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**A.A.R.P.**

**Australian Association for the Rational Study of Prophecy.**

**MAIMONIDES.**

**SELECTIONS ON**

**PROPHETIC COGNITION.**

**(ANNOTATED)**

**By**

**Morry Lee.**



**Summary.**

***The Bases for a Cognitive Approach to the Hebrew Prophets.***

The following selections have been chosen because Maimonides perhaps explains the nature of the Hebrew Prophets the best.[[1]](#footnote-1) Differing from Maimonides, a cognitive approach to the ancient Hebrew prophets presumes neither divine inspiration nor infallibility. The cognitive bases number two; 1) the Hebrew scriptures are *Unified[[2]](#footnote-2) and* 2) *Understandable*.[[3]](#footnote-3) These are the same two criteria underpinning normative cognitive science. First Century Preterism[[4]](#footnote-4) takes a cognitive and inductive approach to saving the appearances of the scriptures. (ie Cognition of the data is by observation and logical coherence within its own semantic unity.) More simply, a cognitive approach begins with observation of the premises, and formal inference to a logical conclusion that necessarily follows.

**GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED.**

**COGNITIVE SELECTIONS FROM PART II.**

**CHAPTERS XXXVI – CH XLV**

Prophecy Directed to the Imagination via Rational Faculty

*Prophecy operating through the medium of the rational faculty refines the imagination.*

**“PROPHECY IS, in truth and reality,** an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty; it is the highest degree and greatest perfection man can attain; it consists in the most perfect development of the imaginative faculty.”

Dreams as the Unripe Fruit of Prophecy

*Prophetic visions and dreams use the same medium of imagination.*

**PART OF the function of the imaginative faculty is,** as you well know, to retain impressions by the senses, to combine them, and chiefly to form images. The principal and highest function is performed when the senses are at rest and pause in their action, for then it receives, to some extent, divine inspiration in the measure as it is predisposed for this influence. This is the nature of those dreams which prove true, and also of prophecy, the difference being one of quantity, not of quality. Thus our Sages say, that *dream is the sixtieth part of prophecy* ; and no such comparison could be made between two things of different kinds, for we cannot say the perfection of man is so many times the perfection of a horse. In *Bereshit Rabba (*sect, xvii.) the following saying of our Sages occurs, *" Dream is the nobelet (Heb. the unripe fruit) of prophecy."* This is an excellent comparison, for the unripe fruit (*nobelet*) is really the fruit to some extent, only it has fallen from the tree before it was fully developed and ripe. In a similar manner the action of the imaginative faculty during sleep is the same as at the time when it receives a prophecy, only in the first case it is not fully developed, and has not yet reached its highest degree.”

Qualifications for a Prophet

*A higher consciousness of selfless-thoughts, detachment from the senses, and intellectual purpose.*

**" IF THERE BE[qualified] *among you a prophet, I, the Lord, will make myself known unto him in a vision, in a dream will I speak to him "*** (Num. xii. 6). Here the Lord tells us what the real essence of prophecy is, that it is a perfection acquired in a dream or in a vision (the original *mareh* is a noun derived from the verb *raah*); the imaginative faculty acquires such an efficiency in its action that it sees the thing as if it came from without, and perceives it as if through the medium of bodily senses. These two modes of prophecy, vision and dream, include all its different degrees. It is a well-known fact that the thing which engages greatly and earnestly man's attention whilst he is awake and in the full possession of his senses forms during his sleep the object of the action of his imaginative faculty. Imagination is then only influenced by the intellect in so far as it is predisposed for such influence. It would be quite useless to illustrate this by a simile, or to explain it fully, as it is clear, and everyone knows it. It is like the action of the senses, the existence of which no person with common sense would ever deny. After these introductory remarks you will understand that a person must satisfy the following conditions before he can become a prophet:

