

## CHAPTER VI

## REVELATION, PROPHECY, AND INSPIRATION

1. Divine revelation signifies two different things: first, God's self-revelation, which the Rabbis called *Gilluy Shekinah*, "the manifestation of the divine Presence," and, second, the revelation of His will, for which they used the term *Torah min ha Shamayim*, "the Law as emanating from God."<sup>1</sup> The former appealed to the child-like belief of the Biblical age, which took no offense at anthropomorphic ideas, such as the descent of God from heaven to earth, His appearing to men in some visible form, or any other miracle; the latter appears to be more acceptable to those of more advanced religious views. Both conceptions, however, imply that the religious truth of revelation was communicated to man by a special act of God.

2. Each creative act is a mystery beyond the reach of human observation. In all fields of endeavor the flashing forth of genius impresses us as the work of a mysterious force, which acts upon an elect individual or nation and brings it into close touch with the divine. In the religious genius especially is this true; for in him all the spiritual forces of the age seem to be energized and set into motion, then to burst forth into a new religious consciousness, which is to revolutionize religious thought and feeling. In a child-like age when the emotional life and the imagination predominate, and man's mind, still receptive, is overwhelmed by mighty visions, the Deity stirs the soul in some form perceptible to

<sup>1</sup> See Sifre Deut. XXVI, 8; Sanh. X, 1; J. E., art. Revelation; Dillmann, 61 f.; Geiger, D. Jud. u. s. Gesch. I, 34 f.

the senses. Thus the "seer" assumes a trance-like state where the Ego, the self-conscious personality, is pushed into the background; he becomes a passive instrument, the mouth-piece of the Deity; from Him he receives a message to the people, and in his vision he beholds God who sends him. This appearance of God upon the background of the soul, which reflects Him like a mirror, is Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

3. The states of the soul when men see such visions of the Deity predominate in the beginnings of all religions. Accordingly, Scripture ascribes such revelations to non-Israelites as well as to the patriarchs and prophets of Israel, — to Abimelek and Laban, Balaam, Job, and Eliphaz.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the Jewish prophet is not distinguished from the rest by the capability to receive divine revelation, but rather by the intrinsic nature of the revelation which he receives. His vision comes from a moral God. The Jewish genius perceived God as the moral power of life, whether in the form expressed by Abraham, Moses, Elijah, or by the literary prophets, and all of these, coming into touch with Him, were lifted into a higher sphere, where they received a new truth, hitherto

<sup>1</sup> See Deut. XIII, 2-6, where prophet forms a parallel to dreamer of dreams. God appears in a dream to Abraham (Gen. XV, 1, 12), to Abimelek (Gen. XX, 3, 6), to Jacob (XXVIII, 12; XXXI, 11; XLVI, 2), to Laban (XXXI, 24), to Balaam (Num. XXIV, 3), and to Eliphaz (Job IV, 3-6). Dream-like visions open the prophetic career of Moses (Exod. III, 3-6), Samuel (I Sam. III, 1, 15, 21), Isaiah (Is. VI, 1 f.), Jeremiah (Jer. I, 11 f.), Ezekiel (Ezek. I, 4), and others. Revelation in the Bible is *Mahazeh*, *hazon*, and *hizayon*, "vision" — whence *hozeh*, "seer"; or *mareh*, "sight," whence *roeh*, "seer." See also Geiger: *Urschrift*, 340; 390. Prophecy without dream or vision is claimed for Moses (Num. XII, 6-8; Exod. XXX, 11; Deut. XXXIV, 10; see Maimonides: *Moreh*, II, 43-47; Albo, *Ikkarim*, III, 8). The revelation on Sinai is described as "the great vision," or *mareh*: Exod. III, 3; XXIV, 17; compare Deut. IV, 11-V, 23, according to which only a "voice" is heard. Instead of God the later prophets see an angel, as Zach. I, 8, 11; II, 2 f. Compare Yebam. 49 b, as to the difference between Isaiah, who saw God in a vision, and Moses, who saw Him "in a shining mirror." He will appear in the latter way to the righteous in the future world, Suc. 45 b; Lev. R. I, 14; I Cor. XIII, 12.

<sup>2</sup> See Gen. XX, 6; XXXI, 29; Num. XXIV; Job IV, 16 f.; XXXVIII, 1.

hidden from man. In speaking through them, God appeared actually to have stepped into the sphere of human life as its moral Ruler. This self-revelation of God as the Ruler of man in righteousness, which must be viewed in the life of any prophet as a providential act, forms the great historical sequence in the history of Israel, upon which rests the Jewish religion.<sup>1</sup>

4. The divine revelation in Israel was by no means a single act, but a process of development, and its various stages correspond to the degrees of culture of the people. For this reason the great prophets also depended largely upon dreams and visions, at least in their consecration to the prophetic mission, when one solemn act was necessary. After that the message itself and its new moral content set the soul of the prophet astir. Not the vision or its imagery, but the new truth itself seizes him with irresistible force, so that he is carried away by the divine power and speaks as the mouthpiece of God, using lofty poetic diction while in a state of ecstasy. Hence he speaks of God in the *first* person. The highest stage of all is that where the prophet receives the divine truth in the form of pure thought and with complete self-consciousness. Therefore the Scripture says of Moses and of no other, "The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to another."<sup>2</sup>

