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Ecstatic Prophecy in the Old Testament

By GUNNEL ANDRÉ

When speaking of prophets in our culture, we usually have the Old Testament classical prophets in mind. At the mention of prophetic ecstasy the immediate reaction is often, "That would be Saul and the asses or Elijah and the prophets of Baal". A sharp distinction is often made between the so-called primitive prophets and the classical prophets. Bearing in mind that the Chronicles mention chronicles, prophesies, visions and narratives of various non-classical prophets there is a certain danger that we make a distinction between different prophetic types more sharply than was done in Old Testament times.

In this paper ecstasy is treated purely in its own terms, and the literary problems of the OT, such as the age of the texts, the various types of texts, and also the possibility of gradual changes in prophetic activity or the concept of prophecy are disregarded.

I will proceed from the definition of a prophet by Johannes Lindblom, "a person who, because he is conscious of having been specially chosen and called, feels forced to perform actions and proclaim ideas which, in a mental state of intense inspiration or real ecstasy, have been indicated to him in the form of divine revelation" (Lindblom 1973, 46). This definition makes it expedient to begin with a closer examination of the classical prophets. Lindblom himself starts with a thorough study of the primitive prophets stressing that "primitive" is not intended in a pejorative sense. I can only feel that his definition, if it does not exclude, at least strongly modifies some of the texts that are usually presented as examples of ecstatic prophecy and for this reason I will use a different point of departure.

According to the definition a prophet is conscious of having been called. In Isa 6 we find the call of Isaiah in the form of a vision with auditive elements. Isaiah says that at a certain time he *saw* God sitting on a throne, dressed in a mantle, whose train filled the temple. God was surrounded by bewinged seraphim flying around and proclaiming a threefold "Holy". In

his vision Isaiah experiences the shaking of the foundations of the thresholds and the smoke filling the temple. He continues to say that in his vision he bewailed himself and his unclean lips. One of the seraphim touched his lips with burning coal from the altar, thereby removing his sin. Then Isaiah *hears* God ask, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah volunteers and receives his commission, “Go, and say to this people [. . .]” The message follows.

A closer look at the text proves that the prophet could not possibly be referring to something that his outward eyes and ears see or hear. God is not a person, whom human eyes can see, nor are the seraphim beings which normal eyes can perceive. Burning coal on his lips would have hurt him and prevented him from speaking.

At the same time it is hardly correct to say that Isaiah did not see anything with his normal vision. If the prophet was in the temple at the festival for the celebration of YHWH’s kingship it is easy to identify the stimuli that formed what his inward eye saw, viz. the two winged cherubim on the ark turning into flying seraphim. The cherubim were thought of as the throne of the invisible YHWH, who to the prophet’s inner eye appeared as a divine king dressed in a royal mantle. Each wing of the cherubim was five metres in length and when these huge statues became living seraphim for Isaiah’s inner eye their voices became a thunder which made the temple shake. The smoke from the incense altar was perceived as smoke filling the temple and the coal of the altar became the instrument of forgiveness. The cherubim, which he saw as seraphim, appeared as the council of YHWH, at which a prophet must have sat to be regarded as a true prophet (e.g. Jer 23: 18, 22).

The call of Jeremiah (Jer 1) is also told in a mixture of vision and audition, and it begins with the very common introduction to a revelation, “The word of YHWH came to me”, followed by the word of YHWH in 1 sing.form. YHWH and Jeremiah carry on a dialogue where the prophet protests over his mission with reference to his youth. He also says: “Then YHWH put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and YHWH said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.”” A summary of the message follows.

Jeremiah then relates two visions in connection with his call. Both of them are introduced by the well-known “The word of YHWH came to me”. In the first vision (vv. 11–12) YHWH asks, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” The prophet answers, “I see a rod of almond.” YHWH explains, “You have seen well for I am watching over my word to perform it”. Whether the prophet actually had an almond-tree in front of him or not is impossible to say. The important thing is that the Hebrew word for almond-

tree is *šāqed* and the participial form of “watch over” is *šoqed*. The almond-tree thus gives Jeremiah an association with the watchfulness of YHWH.