* The substance of the brain must from the very beginning be in the most perfect condition as regards purity of matter, composition of its different parts, size and position ;
* no part of his body must suffer from ill-health ;
* he must in addition have studied and acquired wisdom, so that his rational faculty passes from a state of potentiality to that of actuality ;
* his intellect must be as developed and perfect as human intellect can be ; his passions pure and equally balanced ;
* all his desires must aim at obtaining a knowledge of the hidden laws and causes that are in force in the Universe ;
* his thoughts must be engaged in lofty matters ; his attention directed to the knowledge of God, the consideration of His works, and of that which he must believe in this respect.
* There must be an absence of the lower desires and appetites, of the seeking after pleasure in eating, drinking, and co-habitation ; and, in short, every pleasure connected with the sense of touch. (Aristotle correctly says that this sense is a disgrace to us, since we possess it only in virtue of our being animals; and it does not include any specifically human element, whilst enjoyments connected with other senses, as smell, hearing, and sight, though likewise of a material nature, may some-times include [intellectual] pleasure, appealing to man as man, according to Aristotle.)
* It is further necessary to suppress every thought or desire for unreal power and dominion; that is to say, for victory, increase of followers, acquisition of honor, and service from the people without any ulterior object… and his thought will only be directed to such general principles as would tend to improve the social relations between man and man.

We have thus described three kinds of perfection: mental perfection acquired by training, perfection of the natural constitution of the imaginative faculty, and moral perfection produced by the suppression of every thought of bodily pleasures, and of every kind of foolish or evil ambition.

**CHAPTER XXXVII**

Both Logical and Imaginative Faculties Involved

*Intellectual condition of prophets combined both logical and imaginative faculties.*

**IT IS NECESSARY to consider the nature** of the divine influence which enables us to think, and gives us the various degrees of intelligence. For this influence may reach a person only in a small measure, and in exactly the same proportion would then be his intellectual condition, whilst it may reach another person in such a measure that, in addition to his own perfection, he can be the means of perfection for others.

There are some beings so perfect that they can govern other beings, but there are also beings that are only perfect in so far as they can govern themselves and cannot influence other beings. In some cases the influence of the [Active] Intellect reaches only the logical and not the imaginative faculty , either on account of the insufficiency of that influence, or on account of a defect in the constitution of the imaginative faculty, and the consequent inability of the latter to receive that influence : this is the condition of wise men or philosophers. If, however, the imaginative faculty is naturally in the most perfect condition, this influence may, as has been explained by us and by other philosophers, reach both his logical and his imaginative faculties: this is the case with prophets.

Prophets Compelled by the Force of their Vision to Prophesy

*Personal conviction in a higher power greater than mere self-will.*

**THUS WE FIND THE** prophets that did not leave off speaking to the people until they were slain ; it is this divine influence that moves them, that does not allow them to rest in any way, though they might bring upon themselves great evils by their action. E.g., when Jeremiah was despised, like other teachers and scholars of his age, he could not, though he desired it, withhold his prophecy, or cease from reminding the people of the truths which they rejected. Comp. ***" For the Word of the Lord was unto me a reproach and a mocking all day, and I said, I will not mention it, nor will I again speak in His name ; but it was in mine heart as a burning fire, enclosed in my bones, and I was wearied to keep it, and did not prevail "***(Jer. xx. 8, 9). This is also the meaning of the words of another prophet,***" The Lord God hath spoken, who shall not prophesy ? "*** (Amos iii. 8) Note it.

**CHAPTER XXXVIII**

Courage Peculiar to Persons as Energy in Boys

*Prophets predisposed toward divine mission by their own nature and volition.*

**EVERY MAN possesses a certain amount of courage**, otherwise he would not stir to remove anything that might injure him. This psychical force seems to me analogous to the physical force of repulsion. Energy varies like all other forces, being great in one case and small in another. There are therefore, people who attack a lion, whilst others run away at the sight of a mouse. One attacks a whole army and fights, another is frightened and terrified by the threat of a woman. This courage requires that there be in a man's constitution a certain disposition for it. If man, in accordance with a certain view, employs it more frequently, it develops and increases, but, on the other hand, if it is employed, in accordance with the opposite view, more rarely, it will diminish. From our own youth we remember that there are different degrees of energy among boys.

