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## THE HEBRAIC AUDITORY LOGIC AND THE REVIVAL OF PROPHECY

Rabbi David Cohen (1887-1972), known as “the Nazir,” was a talmudist, philosopher, and kabbalist. A close disciple of the late Chief Rabbi Abraham I. Kook, he dedicated many years to editing his master’s *Orot HaKodesh* and neglected his own writings, which covered the entire sphere of Jewish learning. In 1970, he published the first volume of his *magnum opus*, *Kol HaNevuah—HaHigayon Halvri HaShim’i*, in which he presented his doctrine that is “destined to revolutionize Hebraic knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

The Nazir did not fully explicate his philosophic outlook. The foundations of his doctrine were set forth in an article published in 1920 in a Swiss Jewish annual,<sup>2</sup> and, while the theory is crystallized in *Kol HaNevuah*, many of its principles are elucidated only in the unpublished second part of the book. Based on *Kol HaNevuah* and various manuscripts which deal with logic, philosophy and kabbala, this article will briefly describe the main elements of his unique method, “The Hebraic Auditory Logic.”

### I.

The ultimate aim of the doctrine is “the renewal of prophecy,” uncovering the original Hebraic wisdom embodied in prophecy and returning to its elements. In addition to the usual conception of prophecy as an experience containing a social or moral message, the Nazir understood prophecy to be a methodological process that provides a novel approach to the solution of ontological and epistemological problems. This process is both cognitive and intellectual, that is, it is characterized by a dynamic intellectualism in which the elements of the Hebraic wisdom are disclosed to the prophet. The Hebraic Auditory Logic is the vehicle, the *organon*, to attain wisdom through the spiritual forms, symbols, and allusions revealed to the prophet.

The adjective “auditory” (*shim’i*, from the root, *shema*, to hear) denotes a method for discovering the original Hebraic wisdom. *Shim’iyut* (a derivative of *shema*), audition, has two connotations. It denotes profound reflection, as exemplified in the verse, “Hear (*Shema*) O Israel, the Lord our God,

the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). The verse implies that listening with the inner ear leads to true recognition of God and His unity, “the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”<sup>3</sup> *Shim’iyut* is also related to the meaning given this term in the Jewish philosophical literature of the Middle Ages: *Mitzvot shim’iyot* are divine precepts which man cannot understand and must “blindly” obey (in contrast to precepts which human reason deems necessary). Although the Nazir rejected this narrow meaning of *shim’iyut*,<sup>4</sup> the dialectic force of his presentation produces the following result. In contrast to the Western philosopher who arrives at his world outlook through contemplation, the Jew “audits” heteronomous concepts (prophetic images, or as will be explained, kabbalistic symbols) that lead him to the truth.

The Auditory Logic is also described as “Hebraic.” In contrast to formal logic’s use of syllogisms containing premises which imply the conclusion, the Hebraic logic innovates laws by using the *analogic* reasoning of the exegetic principles used to interpret the Torah. New laws are learned, for example, by the *gezera shava*; from the similarity of words or phrases occurring in two passages it is inferred that what is expressed in the one applies also to the other, even though the words or phrases appear in totally unrelated contexts. The Nazir’s bold innovation is his contention that this analogic reasoning applies not only to the pragmatic realm of halakha, but also to metaphysics.

How could the Nazir apply juristic principles of inference to metaphysics? The answer lies in the nature of the original Hebraic wisdom. This wisdom is unitive, and similar to the unification principle or “all-embracing vision” found in Rav Kook’s writings, the Nazir posited that an inner unity pervades the various Torah disciplines of halakha and philosophy, ethics and logic, speculation and action.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the halakhic hermeneutic principles may also be used in metaphysics.

Prophecy no longer exists among the Jewish people. How then, can one prophesy today? The Nazir claimed that there still exists an extension of prophecy; the kabbala.<sup>6</sup> While in one of his works Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik sees prayer as the continuation of prophecy,<sup>7</sup> the Nazir saw the kabbala as “a remnant” of prophecy. A new ramified esoteric system of symbols and concepts that provide access to the divine, replaces the prophetic visions. One delves into the substratum, the principles of kabbala, and through the auditory method and analogical reasoning embodied in the exegetic principles he uncovers the sparks of the original Hebraic wisdom and is transported into the realm of the divine, a realm which philosophy throughout the ages was unable to reach.