The second vision (vv. 13–19) contains the same question, “What do you see?” The prophet answers, “I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.” YHWH explains, “Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.” Then follows YHWH’s more precise exposition which among other things contains the exhortation, “But you, gird up your loins; arise, and say to them everything that I command you.” In this case too it is hard to say whether the prophet actually had a pot in front of him or not. He could very well have done so while the pot to his inner eye appeared in the north. The fact that he sees the pot in the north is probably to be explained by a mixture of the tradition of the enemy from the north and political clear-sightedness.

The account of the call of Ezekiel (chs. 1–3) is the most detailed narrative and more complicated than the previous ones. In the double introduction Ezekiel himself refers to time and place and says, “The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.” In the second introduction someone else says that Ezekiel found himself in that particular place at that particular time, and that “the hand of YHWH was upon him there.” The vision which follows is full of details and comparisons. Ezekiel sees a fire-flashing cloud coming out of the north, and it is surrounded by brightness and in the middle of the fire there is something *like* gleaming bronze. From the midst of it came the *likeness* of four living creatures, they looked *like* human beings, but nonetheless they had four faces and four wings each. The description continues in the same fashion. The prophet sees YHWH in the same vague way:

Above the firmament over their heads there was the *likeness* of a throne, *in appearance like sapphire*, and seated above the *likeness* of a throne was a *likeness as it were* of a human form. And upward from what had the *appearance of* his loins I saw *as it were* gleaming bronze, *like the appearance of* fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the *appearance of* fire, and there was brightness round about him. *Like the appearance of* the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain so was the *appearance of the likeness* of the glory of YHWH. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

This vision displays several features in common with the vision of Isaiah: the fire, the bewinged creatures who behaves partly in the same manner as the seraphim, the thunder, the being resembling a man on a throne, that is a king. Ezekiel sees the throne above the heads of the bewinged creatures, but he mentions no temple, which raises the question, of whether Ezekiel saw his vision in the temple before the fall of Jerusalem as did Isaiah, and

thus had the same external stimuli. If so, the note that Ezekiel was in Babylon is secondary. Did Ezekiel see his vision in Babylon thus receiving other external stimuli than Isaiah or receiving none at all? In any case, what Ezekiel sees, he sees with his inner eye.

The vision continues. The prophet has fallen on his face and he hears God talking to him, "Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you." Ezekiel describes his reaction, "When he spoke to me, the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me." The prophet hears YHWH say, "I send you to the people of Israel [...] you shall say to them 'thus says YHWH God'." The summary of the message is replaced by the exhortation to prophesy and the unexpected "Open your mouth, and eat what I give you." Ezekiel then describes how a hand offered him a scroll, how the scroll was spread out before him, and how he received a renewed exhortation to eat it. YHWH said to him, "Son of man [...] fill your stomach with it", and Ezekiel obeys, "I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey."

After YHWH's continuing pep-talk Ezekiel says that a spirit lifted him up and that he heard a roaring "Blessed be the glory of YHWH, wherever it is!" He also heard a thunder from the creatures. The vision ends "The spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of YHWH being strong upon me; and I came to the exiles at Telabib, who dwelt by the river Chebar. And I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days." Are these last two verses a part of the vision or not? If they are, then the geographical information means that with his inner eye he saw his experiences as a prophet in the place where he actually found himself, in Babylon. If they describe a real journey, from where did he set out, Jerusalem or Babylon, and how are then the statements about the spirit and the hand of YHWH to be understood?

The Old Testament contains more texts featuring the calling of prophets, but these are sufficient examples of the arousal of consciousness. They have been chosen since they also show examples of ecstasy defined as "an intensive experience which totally engages the individual, a psychological state characterized by the fact that the person is much less open to outward stimuli than in a normal state".¹

It is common to the texts on prophetic calls that the prophets retain their own personalities, that is to say, there is no *unio mystica*. All of them regard themselves as having been called and sent out to be the mouthpieces of YHWH, that is to say, the visions do not primarily concern themselves or their own benefit. On the contrary, they convey to the prophets that they are to face hardships. "Fear not" occurs in some visions. How they reacted physically to these visions we do not know.

