



The Torah tells that when Yosef's brothers inform their father that he is still alive, "the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived" (45:27). *Targum Onkelos* translates this phrase to mean that the *ru'ach kudsha*, or "sacred spirit," overcame Yaakov. Onkelos refers here to the famous Midrashic tradition, mentioned in several sources (*Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, chapter 30, *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 38, and the Midrash Tanchuma), that Yaakov's prophetic capabilities were restored at this moment. Throughout his twenty-two years of bereavement over Yosef's presumed death, Yaakov did not experience prophecy; it was only now, upon hearing that Yosef was still alive, that "the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived," that he regained his prophetic insight.

We find, however, different explanations given for why Yaakov had lost his *ru'ach ha-kodesh* during the interim years and why it was regained when he heard the news about his son. According to *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*, the brothers had issued among themselves a ban forbidding divulging the information of their brother's sale. The Almighty participated, as it were, in the declaration of this ban, and thus He, too, was bound by this agreement. As such, he stripped Yaakov of his prophetic powers so as to deny Yaakov access to this information.

Maimonides, however, in the seventh chapter of his *Shemona Perakim* introduction to *Pirkei Avot*, follows a different Midrashic tradition, which appears in *Midrash Tehillim* (chapter 24). According to this tradition, Yaakov's depression made it impossible for him to experience a prophetic revelation. A prophet cannot obtain prophecy in a state of melancholy; hence, only once Yaakov received word of Yosef's whereabouts did he achieve a level of joy that made it possible for him to receive prophecy.

Interestingly, Maimonides makes this comment amidst his discussion emphasizing that a prophet need not achieve a state of spiritual perfection to obtain prophecy. He points to numerous examples of men who were endowed with *ru'ach ha-kodesh* despite certain failings. King Shlomo, for example, beheld a prophetic vision despite being criticized for his attraction to women; King David was granted prophecy despite his overly ruthless temperament; and Shemuel and Yaakov were criticized for being fearful of other men (Shaul, Esav), and yet beheld prophecies during those periods. Thus, although prophecy undoubtedly required spiritual greatness, it did not require perfection.

Nevertheless, Maimonides adds, with regard to two qualities even the slightest imperfection can prevent an otherwise qualified individual from experiencing prophecy: anger and depression. The prophet Elisha reacted angrily to the arrival of the sinful Israelite king at his home, and therefore had to summon musicians to lift his spirits before he could experience prophecy (Melakhim II 3:15). And Yaakov, as we have seen, could not achieve prophecy throughout the period in which he mourned the absence of his beloved son.

It thus emerges that no emotions are more spiritually destructive than depression and anger. God could grant prophecy to righteous people with imperfections in other areas, but no such possibility exists when it comes to anger and depression. Proper Torah observance requires a general state of emotional contentment and peace of mind, which is disrupted by even a smidgen of anger or sadness. While a life of *avodat Hashem* demands working to improve oneself in every area of religious life, particular attention must be paid to the attaining a state of joy and contentment, and learning to respond to adversity with inner strength and self-control.