Erudite in philosophy, the Nazir asserted that the kabbala answers the fundamental questions left unanswered by philosophy. What is more, at the beginning of the historic and conceptual survey of the kabbalah in *Kol HaNevua*<sup>8</sup> he cited *Keter Rosh* written by the students of the Vilna Gaon, “Kabbalistic wisdom begins where philosophy ends.”<sup>9</sup> Kabbala is,

in a certain respect, both the aim of philosophy and the springboard to attain prophecy, at least as far as contemporary conditions permit. Incidentally, we may note that because the Nazir perceived the kabbala as the basis of prophecy, his active search for prophecy included deep study of the kabbala and using the methods it advocates, especially seclusion, to acquire this knowledge. His immersion in kabbalistic studies went hand in hand with his investigation of the analogic reasoning found in the halakha, especially in the Talmudic exegetic principles.

The Nazir singled out the *sefira* of *bina* (understanding) from the vast array of kabbalistic symbols to express his ideas.<sup>10</sup> Evidently, his philosophic studies led independently to the basic elements of the theory; only afterwards did *bina* become the nexus.<sup>11</sup> In general, *bina* is understood to join the higher *sefirot* (*keter*, *hokhma*) to the lower ones, and has a special link to *malkhut*, the tenth *sefira* that mediates between the upper and lower worlds. *Bina* is known as “the palace” or “edifice,” for in it begins the individuation of the potentiality of creation concentrated in “the point” of *hokhma*. Accordingly, the dynamic, creative powers are attributed to *bina*. This outlook corresponds to one of the Nazir’s primary motives; the search for the elements of existence, for the inner mechanism moving the laws of nature and the universe.

However, *bina* is related to another symbolic scheme, which, it seems, is more suited to his purposes. Kabbala attributes unique qualities to the Hebrew language: it is the language by which the world was created; the letters of the Torah combine to spell the names of God; and so on. In particular, the *sefirot* are described as representing the process of speech. In this scheme, *bina* is the stage where the inner voice that is the root of the outer words (the seven lower *sefirot*) exists, yet is concealed. Investigation of the holy tongue leads to hearing the inner voice that sustains the universal law and basic elements of creation. Therefore the Hebrew language is also an object of the Auditory Logic which analogically analyzes its roots and etymologies.

The emphasis on the importance of esoteric wisdom is evidently due to Rav Kook’s influence on his disciple. One of Rav Kook’s major aims, if not the primary one, was to increase study of the kabbala in the era of the return to Zion. The unique qualities of *Eretz Yisrael* correspond to the character of the inner wisdom: “In *Eretz Yisrael*, the spiritual spring of the inner holiness which is the life light of the soul of *Kenesset Yisrael*, is self sustaining. It only requires assistance from practical and intellectual human endeavor for its perfection.”<sup>12</sup> Study of kabbala is the remedy for the moral decline of humanity,<sup>13</sup> and parallel to the recent popularization of science and intellectual advancement among the masses, Rav Kook considered the time ripe for disseminating esoteric wisdom among various sectors of the populace.<sup>14</sup>

The Nazir sought to initiate the renewal of the prophetic spirit “in

the political renewal in our Holy Land.”<sup>15</sup> To obtain this goal he incorporated Rav Kook’s stress on mystical studies into his doctrine. The original Hebraic wisdom disappeared with the cessation of prophecy; therefore, if it can be re-discovered through the analogic study of the kabbala and its symbols, prophecy will return. The Nazir was not motivated by amorphous experiential impulses, he rather sought to fulfill his yearnings for the revival of prophecy by designing a systematic approach to attain it. Prophecy is no longer seen as the sole possession of an elite group, but as the inheritance of the entire nation; anyone, so it would seem, can attain prophecy by following the methodological and intellectual path set forth by the Nazir. This utopian vision is alluded to in the familiar dictum, “If they are not prophets, they are sons of prophets” (*Pesahim* 66a) cited at the end of the introduction to *Kol HaNevua*.<sup>16</sup>