¹ General definition for the symposium.

With regard to outward stimuli it is very likely that Isaiah's vision was provoked by his visit to the temple, quite possible that Jeremiah really saw a tree and a pot, but unclear how the vision of Ezekiel came about. It is certainly possible and maybe even probable that Ezekiel knew of the vision of Isaiah and that he clothed his own experiences in traditional expressions (cf. 1 Kings 22).

The commissions of the prophets are presented in summary. Their further work is based on new revelations focussed on the message. The prophet is a speaking instrument for YHWH as Aaron was for Moses, "YHWH said to Moses, 'See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh [...]'" (Ex 7: 1 f.). The prophets often, but not always, begin their oracles with such formulae as "The word of YHWH came to me", "YHWH says", "so says YHWH" etc. As we now have them these are sometimes redactional, although they occur often enough within the oracles to suggest that the prophets themselves used them. It was important to the true prophets to stress that they spoke the word of YHWH and not their own. This is shown by their criticism of false prophets. These were not sent by YHWH but they prophesied in the name of YHWH, speaking the ideas of their own hearts and not those coming from YHWH, they stole prophecies from one another, they were to be placed on a par with diviners, dreamers, soothsayers and sorcerers, they followed their own spirit etc. It was typical of the false prophets to prophesy happiness and welfare.

A true prophet knew that his message came from YHWH and that he was forced, whether he liked it or not, to speak it. They were convinced that it was YHWH speaking to them and acting on them and the terminology is theological. It is therefore difficult to interpret their words in psychological terms.

The redactional heading of the Book of Isaiah says that the book contains the vision of Isaiah concerning Judah and Jerusalem, but the oracles as we now have them are seldom visions. Apart from Ezekiel and Zechariah, the oracles by other prophets are likewise for the most part not in the form of visions. More precisely the prophets express themselves as if they have heard the message. It is mostly impossible to trace what happened to the prophets often, but not always, begin their oracles with such formulae as present it to the audience. A revelation, which in the moment of experience could have been a vision to the inner eye, could, when it is presented to the audience after a shorter or longer period of time, have been interpreted and rationalized to the result, "YHWH says". This process of transformation is in most cases elusive. We only have the result.

The lack of information is not total. Isa 12: 1-4 runs:

As whirlwinds in the Negeb sweep on, it comes from the desert, from a terrible land. A stern vision is told to me; the plunderer plunders, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, O Elam, lay siege, O Merdia; all the sighing she has caused I bring to an end. Therefore my loins are filled with anguish; pangs have seized me, like the pangs of a woman in travail; I am bowed down so that I cannot hear, I am dismayed so that I cannot hear, I am dismayed so that I cannot see. My mind reels, horrors have appalled me; the twilight I longed for has been turned for me into trembling.

It is noteworthy that the panic and deaf-mute state described by the prophet is a result of the vision, fear of the dreadful fate of the country. The inducement of the vision is not mentioned nor do we know in what state the prophet was when he saw his vision.

Several texts in the Book of Ezekiel indicate that the prophet was mute and paralyzed after a vision, e.g. Ez 3:22–27:

The hand of YHWH was there upon me; and he said to me, ‘Arise, go forth into the plain, and there I will speak with you’. So I arose and went forth into the plain; and lo, the glory of YHWH stood there, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. But the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet; and he spoke with me and said to me, ‘Go, shut yourself within your house. And you, O son of man, behold cords will be placed upon you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people; and I will make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be dumb and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them [...]’

The prophet is told to stay alone as long as the paralysis lasts, but he will be able to speak clearly when it is time to meet the audience. In another case the paralysis is extremely public and meant to be a symbolic act, Ez 4:4–8:

Then lie upon your left side, and I will lay the punishment of the house of Israel upon you; for the number of the days that you lie upon it, you shall bear their punishment. For I assign to you a number of days, three hundred and ninety days, equal to the number of years of their punishment; so long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, a day for each year. And you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem, with your arm bared; and you shall prophesy against the city. And, behold, I will put cords upon you, so that you cannot turn from one side to the other, till you have completed the days of your siege.