5. The story of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai is in reality the revelation of God to the people of Israel as part of the great world-drama of history. Accordingly, the chief emphasis is laid upon the miraculous element, the descent of the Lord to the mountain in fire and storm, amid thunder and lightning, while the Ten Words themselves were pro-

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word for prophecy is passive,—*nibba'* or *hithnabbe'*, "to be made to speak," or "to bubble forth,"—the Deity being the active power, while the prophet is His mouthpiece.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. XXXIII, 11; Deut. XXXIV, 10.

claimed by Moses as God's herald.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the first words of the narrative state its purpose, the consecration of the Jewish people at the outset of their history to be a nation of prophets and priests.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the rabbis lay stress upon the acceptance of the Law by the people in saying: "All that the Lord sayeth we shall do and hearken."<sup>3</sup> From a larger point of view, we see here the dramatized form of the truth of Israel's *election* by divine Providence for its historic religious mission.

6. The rabbis ascribed the gifts of prophecy to pagans as well as Israelites at least as late as the erection of the Tabernacle, after which the Divine Presence dwelt there in the midst of Israel.<sup>4</sup> They say that each of the Jewish prophets was endowed with a peculiar spiritual power that corresponded with his character and his special training, the highest, of course, being Moses, whom they called "the father of the prophets."<sup>5</sup>

The medieval Jewish thinkers, following the lead of Mohammedan philosophers or theologians, regard revelation quite differently, as an *inner* process in the mind of the prophet. According to their mystical or rationalistic viewpoint, they describe it as the result of the divine spirit, working upon the soul either from within or from without. These two standpoints betray either the Platonic or the Aristotelian influence.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the rabbis themselves showed traces of neo-Platonism

<sup>1</sup> Ex. XIX, 19; XX, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. XIX, 1-8.

<sup>3</sup> Shab. 88 a after Ex. XXIV, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Seder Olam R.*, I and XXI; Lev. Rab. I, 12-14; B. B. 15 b.

<sup>5</sup> Hag. 13 b; Sanh. 89 a; Lev. R. l. c.

<sup>6</sup> See Schmiedl: *Stud. u. jued.-arabische Religionsphilosophie*, 191-192; S. Horowitz: *D. Prophetologie i. d. jued. Religionsphilosophie*; Sandler: *D. Problem d. Prophetie i. d. jued. Religionsphilosophie*; J. E., art. Prophets and Prophecy; *Emunoth* III, 4; *Cuzari*, I, 95; II, 10-12; *Emunah Ramah*, II, 5, 1; *Moreh*, II, 32-48; *Yesode ha Torah*, VII; *Or Adonai*, II, 4, 1; *Ikkarim*, III, 8-12, 17; Nachmanides to Gen. XVIII, 2; Abravanel to Gen. XXI, 27; Comp. Husik, *Hist. Med. Jew. Phil.*, Index s. v. Prophecy; Enc. Rel. Ethics, art. Philosophy and Prophecy.

when they described the ecstatic state of the prophets, or when they spoke of the divine spirit speaking through the prophet as through a vocal instrument, or when they made distinctions between seeing the Deity "in a bright mirror" or "through a dark glass."<sup>1</sup>

The view most remote from the simple one of the Bible is the rationalistic standpoint of Maimonides, who, following altogether in the footsteps of the Arabic neo-Aristotelians, assumed that there were different degrees of prophecy, depending upon the influence exerted upon the human intellect by the sphere of the Highest Intelligence. He enumerates eleven such grades, of which Moses had the highest rank, as he entered into direct communication with the supreme intellectual sphere. Still bolder is his explanation of the revelation on Sinai. He holds that the first two words were understood by the people directly as logical evidences of truth, for they enunciated the philosophical doctrines of the existence and unity of God, whereas the other words they understood only as sounds without meaning, so that Moses had to interpret them.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this amazing rationalism of Maimonides is the view of Jehuda ha Levi, who asserts that the gift of prophecy became the specific privilege of the descendants of Abraham after their consecration as God's chosen people at Sinai, and that the holy soil of Palestine was assigned to them as the habitation best adapted to its exercise.<sup>3</sup> The other attempt of some rationalistic thinkers of the Middle Ages to have a "sound created for the purpose"<sup>4</sup> of uttering the words "I am the Lord thy God," rather than accepting the anthropomorphic Deity, merits no consideration whatever.

7. It is an indisputable fact of history that the Jewish people,

<sup>1</sup> Horowitz, l. c. p. 11-16; Gen. R. XVII, 6; Lev. R. l. c.; Sanh. 17 b; Philo: De Decalog., 21; de Migratione Abrahami, 7; comp. I Corinth. XIII, 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Moreh*, l. c.

<sup>3</sup> *Cuzari*, l. c.

