



# מרומי תורה

פרשת שופטים - ד' אלול תשפ"ד

## Prophecy and Potential: Lessons from the False Prophet

Yehuda Goldfeder

In last week's *parashah*, we are given the first of two tests<sup>[1]</sup> to determine if a *navi* is a *navi sheker*. The test in *Re'eh* is simple: if he prophesies in the name of a foreign god, despite any omens or miracles that may accompany it, he is a false prophet. But the test in this week's *parsha* is not so simple. We are told that if a prophet predicts the future, and his prediction does not come to pass, he is a *navi sheker*. This test poses two issues. Unlike the first test, the second test does not give us the right answer until future events have already come to pass. In other words, it only gives us the truth retrospectively: it tells us the right answer too late. It was just this limitation that deeply vexed Yirmiyahu in his showdown with Chananya Ben Azur.<sup>[2]</sup>

But there is another challenge. If simply making a prediction that does not come to pass is grounds for charges of false prophecy, several of the major prophets come into question! The most famous example of this is Yonah.<sup>[3]</sup> He predicted Nineveh would get destroyed in 3 days' time, and that did not come to pass.<sup>[4]</sup> Of course, as *Sefer Yonah* tells us, this was due to repentance, but that begs the question: if repentance can annul a divine decree, then how can we even know if a *navi* is lying? Maybe he was right, but *teshuvah* changed the future!

Rambam addresses this question<sup>[5]</sup> by distinguishing between positive and negative predictions. A negative prediction, like the destruction of Nineveh, is no proof, as perhaps *teshuvah* changed things. But a positive prediction is a different matter. As the *Talmud* tells us,<sup>[6]</sup> when Hashem makes a proclamation for the good, even a conditional one, He never rescinds it. Thus, we only apply this test when a *navi* is making a prediction for good.<sup>[7]</sup>

However, this answer seems to be in contradiction with the actions of Yaakov. Hashem promises him protection, and yet a few chapters later he is in great fear of Esav!<sup>[8]</sup> The *Gemara* explains that Yaakov was worried his sins may have caused Hashem to annul the promise!<sup>[9]</sup> Clearly even a positive promise can be changed due to sins! To address this, several alternative explanations are given for the test in our *parshah*. Perhaps the test is only applicable on predictions that are unrelated to human free will, or are in cases when we know human action has not changed course, or is only applicable when a *navi* is trying to temporarily abrogate the Torah, or is otherwise being challenged

## The Simple Jew

Temima Fried

There are many *pesukim* throughout the *Torah* that give general life guidance as to how we should conduct ourselves. We find one of them in this week's *parsha*, where the *pasuk* says, "תמים תהיה, 'עם ה' אלקיך", "You must be wholehearted with your G-d Hashem".<sup>[1]</sup>

Initially, this *pasuk* seems clear. One should be devoted to Hashem with their entire heart. But let us delve into this word choice. Why does the *pasuk* use the word, "תם", "wholehearted"?

According to Rashi and others, the *pasuk* is telling us not to try and investigate the future, but to trust in Hashem completely that everything that happens is directly from Him.<sup>[2]</sup> This inherently makes sense. תם indicates a certain level of completeness. If we're complete in our *yiras* Hashem and *ahavas* Hashem, then we will be תם with Hashem.

However, there's another place that the word תם is famously used, and its interpretation seems to be drastically different. In the *Haggadah*, we list out four sons, namely, the צדיק (the wise son), the רשע (the wicked son), the תם (the simple-natured son), and the שאינו יודע לשאול (the one who does not know how to ask).<sup>[3]</sup> In this scenario, the תם isn't seen as "complete" or "wholehearted", but rather as oblivious. How can these two interpretations of the word תם be reconciled?

The *Bechor Shor* gives us a penetrating insight that can help us understand the meaning of the word תם!<sup>[4]</sup> He explains the word choice in our *pasuk* as representing a simple person that's not going to be exacting with Hashem. Rather, this individual takes everything Hashem gives him and only desires the will of Hashem. He says, "Whatever is good in Hashem's eyes, I will do".

Based on this interpretation, we can see how these two concepts intertwine. How is one wholehearted with Hashem? How does one become so connected to Hashem that they're walking in His ways? They need to utilize *emunah peshuta*, simple faith. They need to trust in Him that everything He's doing is for the best, regardless of if they currently understand it.

Of course, this isn't to say that one shouldn't get involved in the

by another prophet.<sup>[10]</sup> Regardless, these answers assume that even prophecies for good are dependent on our actions.