Yes, the Nazir held high expectations for his logical method which corresponds to the “acoustic”-analogic content of all manifestations of Hebraic wisdom: the prophetic parables and metaphors; the halakha, especially the Talmudic exegetic principles; Jewish philosophy, perceived as an intellectual commentary to prophecy; and the kabbalistic symbolism. He was convinced that the Hebraic Auditory Logic could serve as the foundation of a new Jewish religious philosophy that would perpetuate the unique continuity of Jewish religious thought throughout the ages. It could provide access to the halakhic hermeneutic principles and thereby increase proficiency in Talmudic studies and renew Israel’s spirit.<sup>17</sup>

## II.

Editing, like translation, is in many respects an interpretation. This is especially true of the Nazir’s editing of Rav Kook’s *Orot HaKodesh*, which is a systematic rather than a chronological presentation of Rav Kook’s spontaneous writings. The composition dates of hundreds of individual sheets were omitted before their arrangement into a full-fledged philosophic system. The Nazir kept a diary, excerpts of which were published in *Nezir Ehav, A Book of Essays and Articles in Memory of Rabbi David Cohen* (Jerusalem: 1977). In entries written in 1929 or thereabouts, we find several paragraphs about the editing of *Orot HaKodesh* which clearly indicate that the Nazir considered himself a partner and, to a certain extent, creator of the work, an allegation reinforced by the fact that “the Rav did not participate in the editing of his *Orot Hakodesh*.”<sup>18</sup>

The words are the words of the Rav, written in eight diary-like notebooks, scattered about without a connecting thread. They were selected, pieced together, covered with flesh and skin, and became one. They came to life as spirit and soul were blown into them. . . . The construction followed a blueprint designed by the spirit and soul of the editor-architect. It

is a magnificent palace, splendid in holiness. My uncle, Rabbi Avraham HaKohen, spoke to the Rav, our master, about the editing and applied to it the Talmudic saying 'The craftsman acquires possession by improving the utensil' (*Bava Kama* 98b). Indeed, I am a partner in the creation, but the work was done with such modesty that the reader thinks that before him is a complete work produced by its great creator, the Rav. . . . Were I not afraid, I would dare to say that the editing, like the composition, was inspired by the Heavenly Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

No particulars regarding the sequence of the chapters of *Orot HaKodesh* are found in the memoirs. Yet, based on the Nazir's rapturous involvement and dedicated conceptual systematization of the material, we may conjecture that the arrangement of *Orot HaKodesh* reflects the editor's personal outlook. The Nazir's analogic orientation is perceptible in the overall structure, the chapter headings, and the words he emphasized in *Orot HaKodesh*.<sup>20</sup> This contention is true for the entire work and will be illustrated in the following general survey of the first section of *Orot HaKodesh*, titled *Hokhmat HaKodesh*,<sup>21</sup> in which Rav Kook's conception of the holiness that unifies the diverse disciplines of Judaism is presented with an emphasis on the analogic method which characterizes those disciplines.

The first of seven orders (subsections), *Hokhmat haEmet HaKolelet*, is composed of chapters that portray the excellence of the esoteric wisdom, a wisdom preeminent in the eyes of the Nazir for it embodies the theosophic attainment of analogic thought. The next order, *Ihud haNistar v'haNigleh*, asserts that the inner wisdom (*nistar*) is concealed in the legal corpus of the halakha (*nigleh*). The sequential flow of the chapters moves from the unity of halakha with prophecy and aggada to the disclosure of the inner content of the halakha, a reflection of the Nazir's association of the exegetic principles with analogical reasoning. The third and fourth orders, *Ihud haKelalut v'haPeratut* and *Ihud Madda haKodesh v'haHol*, discuss, respectively, the analogic reciprocal relationship between the specific and the general and between holy and secular knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