Intuition also Peculiar to Persons to Foretell Events

*Intellectual forecasting and intuition common to all, but this faculty acute in the prophets.*

**THE SAME is the case with the intuitive faculty**; all possess it, but in different degrees. Man's intuitive power is especially strong in things which he has well comprehended, and in which his mind is much engaged. Thus you may yourself guess correctly that a certain person said or did a certain thing in a certain matter. Some persons are so strong and sound in their imagination and intuitive faculty that, when they assume a thing to be in existence, the reality either entirely or partly confirms their assumption. Although the causes of this assumption are numerous, and include many preceding, succeeding, and present circumstances, by means of the intuitive faculty the intellect can pass over all these causes, and draw inferences from them very quickly, almost instantaneously. This same faculty enables some persons to foretell important coming events.

Prophets Possessed both Courage and Intuition in Different Degrees

*Courage and belief the foundation of virtue.*

**THE PROPHETS must have had these two forces, courage and intuition,** highly developed, and these were still more strengthened when they were under the influence of the Active Intellect. Their courage was so great that, e.g., Moses, with only a staff in his hand, dared to address a great king in his desire to deliver a nation from his service. He was not frightened or terrified, because he had been told***, " I will be with thee "(***Exod. iii. 12). The prophets have not all the same degree of courage, but none of them have been entirely without it. Thus Jeremiah is told : ***" Be not afraid of them,"*** etc. (Jer. i. 8), and Ezekiel is exhorted, ***" Do not fear them or their word "*** (Ezek. ii. 6). In the same manner, you find that all prophets possessed great courage. Again, through the excellence of their intuitive faculty, they could quickly foretell the future, but this excellence, as is well known, likewise admits of different degrees

Future Derived Clearly as if Deduced by Syllogisms

*Information processes of prophets from supplied premises through the reason to the imagination.*

**THE TRUE PROPHETS** undoubtedly conceive ideas that result from premises which human reason could not comprehend by itself ; thus they tell things which men could not tell by reason and ordinary imagination alone ; for [the action of the prophets' mental capacities is influenced by] the same agent that causes the perfection of the imaginative faculty, and that enables the prophet thereby to foretell a future event with such clearness as if it was a thing already perceived with the senses, and only through them conveyed to his imagination. This agent perfects the prophet's mind, and influences it in such a manner that he conceives ideas which are confirmed by reality, and are so clear to him as if he deduced them by means of syllogisms.

Prophecy and its Extension to Actuality.

*Unity of all true Knowledge is both potential and actual.*

**THIS SHOULD** be the belief of all who choose to accept the truth. For [all things are in a certain relation to each other, and] what is noticed in one thing may be used as evidence for the existence of certain properties in another, and the knowledge of one thing leads us to the knowledge of other things. But [what we said of the extraordinary powers of our imaginative faculty] applies with special force to our intellect, which is directly influenced by the Active Intellect, and caused by it to pass from potentiality to actuality.

Prophecy Enters the Intellect through Premise, Conclusion, and Inference

*Prophetic knowledge reached by usual rational method; premise, conclusion, and attendant inference.*

**IT IS THROUGH THE INTELLECT** that the influence reaches the imaginative faculty. How then could the latter be so perfect as to be able to represent things not previously perceived by the senses, if the same degree of perfection were withheld from the intellect, and the latter could not comprehend things otherwise than in the usual manner, namely, by means of premise, conclusion, and inference. This is the true characteristic of prophecy…

Failure of Underdeveloped Logic

*Possibility of cognitive failure of human agent.*

**I SPOKE HERE** of true prophets in order to exclude the third class, namely, those persons whose logical faculties are not fully developed, and who do not possess any wisdom, but are only endowed with imaginative and inventive powers. It may be that things perceived by these persons are nothing but ideas which they had before, and of which impressions were left in their imaginations together with those of other things ; but whilst the impressions of other images are effaced and have disappeared, certain images alone remain, are seen and considered as new and objective, coming from without.