The Malbim champions this approach as a way of explaining several difficult passages in Tanakh.<sup>[11]</sup> He explains that *nevu'a* is often not a prediction of what the future is, but of what it ought to be, of what it could be if we only live up to our potential. This approach solves several thorny issues, such as the seemingly imminent messianic visions of Yeshayahu that seem to be about Chizkiyahu,<sup>[12]</sup> and of Chagai and Zechariah<sup>[13]</sup> that seem to be about Zerubavel. It also explains why Yechezkel in Galus Bavel would be shown a vision of the third Temple, if the second one had yet to be built.<sup>[14]</sup> In all these cases, Hashem was telling us of our potential. Mashiach can come in any generation, and thus, there was potential for the leaders of those generations to rise to the occasion, and for Bayit Sheni to be the final redemption. However, since we did not live up to the occasion, the *nevu'ot* will be fulfilled in the future.<sup>[15]</sup>

This also answers another difficulty in our parshah. We are told that if Hashem broadens our border, we are to build an additional three cities of refuge. This broadening of borders seems to refer to the enlarged Israel that runs all the way to the Euphrates River,<sup>[16]</sup> as originally promised to Avraham at the Bris Bein Habesarim.<sup>[17]</sup> But when are we supposed to get this enlarged border? Confusingly, in the beginning of Sefer Yehoshua,<sup>[18]</sup> Hashem tells Yehoshua that he is going to conquer this enlarged border! Yet, as we know, this did not happen. The approach above allows us to explain this *nevu'a* as well in an aspirational nature.

Aside from simply an elegant way of explaining many *pesukim*, this approach offers us a powerful insight into our own potential. Sometimes our goals may seem very lofty and far off. Sometimes they may seem almost impossible to aspire to. But we must remember, the potential for greatness, even for Mashiach, is not something that lurks in the distant future. It is a very real, live, active<sup>[18]</sup> potential, existing in every one of us, ready to emerge if we give it a chance. Much like how divine decrees of punishment can be suspended by *teshuv'a*, divine decrees of redemption, even if seemingly distant, can be brought about today. May we all merit to see them!



### Trivia Questions



- 1) What do a wife and a vineyard have in common in this week's פרשה?
- 2) Which tool is only mentioned twice in the תורה and both times are in this week's פרשה? What are the two instances?

details of Judaism. There's infinite beauty and depth to our *mesorah*, *halacha*, and *hashkafa*, and to not investigate it would be a tremendous loss. However, one needs to balance that with a healthy amount of *emunah peshuta*. One needs to be able to look at the world and understand that Hashem is in control. If one looks at life with a degree of *emunah peshuta*, one can truly walk in the ways of Hashem.

With *Elul* upon us and the *Yamim Nora'im* around the corner, let's commit to working on our *emunah peshuta*, and with this *avodah* may we merit to see the building of the third *Bais HaMikdash* speedily in our days.

Have a great *Shabbos*!



### Trivia Answers From Last Week

- 1) If a *עיר הנדחת* lives in a *צדיק*, although he isn't killed, his possessions are destroyed.
- 2) Never – it always says *מקום אשר יבחר*.

[1] Devarim 13:2-6, and Devarim 18:22

[2] Yirmiyahu Ch. 18

[3] Other prominent examples include Yishayahu 38:1, where he proclaims Chizkiyahu's imminent death.

[4] Although, as detailed in the book of Nachum, Nineveh did ultimately get destroyed for its sins

[5] Yesodei Hatorah 10:4. Also found in his Introduction to the Explanation of the Mishnah

[6] Berachot 7a

[7] See however Shabbos 55a, and Lechem Mishnah on Yesodei Hatorah 10:4

[8] Berachot 28:15 and Berachot 32:8

[9] Brachot 4a. See Lechem Mishnah to Yesodei Hatorah 10:4 and Gur Aryeh to Devarim 18:22

[10] Bechor Shor, Chizkuni, Seforno, and Malbim respectively to Devarim 18:21-22

[11] See Malbim to Yeshayahu 11:1, Chagai 1:1 and 2:9, Ezra 6:16, and Yehoshua 1:4. See also Eim Habanim Simcha Chapter 3, Ibn Ezra and R' Moshe Ibn Gikatilla to Chagai 2:9

[12] Like Yeshayahu 9:6 and 11:1. Noting this, the gemara records in Sanhedrin 94a comments that God desired for Chizkiyahu to be Mashiach, but he did not live up to that potential. See also Sanhedrin 99a.

[13] See for example Zecharia 4:7 and Chagai 2:23

[14] Ch. 4b. While never explicitly called the Third Temple, see Mishnah Torah, Beis Habechirah 1:4

[15] See however Sanhedrin 110b that the ten lost tribes will never return, despite many *Nevot* otherwise

[16] Devarim 19:7. See Ramban, R' Bachya, and Rashbam ad. loc.

[17] Berachot 15:18

[18] Yehoshua 1:4

[1] Devarim 18:13. Translation taken from Sefaria.

[2] Rashi Devarim 18:13 s.v. תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך. See also Ramban Devarim 18:13 s.v. תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך.

[3] Translations for the sons' names are taken from Sefaria.

[4] Bechor Shor Devarim 18:13 s.v. תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך.

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