The paralysis itself works as an accusation of guilt and the face of the prophet turned towards Jerusalem and his outstretched arm symbolize a threat.

Daniel mentions feebleness (10: 8–11):

So, I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground. And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. And he said to me, 'O Daniel, man greatly beloved, give heed to the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you'. While he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling.

A contrary state of severe pain is represented in Jer. 4: 19, "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent." In another place he says, "My heart is broken within me, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine" (23: 9).

These texts may suffice as examples. A more extensive study of the material proves the dominance of paralytic reactions over vigorous movements of the body.

The question of how a prophet arrives at a revelatory state of mind is even more difficult to answer, but there are examples. Habakkuk says (2: 1–3):

I will take my stand to watch, and station myself on the tower, and look forth to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. And YHWH answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end-it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

Another example occurs in the Balaam-story in Nu 23: 3ff. "Balaam said to Balak, 'Stand beside your burnt-offering, and I will go; perhaps YHWH will come to meet me; and whatever he shows me I will tell you'. And he went to a bare height. And God met Balaam [...] and YHWH put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, 'Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak' ". This is repeated, but at the end of the story the following happens (24: 1 ff.):

When Balaam saw that it pleased YHWH to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and saw Israel encamping tribe by tribe. And the spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse, and said, 'The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes uncovered'.

Habakkuk (2: 1 ff.) stationed himself on a wall of the fortification to look for God's answer. Daniel had probably fasted for three weeks before a certain vision (10: 2), while Elijah was ordered by YHWH to go and hide by a

brook and drink its water. He was promised that ravens would bring him bread and meat (1 Kings 17: 2–6).

These texts indicate that the prophets often were alone when they experienced their revelations. Consequently, we know nothing of the reaction of their environment.

We learn from other texts that the prophets called out their message. The Hebrew verb *qārā'* basically means "to call aloud". Trito-Isaiah (58: 1) was ordered, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet". If Isaiah (1: 2) and Micah (6: 1) actually yelled when they called on heaven and earth, mountains and hills as witnesses is hard to tell. It is probably a cultic expression to be taken less literally.

In some cases (Ez 21: 2; Am 7: 16; Mi 2: 6, 11) "prophesy" is combined with *hittîp*, "let drip", which is said sometimes to refer to froth dripping through the beard (1 Sam 21: 14). In two of the four cases, Amos and Micah, a non-prophet tells a prophet to stop this activity, and in one case a false prophet is involved. This does not necessarily mean that the prophets behaved as if they were mad. It could just as well refer to their boiling rage and the sprinkling of spit. It could also be a pejorative expression.

A true prophet speaks clearly and distinctly. The criticism of false prophets also refers to their mumbling (Jer. 23: 31) or their talking unintelligible nonsense. The example par excellence is found in Isa 28: 7–13, "These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment [. . .] For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." The translation does not give justice to the Hebrew text, which runs, *šaw lāšāw, šaw lāšāw, qaw lāšāw, qaw lāqāw, z^eeršām, z^eeršām*. Is this an onomatopoeic description of the speech of drunkards, or does it picture the lack of sense in their prophecies? Does it refer to incessant prophesying or is it pious glossolalia? (Hölscher 1914, 35). Lindblom hears the babbling of babies (Lindblom 1973, 201, for more suggestions see Kaiser 1974 ad. loc.). I suggest that Isaiah ridicules the priests and the prophets, not the other way around.

There are very few suggestions that the classical prophets behaved strangely when in a revelatory state of mind. The common term is that they "sought" or "asked" for oracles. People could come to the prophet and beg him to "ask" God and the revelation is then termed as God's "answer". In some cases (37: 3; 42: 2, 20) Jeremiah is called on to "pray" for an answer.

