

A Tzaddik and His Students

Many Jews are attracted to spirituality but never think to look in their own religion to find it. Still more are unaware that chassidic philosophy and its practice are the “soul” and spiritual core of Judaism.

The starting point of the chassidic way of life is a chassid’s connection to his or her Rebbe. But like many of the more spiritual concepts in Judaism, the role and function of a Rebbe -- and the chassidic movement in general -- has been largely cloaked in mystery, misinterpreted, or simply unknown.

In this book, **A Tzaddik and His Students: *The Rebbe-Chassid Relationship***, Rabbi Shloma Majeski takes the reader on a step-by-step journey into the spiritual world of the Rebbe-chassid relationship, explaining the nature and purpose of a tzaddik/Rebbe, his connection with his chassidim, and the relevance of this phenomenon in the lives of every human being today.

Rabbi Shloma Majeski is the dean of Machon Chana Women’s Institute of Jewish Studies in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, home of the World Headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. A renowned lecturer on chassidic philosophy for over thirty years, Rabbi Majeski is the author of the acclaimed book *The Chassidic Approach to Joy* and a tape series entitled “The Basic Principles of Chabad Chassidic Philosophy.”



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בס"ד

A Tzaddik and His Students: THE REBBE-CHASSID RELATIONSHIP

By: Rabbi Shloma Majeski

(Chapter 5)



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For further reading about this and other topics in chassidic philosophy,
 information on how to obtain Rabbi Majeski's book *The Chassidic*
Approach to Joy, and his tape series on chassidic philosophy, contact your
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Rabbi Yosef Y. Shagalov,
Executive Director

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kindness, Providence has led you here so I could help you
 rectify your deeds.”

The Baal Shem Tov used his holy vision to ascertain the
 remedy for the man's terrible mistakes. If he would support the
 poor man's family for the rest of his life and open his house so
 that poor people could come to get help, the slate with his
 friend would be clean.

In this and the other stories, only a *tzaddik* with *ruach*
hakodesh or the gift of prophecy could accomplish such
 extraordinary feats of spiritual perception — all orchestrated to
 help a Jew rectify his past or receive blessings in the future.

The Benefit of Ruach HaKodesh

Knowing that a Rebbe can see the past, present, and future
 may enhance one's appreciation of a Rebbe, but that's not the
 main thrust of one's relationship with a Rebbe.

When a chassid seeks the advice and spiritual insight of a
tzaddik, he knows the *tzaddik* is using *ruach hakodesh* or
 prophecy to communicate to him what G-d wants him to
 know. That's why a chassid is absolutely committed to
 following the Rebbe's words because he is assured that G-d is
 personally communicating His desire and directive to him
 through the *tzaddik*.

Although the average Jew may not perceive the spiritual
 forces present in the world, experiencing a *tzaddik's ruach*
hakodesh or prophecy gives him the spiritual confidence
 necessary to develop a love and passion for G-d and elevate his
 Divine service to a whole new level. This is one of the most
 important functions of the Rebbe-chassid relationship.



him. It was decreed that the selfish friend should die and be sent to *Gehinnom*¹⁸ as punishment for what he did. He came up to the Heavenly Court but in the midst of being judged, the ‘good’ friend made very animated and adamant demands: ‘I won’t be able to enjoy my reward in heaven knowing that my friend is suffering. Don’t send him to *Gehinnom*!’

“Finally the Heavenly Court agreed that both souls would go down to the world again and the ‘bad’ friend would be given another chance to help the ‘good’ friend. If he did, his sin would be repaired and he would have a clean slate. So both souls reincarnated in the same predicament; one poor and the other rich.

“This time, though, they were strangers; neither was aware of their past connection. The rich person unfortunately hadn’t changed, and when the poor person knocked on his door for help, the same behavior repeated itself and he selfishly refused. Dejected and despondent, the poor man passed out and died outside the rich man’s door.

“Now when the poor person’s soul went up to the Heavenly Court, they wanted to bring up the rich person’s soul as well to give it the punishment it deserved. The ‘good’ friend said, ‘Please. I love him so much. Don’t punish him. Find a way for him to repent and correct his ways.’”

When the Baal Shem Tov concluded this story, the man to whom he was speaking paled and began to tremble. Indeed, just days before, a poor man died at his doorstep when he refused to give him charity. The Baal Shem Tov looked at him and said, “You are one of the souls in this story. Had you given your ‘friend’ the charity he requested, your whole life would have been rectified. But now, because of your friend’s

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18. When a person passes away, his soul may go to *Gehinnom*, a place of purification, to be spiritually cleansed before entering the World to Come.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** ע"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** ה"י
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** ע"ה
Ekman

Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** ע"ה
Marenburg

Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766

Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** ע"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)

Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF

Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתיח'
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY

Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y. and Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

weak from hunger, he made the difficult trip on foot and finally arrived at the home of his friend.