<sup>4</sup> *Kol Nibra: Moreh*, I, 65; *Emunoth*, II, 8; *Cuzari*, I, 89.

on account of its peculiar religious bent, was predestined to be the people of revelation. Its leading spirits, its prophets and psalmists, its law-givers and inspired writers differ from the seers, singers, and sages of other nations by their unique and profound insight into the moral nature of the Deity. In striking contrast is the progress of thought in Greece, where the awakening of the ethical consciousness caused a rupture between the culture of the philosophers and the popular religion, and led to a final decay of the political and social life. The prophets of Israel, however, the typical men of genius of their people, gradually brought about an advance of popular religion, so that they could finally present as their highest ideal the God of the fathers, and make the knowledge of His will the foundation of the law of holiness, by which they desired to regulate the entire conduct of man. Thus, religion was no longer confined by the limits of nationality, but was transformed into a spiritual force for all mankind, to lead through a revelation of the One and Holy God toward the highest morality.

8. The development of thought brought the God-seeking spirits to the desire to know His will, or, in Scriptural language, His ways, in order to attain holiness in their pursuit. The natural consequence was the gradual receding of the power of imagination which had made the enraptured seer behold God Himself in visions. As the Deity rose more and more above the realm of the visible, the newly conceived truth was realized as coming to the sacred writer through the spirit of God or an angel. *Inspiration* took the place of *revelation*. This, however, still implies a passive attitude of the soul carried away by the truth it receives from on high. This supernatural element disappears gradually and passes over into sober, self-conscious thought, in which the writer no longer thinks of God as the Ego speaking through him, but as an outside Power spoken of in the third person.

A still lower degree of inspiration is represented by those writings which lack altogether the divine afflatus, and to which is ascribed a share of the holy spirit only through general consensus of opinion. Often this imprint of the divine is not found in them by the calm judgment of a later generation, and the exact basis for the classification of such writings among the holy books is sometimes difficult to state. We can only conclude that in the course of time they were regarded as holy by that very spirit which was embodied in the Synagogue and its founders, "the Men of the Great Synagogue," who in their work of canonizing the Sacred Scriptures were believed to have been under the influence of the holy spirit.<sup>1</sup>

9. Except for the five books of Moses, the idea of a mechanical inspiration of the Bible is quite foreign to Judaism. Not until the second Christian century did the rabbis finally decide on such questions as the inspiration of certain books among the Hagiographa or even among the Prophets, or whether certain books now excluded from the canon were not of equal rank with the canonical ones.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the influence of the holy spirit was for some time ascribed, not only to Biblical writers, but also to living masters of the law.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the rabbis, the working of the holy spirit ceased with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who, with Ezra, were included also among the "Men of the Great Synagogue." See Tos. Sota XIII, 2; Seder Olam R. XXX; Sanh. 11 a. See J. E., art. Synagogue, Men of the Great; Holy Spirit; Inspiration. Comp. B. B. 14 b, 15 a; Yoma 9 b; Meg. 3 a, 7 a; I Macc. IV, 46; Ps. LXXIV, 9; Josephus, *Con. Apion.*, I, 8; Philo: *Vita Mosis*, II, 7; Aristeeas, 305-307. As to the difference between the spirit of prophecy and the holy spirit, see *Cuzari*, III, 32-35; *Moreh*, II, 35-37. The Essenes claimed the holy spirit for their apocryphal writings; see IV Esdras XIV, 38; Book of Wisdom VII, 27.

<sup>2</sup> On the disputes concerning canonical books, see Yadayim III, 5; Ab. d. R. N., I, ed. Schechter, 2-3; Shab. 30 b; Meg. 7 a. Comp. B. K. 92 b, where Ben Sira is quoted as one of the Hagiographa.

<sup>3</sup> See Tos. Pes. I, 27; IV, 2; Sota XIII, 3; Yer. Horay. III, 48 c; Lev. R. XXI, 7.

The fact is that divine influence cannot be measured by the yardstick or the calendar. Where it is felt, it bursts forth as from a higher world, creating for itself its proper organs and forms. The rabbis portray God as saying to Israel, "Not I in My higher realm, but you with your human needs fix the form, the measure, the time, and the mode of expression for that which is divine."<sup>1</sup>

10. While Christianity and Islam, its daughter-religions, must admit the existence of a prior revelation, Judaism knows of none. It claims its own prophetic truth as *the* revelation, admits the title Books of Revelation (Bible) only for its own sacred writings, and calls the Jewish nation alone the People of Revelation. The Church and the Mosque achieved great things in propagating the truths of the Sinaitic revelation among the nations, but added to it no new truths of an essential nature. Indeed, they rather obscured the doctrines of God's unity and holiness. On the other hand, the people of the Sinaitic revelation looked to it with a view of ever revitalizing the dead letter, thus evolving ever new rules of life and new ideas, without ever placing new and old in opposition, as was done by the founder of the Church. Each generation was to take to heart the words of Scripture as if they had come "this very day" out of the mouth of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. h. Sh. 27 a; Mak. 22 b.

<sup>2</sup> Sifre Deut. VI, 4.