Jeremiah has the following passage (29: 26f.), "YHWH has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to have charge in the house of YHWH

over every madman who prophesies, to put him in the stocks and collar. Now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who is prophesying to you?" Extracted from its context the passage seems to hint that Jeremiah was mad. But these verses are part of a letter, which a certain Shemaiah sent to a priest in Jerusalem. In its turn the letter is part of an oracle, which Jeremiah was ordered to deliver to Shemaiah and the message is a curse on Shemaiah's apostasy. Thus we can presume that Shemaiah bracketed all the prophets he disliked together under the same designation.

Turning to the historical books we get a different picture of prophetic activity. The texts are few and we seldom hear the prophets' own words. It is striking how often they appear in groups.

The two kings of Judah and Israel meet in Samaria during a time of peace to discuss the possible recapture of Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22). "Inquire first for the word of YHWH", suggested Jehoshaphat of Judah. Ahab of Israel assembled about 400 prophets and asks, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead or not?" They answered that YHWH tells him to go. In spite of this message from 400 prophets Jehoshaphat insists on asking one more and Ahab suggests Micaiah ben Imlah, although he dislikes this prophet since he only prophesies misfortune. The man who fetches him brings pressure to bear upon him to answer as the other prophets had. Micaiah insists that he will speak as YHWH tells him to. However, he answers like the others, which makes Ahab furious and summons him to tell the truth. The prophet then describes a vision, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd; and YHWH said, 'These have no master, let each return to his home in peace' ". Ahab understands this as an oracle of doom and sighs over the hopeless prophet. Micaiah tells another vision:

I saw YHWH sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and YHWH said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before YHWH, saying, 'I will entice him'. And YHWH said to him 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go forth and do so'. Now therefore behold, YHWH has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; YHWH has spoken evil concerning you. Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, 'How did the spirit of YHWH go from me to speak to you?' And Micaiah said, 'Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself.

The king obeys the false prophets and the result turns out as Micaiah has said.

The last passage very much resembles the classical prophets. Micaiah

has with his inner eye seen and heard YHWH sitting on his throne conferring with his heavenly council and asking for a volunteer. The main difference is that it is not the true prophet who volunteers, but the bad spirit. The initiative and order to make Ahab's prophets false prophets comes from YHWH. Micaiah claims to be a true prophet, because he has seen how about 400 prophets became false prophets. He says that he *saw* or *has seen* this which could mean that he saw the vision before he met the kings—he knew in advance what they would ask him. The fact that the prophets are usually calm, often alone, when they see their visions speaks in favour of this, but it can be assumed that the bullied Micaiah was irritated in front of the kings. He was hardly less irritated when one of the false prophets hit him and asked sarcastically, “How did the spirit of YHWH go from me to speak to you?” that is to say, “If you have seen how we received false revelations, how did it happen when you received yours?” Micaiah does not answer this, but like the classical prophets refers to the fact that a true prophet is known by the accomplishment of his message.

This latter is the point of the legend of Elijah and the Baal-prophets (1 Kings 18). Elijah has to prove that YHWH, of whom he is the mouthpiece, is the true God in contrast to Baal. To demonstrate this two altars, one for each side, are to be erected and the challenge is, “You call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of YHWH”. Then Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to begin:

Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it. ‘And they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, ‘O Baal, answer us! ‘But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped about the altar which they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked at them, saying, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened’. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice; no one answered, no one heeded.

When it is his turn Elijah orders quantities of water to be poured over his altar and after this he prays to YHWH and this is the only thing he does. The Baal prophets on the other hand were vociferous for several hours, which makes Elijah mock at them. Moreover, they limp, *pāsah*, around the altar which probably is a pejorative designation for their dancing. They cut themselves, *hitgoded*, with swords and lances. The verb is otherwise used as a part of the foreign and for the Israelite forbidden mourning-ritual (e.g. Deut 14: 1). Here it is clear that the Baal prophets usually behaved in this

way. Finally, they were busy with *hitnabbe'*. The verb occurs in Niphal and as here in Hithpael and is in the majority of cases translated "to prophesy". Here it means "rave" and it is doubtful that it has anything to do with "prophecy". To the meaning of *hitnabbe'* we shall return. From the information that they cried aloud until midday and started *hitnabbe'* in the afternoon it may be concluded that they turned from calling on Baal to something else. It is clear that this marks the climax of a form of group-dynamic ecstasy.

