא, עליו השלום, הפליג בהתעלות מן האנושות עד שהשיג המדרגה המלאכית, ונהיה במדרגת המלאכים, לא נשארה לו מחיצה[52] שלא קרעה ולא עכבו מעכב גופני, ולא פגמו שום חסרון, לא מעט ולא רב, **ונתבטלו ממנו כוחות הדמיוניים והחושיים בהשגותיו,** ונדהם כח המתעורר, **ונשאר שכל בלבד** - He [Moshe Rabbeinu], peace be on him, excelled in elevating himself above mankind until he reached the level of an angel, was in an angelic state, there was no further barrier that required his dismantling it, he was not limited by any physical impediment, he had no small nor large defect, <u>his imaginative and sensory faculties were not in effect during his apprehension, his instinctual faculty was dampened, he was purely rational.</u>" Moshe Rabbeinu conquered his physical urges to the point that he was considered an angel, thus completely eliminating the involvement of the imaginative faculty in his metaphysical speculation and consequently in his prophecy. The imaginative faculty, as discussed

earlier, operates using the memory of sensory experiences. Only when a person no longer is governed by those senses can he overcome and repress his imaginative faculty, which is what Moshe was able to accomplish. It is only after Moshe Rabbeinu perfected himself by keeping his imaginative faculty in check during his metaphysical contemplation, that he was able to experience Direct Prophecy and receive the Torah verbatim. Moshe was able to achieve this as he had overcome his physical needs and became שכל בלבד. Just like understanding Negative Attributes requires a way of thinking that utilizes only the rational faculty without the interference of the imaginative, so is Direct Prophecy completely independent of the imaginative faculty. Just as in understanding Negative Attributes Moshe surpassed all other humans, so was he unique in acquiring Direct Prophecy.

Prophecy According to Rambam

We can now clearly see that Rambam connects very intimately Knowledge of G-d and Prophecy. Prophecy is a direct result of metaphysical speculation, not a miraculous event. It is something that all humans should aspire to and it is a natural ability that G-d gave man when he was created. In Mishne Torah[53] Rambam introduces the chapter that deals with prophecy - מיסודי הדת **לידע** שהאל מנבא את בני האדם - It is a foundation of the religion **to know** that the Deity gives prophecy to mankind. Rambam tells us first that it is an obligation for a man of religion not only to believe in prophecy but to know and understand its processes - לידע - to know. He then tells us that it is an ability that all mankind has - **את בני האדם** - not just the Jewish people. According to Rambam man acquires prophecy in the following manner:

"אדם[54] שהוא ממולא בכל המדות האלו ...כשיכנס לפרדס וימשך באותן הענינות הגדולים הרחוקים ...אלא דעתו תמיד פנויה למעלה קשורה תחת הכסא להבין באותן הצורות הקדושות הטהורות ומסתכל בחכמתו של הקב"ה כולה מצורה ראשונה עד טבור הארץ ויודע מהם גדלו, **מיד** רוח הקודש שורה עליו -

A person who has perfected himself...when he enters the orchard (metaphor for the study of metaphysics) and gets involved in all these great and distant issues... and his mind is always turned upwards, bound under the Throne[55] to speculate in those holy and pure forms and he contemplates in G-d's wisdom from the first form

to the center of the earth and through them recognizes His grandeur, **at once** the spirit from the holy[56] descends upon him."[57]

Prophecy is the natural result of metaphysical speculation. A person starts by analyzing his surroundings and follows the analysis until he acquires an insight regarding the First Cause and His actions. This apprehension of G-d through positive attributes may[58] result in Inspirational Prophecy where both, the apprehension and the prophecy, are dependent and involve the imaginative faculty. Prophecy comes about when the prophet understands the way the world is run and feels an overwhelming need to act in ways that are complementary to what he perceives as G-d's will. As the prophet advances in his speculation, he comes to an understanding that the essence of G-d can only be known as what He is not, or Negative Attributes. As he perfects this understanding of G-d, the prophet should theoretically be able to reach Moshe's level of understanding and experience Direct Prophecy. I say theoretically because the Torah informs us that it will never happen - ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה [59]- And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moshe.

Conclusion

According to Rambam, knowledge of G-d and prophecy are closely linked and depend on each other. To arrive at a knowledge of G-d, man starts by acquiring a basic knowledge of the sciences so that he can understand the world he lives in. This leads him to metaphysics, as he tries to understand how the universe came to exist. He then starts to develop a basic understanding of G-d as the First Cause. As more knowledge and understanding is acquired, his thinking becomes more sophisticated. Eventually the level of Avrohom and the other prophets is reached and can be surpassed with the understanding of Negative Attributes. As long as perfection is not reached, the imaginative faculty still plays a part and only Inspirational Prophecy is possible. As man continues with the process of searching to understand G-d beyond Positive Attributes he can reach the ultimate level of understanding G-d through Negative Attributes. Once perfected, this understanding does not allow for the involvement of the imaginative faculty. Having reached that perfect level of understanding, man can now experience Direct Prophecy without the involvement of the imaginative faculty. Such perfection was acquired

only by Moshe Rabbeinu and the Torah predicts that no one else will ever acquire it again. The legitimacy of the Torah is thus established and no changes to it are possible.[60] ☙

NOTES

1. I thank R. Benzion Buchman, friend, Rebbe and Chaver for listening to me while I developed my arguments, reading, commenting and editing the early version, keeping me focused and more important encouraging me to write.

2. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:35 p. 367. Shlomo Pines, Edition 2 volumes, The University of Chicago Press, henceforth, Moreh. All citations are from this Edition with my emendations for style.

3. For a discussion of the timing of this experience see: רמב"ן שמות ל"ג ז', פי' הרד"ל על פדר"א פרק מ"ו (דף ק"ט ע"ב הוצ" ורשא), אדרת אליהוּ שמות ל"ג ז'.

4. הל' יסוֹה"ת פ"ז ה"ו

5. Rambam is referring to the revolution of the planets and stars as observed in the sky.

6. הל' ע"ז פ"א ה"ג

7. Moreh 2:1, p. 243. Aristotelian science understood that the four basic elements, mixed in different combinations and proportions, bring about the generation of matter. Separation of matter into its components and returning the elements to their original state brings about corruption (destruction) of that matter. Motion is what causes these changes. Motion induced by the influence of the movement of the spheres causes the combination of the basic elements, or generation of matter. Corruption is a result of a yearning of each element to return to its natural place determined by what we call its mass, earth being the heaviest and fire the lightest. Thus motion is the key factor in generation and corruption. There must therefore be something that caused the first motion of the spheres. That is the First Cause. The first 12 chapters of the second part of Moreh deal with the issue of First Cause or G-d's existence in this context.

8. An attribute is a term man uses to describe G-d, a being he only knows exists because he perceives results of His acts. When there is a strong storm for example, and as a result of his meditation man realizes that it is the result of the laws of nature G-d put into the world at the time of creation, man describes G-d as powerful (גבוֹר).

9. That is why El is used in the context of strong ones see Rashi שמות ט"ו י"א. Elohim is used in the context of judges and rulers see Moreh 1:2.

10. שמות ו' ג'

11. As opposed to a proper name.

12. See מלות ההגיון י"ל מאגנס, האוניברסיטה העברית תשמ"ז, שער ט' for a presentation.

13. See R. Qafih's translation note 1 on this chapter. Here I have modified Pines translation to conform to R. Qafih's understanding.

14. I have used the translation proposed by Prof Schwartz in note 15 to the introduction in his translation of the Moreh.

15. See Moreh Introduction page 6 for an interesting description of such a schism.

16. הל' ע"ז פ"א ה"ג

17. Moreh 1:57, p. 133, "Similarly when we say one, the meaning is that He has no equal and not that the notion of oneness attaches to His essence". Thus unique.

18. Rabbeinu Bahya in his חובת הלבבות שער היחוד פרק י' presents the same idea.

19. שמות ג' ו'

20. בראשית י"ח כ"ב

21. The beginning of the verse is: "I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Avrohom, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yakov." As we saw earlier their concept of G-d is through nature and it is in that context that Moshe did not allow himself to arrive at conclusions.

22. An interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics. Webster dictionary

23. הל' ע"ז פ"א ה"ג

24. שמות ג' י"ג

25. I understand this to refer to the tribe of Levi, see הל' ע"ז א' ג'.

26. The plain reading of this text would indicate that Rambam holds that people did not know that G-d existed. However in I, 36 he writes, "Now you know that whoever performs idolatrous worship does not do it on the assumption that there is no deity except the idol...Rather it is worshipped in respect of it being an image of a thing that is an intermediary between ourselves and G-d'. This seems to indicate that the First Cause was always

known and accepted. I therefore read it here as meaning having an erroneous concept of G-d. Also see הל' ע"ז פ"א.

27. "their" refers to the ones who reached the utmost limit of speculation. It would therefore imply that the only understanding of G-d even for the few that did have it, was through nature and tainted by an inability to separate themselves from the perception of their senses. Although Avrohom had reached a high level of understanding see Moreh 3:29 "it became clear to him [Avrohom] that there is a separate deity that is neither a body nor a force in a body," he had not attained intellectual perfection to understand G-d without the use of the imaginative faculty that depends on the perception of the senses which, as we will see, is the root of positive attributes.

28. Moreh, introduction to part two, page 238.

29. Shaddai is a similar concept as we saw earlier. It describes G-d as an independent existent. However it meets the criteria of a positive attribute "an essence possessing attributes." In our "fantasy" we see an essence that is superior and of the highest rank because of its independence. YHVH on the other hand is an expression of an absolute being totally outside time and space. When something is outside time and space, the term "existent" is just a meaningless expression (amphibolous) for lack of another.