The fifth, sixth, and seventh orders, *Or haRazim*, *Keshev haYihudim*, *Hitgalut Or haKodesh*, are the upper echelons of the analogic thought. The fifth order presents the kabbalistic approach to manifest reality where analogic reasoning becomes a method for comprehending the universe. This line of thought is continued in the sixth order which leads to the analogic basis of the Hebrew language, to the *yihudim* which are tightly bound to the letters of the alphabet and their secret meanings. The section ends with the revelation of prophecy. Here the Nazir advances his eschatological hope that prophecy will return when the characteristic Hebraic analogic reasoning is fully disclosed.<sup>23</sup>

The question generated by this synopsis—to what extent can *Orot HaKodesh*, in its present format, be considered the sole creation of Rav Kook—will be the subject of a separate study.

In this article we have briefly presented the main elements of "The Hebraic Auditory Logic." A complete evaluation of the doctrine will be possible only after the publication of the Nazir's numerous manuscripts. Nevertheless, from this analysis it is apparent that we have here an original thesis worthy of consideration and further investigation.

NOTES

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1. Rabbi David Cohen, *Kol HaNevua* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1970), p. 10 (*hakdama*).
2. Rabbi David Cohen, "Die Struktur der Jüdischen Religionsphilosophie," *Jüdische Jahrbuch für die Schweiz* (Basel: 1919/1920), pp. 88-111.
3. *Kol HaNevua*, p. 25.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.
6. See Dov Schwartz, "Mavo le Manginot HaTikunim," *BeShemen Ra'anani: Sefer Zikaron leRav Shalom Natan Ra'anani Kook*, vol. 1, Ben Zion Shapiro ed. (Jerusalem: Makhon HaRatziah, 1990), p. 372.
7. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, 7:2, Summer 1965, p. 36.
8. *Kol HaNevua*, p. 135.
9. The kabbala is worthy of this description because of the emphasis it places on Hebrew as the holy tongue. The centrality of the holy tongue in the kabbalistic literature is well known, beginning with the *Heikhalot* and *Merkava* literature, *Sefer Yetzira*, and the speculative emphasis found in the works of Rabbi Isaac the Blind and thereafter. In this respect, the Nazir can definitely be considered as continuing the traditional emphasis on the language.
10. See Schwartz, "Mavo l'Manginot HaTikunim," pp. 173-76.
11. There is one exception. In the introduction to *Kol HaNevua* (p. 9), he wrote: "I discovered it afterwards in the Sefirotic esoteric wisdom in *Sha'are Ora* (*Sha'ar 10, Keter*): This *sefira* is termed *ayin* (naught) in the Torah. You must know, that because of the total obscurity of the *sefira* of *keter* and its concealment from all creatures, no one can contemplate it, except by listening with the ear." Quite possibly the Nazir reached this conclusion at the end of his life during the editing of *Kol HaNevua*, the only consolidated work he published.
12. Rabbi Abraham I. Kook, *Orot HaKodesh I* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1963), p. 134.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 7. See Dov Schwartz, "HaRe'iya veHaNazir," *Barkai, Bit'ona Rabbani Merkazi*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: World Movement of the Mizrahi-HaPoel Hamizrahi in conjunction with the Federation of the Poel Hamizrahi in Eretz Yisrael, (1989), pp. 216-21.
15. *Kol HaNevua*, p. 11. See also p. 5.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 7 (*rosh davar*).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 10 (*hakdama*), 5-7 (*rosh davar*), 318.
18. *Nezir Ehav* (Jerusalem: Nezer David, 1977), p. 302.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 298-9.
20. See Dov Schwartz, "Arikha Mul Yetzira," *Da'at*, vol. 24 (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1990), pp. 87-92.
21. *Orot HaKodesh I*, pp. 1-158.
22. Evidently, *madda hahol* refers to natural perception (see especially ch. 51-5), and is the basis of introspection which is rooted in analogic thought.
23. It is interesting to note that every section of *Orot HaKodesh* concludes with an eschatological tone that corresponds to the editor's messianic aspirations.