A totally different example comes from 2 Kings 5: a Syrian officer by the name of Naaman has been to see the prophet Elisha and has been cured of his leprosy. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, is uneasy about the fact that Elisha does not accept the gifts of gratitude from Naaman. So he slips out and secures some presents for himself by trickery. When he returns home Elisha asked him where he has been. Another lie: "I went nowhere." Elisha says, "Did I not go with you in spirit when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money . . .?" How does Elisha know what has happened? The bombastic translations, not only into English, suggest that Elisha has been in a state of ecstasy and has seen a vision. This is not the case. The Hebrew text runs, "My heart has not left me", and in Hebrew anatomy the heart is the seat of mental activity. Elisha, knowing with whom he has to deal, simply says, "Do you really think that I don't understand what you have been doing?"

Saul seems to have been a rather neurotic person. His attacks of fury are said to be caused by an evil spirit from YHWH or by YHWH's spirit. As a young boy he is sent away by his father to find his lost asses, and on the way he receives the advice to see Samuel, the seer. The redactor of the text (1 Sam 9-10) explains, "Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, 'Come, let us go to the seer'; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer". Before Saul reaches him, Samuel receives a revelation that he should anoint Saul to be prince. This he does. Later he sends Saul away with a detailed description of what is going to happen before they meet again. Among other things this:

You shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a garrison of the Philistines; and there as you come to the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre, before them, and they *hitnabbe'*. Then the spirit of YHWH will come mightily upon you, and you shall *hitnabbe'* with them, and be turned into another man. Now when these signs meet you, do whatever your hands find to do, for God is with you [. . .] When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all these signs came to pass that day. When they came to Gibeah, behold a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God came mightily upon him, and he *hitnabbe'* among them. And when all who knew him before *saw* how he *nibba'* with the prophets, the people said to

one another, 'What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?' And a man of the place answered, 'And who is their father?' Therefore it became a proverb, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' When he had finished *hitnabbe'* he came to the high place.

Here we have a clear example of music in connection with *hitnabbe'*. It is also said of Miriam, who is called a prophetess in Ex 15: 20 that she took a timbrel in her hand and that all the women followed her with timbrels and dancing. The combination occurs in more institutionalized form in 1 Chr 25: 1-3, where the list of temple singers mentions the men who were set apart to *nibba'* on lyres, harps and cymbals under the direction of the king and those who should *nibba'* with the lyre in thanksgiving and in praise.

Saul will *hitnabbe'* through the spirit of YHWH and *expressis verbis* be turned into another man. This happens and Saul's transformation causes surprise. The question is of course, precisely what caused the surprise? Do they think that he has become a prophet and been received into the prophetic guild or do they ask, "Why does he behave like a prophet when he is not one?"

In order to answer the question we must look at two other texts. The first one is Nu 11 and tells how the people in the desert complain of the lack of food. They are tired of all the manna and ask Moses for meat and nag at him about the good food they had eaten in Egypt. Moses presents the problem to God and says that he is no longer able to carry the people alone. God tells him, "Gather for me 70 men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; and bring them to the tent of meeting and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone." The people are promised food until they literally throw up. Moses asks God how he plans to feed the 600.000. The answer is a flip on the nose, "Is YHWH's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not". Moses obeys and the following happens:

YHWH came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was upon him and put it upon the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they *hitnabbe'*. But they did so no more. Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested upon them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they *hitnabbe'* in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad *hitnabbe'* in the camp'. And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, forbid them'. But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all YHWH's people were *n'bi'im*, that YHWH would put his spirit upon them!'