**CHAPTER XLIII**

Allegorical Visions as Amenable to Interpretation as Dreams

*Meaning of allegorical figures self-contained within the prophets themselves.*

**WE HAVE ALREADY SHOWN** in our work that the prophets sometimes prophesy in allegories; they use a term allegorically, and in the same prophecy the meaning of the allegory is given. In our dreams, we sometimes believe that we are awake, and relate a dream to another person, who explains the meaning, and all this goes on while we dream. Our Sages call this *" a dream interpreted in a dream." In* other cases we learn the meaning of the dream after waking from sleep. The same is the case with prophetic allegories. Some are interpreted in the prophetic vision. Thus it is related in Zechariah, after the description of the allegorical vision ***" And the angel that talked with me came again and waked me as a man that is awakened from his sleep. And he said unto me, ' What dost thou see ? ' "*** etc. (Zech. iv.1-2), and then the allegory is explained (ver. 6, sqq!)

Allegorical Figures Represent Ideas and Indicate Certain Periods

*Figurative language transfers meaning by signifying certain ideas, also using etymology and homonymity.*

**YOU MUST further know** that the prophets see things shown to them allegorically, such as the *candlesticks, horses, and mountains of Zechariah* (Zech. iv. 2 ; vi. 1-7), the *scroll of Ezekiel* (Ezek. ii. 9), the *wall made by a plumb-line* (Amos vii. 7), which Amos saw, the *animals* of Daniel (Dan. vii.and viii.), the *seething pot* of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 13), and similar *allegorical objects shown to represent certain ideas.* The prophets, however, are also shown things which do not illustrate the object of the vision, but indicate it by their name through its etymology or homonymity. Thus the imaginative faculty forms the image of a thing, the name of which has two meanings, one of which denotes something different [from the image]. This is likewise a kind of allegory. Comp. *Makkal shaked,* ***" almond staff,"*** of Jeremiah (i. 11-12). It was intended to indicate by the second meaning of *shaked* the prophecy, ***" For I will watch "*** (s*haked*), etc., which has no relation whatever to the staff or to almonds. The same is the case with the *kelub kayiz*, ***" a basket of summer fruit,"***seen by Amos, *by which the completion of a certain period was indicated*, ***" the end*** *(ha-kez)* ***having come "*** (Amos viii. 2).

**CHAPTER XLV**

Prophecy; Limited Action, Finite in Duration

*Cognitive meaning limited to the state of affairs within the prophet’s state of affairs.*

**WHEN SUCH A PERSON** is occasionally called prophet, the term is used in a wider sense, and is applied to him because he is almost a prophet. You must not be misled by the fact that according to the books of the Prophets, a certain prophet, after having been inspired with one kind of prophecy, is reported to have received prophecy in another form. For it is possible for a prophet to prophesy at one time in the form of one of the degrees (which I am about to enumerate,) and at another time in another form. In the same manner, as the prophet does not prophesy continuously, but is inspired at one time and not at another, so he may at one time prophesy in the form of a higher degree, and at another time in that of a lower degree ; it may happen that the highest degree is reached by a prophet only once in his lifetime, and afterwards remains inaccessible to him, or that a prophet remains below the highest degree until he entirely loses the faculty ; for ordinary prophets must cease to prophesy a shorter or longer period before their death. Comp***." And the word of the Lord ceased from Jeremiah "*** (Ezra i. l) ; ***" And these are the last words of David "*** (2 Sam. xxiii. i). From these instances it can be inferred that the same is the case with all prophets.

**END OF COGNITIVE SELECTIONS**

**PART II, CHAPTERS XXXVI -LXV**

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**Morrison Lee**

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**A.A.R.P.**

Australian Association for

the Rational Study of Prophecy.

**FACEBOOK**

Preterist Lab. Morry Lee

**EMAIL**

[morry\_lee@yahoo.com.au](mailto:morry_lee@yahoo.com.au)

**ACADEMIA.EDU**

<https://independent.academia.edu/MorryLee>

1. The term Hebrew Prophets is defined as; the thirty nine books of the Jewish canon. (Incidentally these books are also the bases also for a cognitive approach to the twenty-seven books of the Christian scriptures, making sixty-six in total, but here only the Jewish canon is considered.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Unified* is defined as; a thematic, cultural and semantic unity [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Understandable* is defined as; to grasp the meaning or reasonableness of, to comprehend, appreciate. Webster [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We use the adjectives *First-Century* Preterism to avoid ambiguity and clarify to *which* past period we refer . [↑](#footnote-ref-4)