30. See Moreh 2:1 for a lengthy discussion of this argument.

31. Isaac Franck, *Maimonides and Aquinas on Man's Knowledge of G-d. in Maimonides; A Collection of Critical Essays*, Joseph A. Bujis, Ed. Univ. of Notre Dame Press 1998.

32. At the end of Moreh 1:62, p. 152 Rambam states: "It behooves us to speak of this name [the articulated name - שם המפורש], which is, I am that I am..."

33. ברכת כהנים וכהן גדול ביוהכ"פ

34. See Shlomo Pines - *The Limitations of Human Knowledge - in Maimonides*, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, Joseph A. Bujis Ed.

35. This description is exactly the type of thinking required in dealing with the learning of Torah as any student of Gemara knows.

36. הלכות יסודה"ת פ"א ה"י

37. For a detailed description of this process see Moreh 3:51 - section starting, "A call for attention".

38. For a very succinct description of Active Intellect see note 10 to Moreh 1:37 in Prof. Schwartz's translation. It is a concept found in Alfarabi, one of the Muslim Aristotelians that Rambam used. One of its functions is to allow for the prophet to "receive" information via an "overflow" from it.

39. שמות ל"ג, י"ג

40. Moreh 2:37, p. 375 "The nature of this matter makes it necessary for someone to whom this additional measure of overflow has come, to address a call to people, regardless of whether that call is listened to or not, and even if he, as a result thereof, is harmed in his body."

41. ירמיהו ט' כ"ג.

42. It is noteworthy that Rambam explains the word השכל as apprehension of G-d and the word ידוע as knowing G-d's attributes. For the **real** apprehension of G-d one must use only the rational faculty - שכל - as discussed above.

43. In Moreh 3:54 p. 637, note that צדקה ומשפט - righteousness and judgment are the same actions G-d said that Avrohom would instruct his children to follow. See Breishis 18:19 and Moreh 2:39.

44. שמות ל"ג,י"ג

45. Moreh 2:36, p. 369. See Jose Faur, *Homo Mysticus*, pp. 69-79 for an interesting discussion on the process.

46. See Moreh 2:43.

47. הל' תשובה פ"ג ה"ח

48. The need for interpretation personalizes the prophecy. The prophet's personality and state at the time of prophecy is involved in the interpretation of the prophecy. That probably is the meaning of the Rabbis סיגנון אחד עולה לכמה נביאים ואין שני נביאים מתנבאים בסגנון אחד - סנהדרין פ"ט. In other words, the same prophecy is understood by each prophet according to his interpretation. This is therefore a far cry from verbatim repetition which is a requirement for Torah.

49. R. Qafih and Prof. Schwartz translate the prophecy I refer to here as, קריאה נבואית, Pines - prophetic call.

50. Most of the mitzvoth start with צו, דבר, אמור.

51. הקדמות הרמב"ם מהדורת יצחק שילת דף קמ"ב, משנה עם פי' המשנה מהדורת הרב קפאח חלק ניזיקין דף קמ"ב

52. For an explanation see שמנה פרקים פרק ז'.

53. הל' יסוה"ת פ"ז ה"א

54. Note that Rambam is very careful in his use of the word אדם as opposed to ישראל. In the first 4 chapters of Yesodei Hatorah, where he discusses knowledge of physics and metaphysics for acquiring knowledge of G-d, he uses אדם only. בית ישראל appears only in chapter 5 when dealing with the commandment of sanctifying G-d's name. Knowledge of G-d and prophecy are universal.

55. For the meaning of Throne see Moreh 1:9, "...the heaven indicates My existence, grandeur, and power, as a throne indicates the greatness of the individual who is considered worthy of it."

56. For an interesting and novel understanding of רוח הקודש see, *Homo Mysticus* by Jose Faur page 74, and for the word פרדס see page 35.

57. הל' יסוה"ת פ"ז ה"א.

58. I use the word, "may" intentionally. There is no prophecy unless there is intellectual and behavioral preparation followed by metaphysical speculation. However, not all successful preparation and metaphysical speculation results in prophecy. See Moreh 2:32 - the third opinion.

59. דברים ל"ד י'.

60. The Torah ends with the following statement:

ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו ה' פנים אל פנים לכל האותות והמופתים אשר שלחו ה' לעשות בארץ מצרים לפרעה ולכל עבדיו ולכל ארצו ולכל היד החזקה ולכל המורא הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל.

Rambam comments on this statement in Moreh 2:35, p. 368 - " For here it establishes a connection and a tie between the two notions, namely, that there will not arise either someone who will have an apprehension similar to his or one who will perform actions similar to his." There is a connection between Moshe's apprehension of G-d and his miracles. Apparently Moshe's ability to perform the necessary miracles was dependent on the same conditions that were required for Direct Prophecy. If my thesis is correct, his miracles were performed without the interference of the imaginative faculty. The significance of this requires further study and investigation.