The episode ends with the raining of quails and YHWH's wrath over the greed of the people. Moses is not an ordinary prophet, nor are the 70 elders or the two other men prophets, but they do pursue the activity of *hitnabbe'* and apparently for a short while. It gives Joshua an unpleasant sensation, but Moses wishes that the entire people would do the same thing. The question is, *what* do they do? The idea is that they should help Moses with the responsibility for the people after they have received due shares of the spirit upon Moses. If we combine the passage quoted above that Aaron, his prophet, would talk sense to Pharaoh, and the fact that YHWH's spirit was given to kings and prophets when they were inaugurated in their new positions, the text of Nu 11 becomes clear. The text describes how the elders were legitimated as leaders and officers. It is not necessary or even probable that they behaved particularly vigorously. It is rather a question of intensive inspiration in form of possession trance.

The other text concerns Saul (1 Sam 19: 20–24). He sends men to catch the fleeing David:

When they saw the company of the *n^ebi'im* pursuing *nibba'* and Samuel standing as head over them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also *hitnabbe'*. When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also *hitnabbe'*. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also *hitnabbe'*. Then he himself went to Ramah, [. . .] and the spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he *hitnabbe'* until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too *hitnabbe'* before Samuel, and lay naked all that day and all that night. Hence it is said, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'

It is common to these three texts that they concern persons who are said to receive the spirit of YHWH. None of them is a prophet. None receives a message and nothing points to any kind of speech. Nothing points to vigorous bodily movements, on the contrary, Saul seems to have been paralyzed. Another common feature is that their changes are transitory and a solitary instance. This solitary incident occurs in connection with the inauguration of these persons into a new position. I maintain that these texts, which are the most often cited examples of ecstatic prophecy in the Old Testament, do not actually describe ecstatic prophecy, that is to say, ecstasy "yes", prophecy "no". The texts describe persons who at their inauguration into new functions are legitimated by a solitary state of possession trance, in this case possession of YHWH's good spirit in contrast to YHWH's or anybody else's evil spirit. This means that the proverb "Is Saul among the *n^ebi'im*" signifies, "Is Saul in the state of possession trance, which proves that he is a leader legitimated by YHWH?"

John Sturdy argues that the proverb must have originally circulated on its own and whatever the actual first occasion of its use, the story of it would

be later and aetiological. He maintains that the proverb arose as Davidic propaganda against Saul, as the question can be shown to expect the answer “no”, which implies: it is a good thing to be a prophet, and Saul is no prophet. I understand the purpose of the two aetiological stories to be to answer “yes” to the question and so they represent a positive (re-?) valuation of Saulite kingship (Sturdy 1970).

Simon Parker claims that as the verb *nibbāʾ*, *hitnabbeʾ* in some cases means “be in a possession trance” the noun *nābīʾ* in the same text must signify “a person in possession trance” and thus something other than what is generally meant by “prophet” (Parker 1978). In view of the fact that the description in the last three texts of the activity *nibbāʾ*, *hitnabbeʾ* is so vastly different to what we know of prophetic activity I agree with Parker.

To summarise one may conclude that the orgiastic, vigorous ecstasy is alien to the Israelite prophets. On the other hand it is found among false and non-Israelite prophets. The ecstasy of the YHWH-prophets, primitive as well as classical is characterized by a calm, sometimes paralytically calm, seeing and hearing the word of YHWH, which they feel compelled to forward.

I started by quoting Johannes Lindblom and I will finish by doing so again, “Modern scholars have attempted to explain the religious experiences of the prophets by the methods of modern psychology with its emphasis on the subconscious or, rather, unconscious sphere of the human mind. For the understanding of the prophetic visions and auditions, their spontaneous and sudden occurrence, and their vivid and fanciful contents, the idea of the effective power of the unconscious is of great help. The application of the psychological methods of Freud or Jung to the experiences of the prophets has, however, not yet proved to be very fruitful. Literary documents from so remote a time cannot yield much to the psycho-analyst. Moreover, the application of these methods demands special qualifications which cannot reasonably be expected of a Biblical exegete. For fear lest I should appear a dilettante entering a domain unfamiliar to me I leave this task to those who are expert in it” (Lindblom 1973, 219).

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