“Joyous at seeing his old friend, he welcomed him with open arms, offering him a room and a bed in his home to recuperate. Instead of giving him a loan, he did something truly incredible. He took all the money he had, divided it in half, and gave one-half to his friend. ‘Just like when we were kids,’ he said warmly.

“The man went back home and invested the money in a business and became very successful.

“The wheel of fortune changed and the other friend now became poor. He lost his entire fortune and also had to beg in order to survive. One day, the thought popped into his head: ‘I’ll go to my dear friend whom I was so glad to help and he will surely help me.’ Making the long, difficult trip on foot, he finally arrived at his friend’s home, full of hope.

“But this friend was not so generous. Along with his newfound wealth came the insidious traits of selfishness and stinginess. When the poor friend came to the door, the servant said, ‘My boss can’t see you now. You’ll have to come back tomorrow.’

“‘Tell him it’s me!’ cried the man. ‘Tell him my name!’ But the answer came back, ‘He is very busy today. He will see you tomorrow.’

“The man was so weak and physically broken from the trip that the hope of seeing his dear friend had been the only thing keeping him alive. But the disappointment of his friend’s reaction was the final blow, and now that that dream had been shattered, he crumbled in despair. Nobody knew he was by the door, and he died there of a broken heart.

“When his soul came up to heaven, there was a tremendous uproar about how terribly his friend had treated

*Seeing One's Past Lifetimes
Through Ruach HaKodesh*

Then we find that the *tzaddik's* spiritual ability goes beyond perceiving the past, present and future of a person's lifetime and extends to a person's previous lifetimes. This is a Torah principle known as *gilgulim*: the possibility of a soul incarnating several times in order to rectify some untoward action from a past life, complete something left incomplete, or fulfill a certain purpose.

Many *tzaddikim* were aware of the details of people's past lives, the purpose of their subsequent reincarnations, and what needed to be done to achieve rectification or completion.

One such story involves the Baal Shem Tov. A man once traveled to the Baal Shem Tov, not really knowing what had propelled him to come. He stood staring at the Baal Shem Tov, not sure what to do or say. When the Baal Shem Tov asked if there was anything he would like to ask him, he declined, saying he was already blessed with health, children, and wealth. The Baal Shem Tov said, "If so, I will tell you a story.

"There were once two little boys who were close friends. They were so close that throughout their childhood, whenever either one of them would get any money, they would split it equally between them.

"Eventually they grew up and went their own way. Both were blessed with families and both became very successful businessmen. Eventually, one of them lost his entire fortune and became very poor; so poor, in fact, that he had to beg for food. Suddenly the thought flashed in his mind that he could go to his old friend and ask for a loan to reestablish himself in business. His friend lived far away and he didn't have money for a horse and wagon. Even though it was winter and he was

CHAPTER FIVE

**RUACH HAKODESH
AND PROPHECY**

A *tzaddik's* ability to perform miracles was discussed in the previous chapter, accompanied by several stories involving miracles performed by *tzaddikim*. A common reaction to a miracle is often the excitement and the "wow" it elicits, but more important is the G-dly purpose of this phenomenon in our lives.

Regardless of the depth of our academic knowledge of G-dliness, witnessing a miracle enhances our spiritual awareness well beyond the confines of intellect. It refines and attunes us to the existence of higher realities and spiritual subtleties, and this helps us greatly in our G-dly practice.

At chapter's end, an analogy was given comparing an ordinary person's view of the world and the *tzaddik's* ability to perceive the G-dliness that exists beyond the veils of nature.

In this chapter, this G-dly perception of a *tzaddik* will be explored in more detail.

The Holy Vision of a Tzaddik

A *tzaddik* possesses the ability to see and perceive spiritual realities unknown to, and concealed from, the ordinary eye and mind.

Knowledge of the future, spiritual decrees such as those placed on people, countries, or crops, events transpiring in

heaven, the spiritual purpose and outcome of worldly events, and a deep understanding of G-dliness are all part of the *tzaddik's* ability to perceive higher realities.

A *tzaddik* can also see deeply into a person's soul and view the past, present and future of that person's life. Even the events and spiritual consequences¹ of a person's past lifetimes can be perceived by the *tzaddik*, as well as the corrections that need to be made as a result of them.

This holy vision is known by the terms "*ruach hakodesh*" or "prophecy," otherwise known as Divine inspiration.² Divine inspiration is as the term implies — inspiration (or spiritual revelation) that comes from G-d. A *tzaddik's* Divine inspiration allows him to experience deeper spiritual awareness of people and events which he often then communicates in order to assist people in their spiritual growth and Divine service.

As with the other aspects of a *tzaddik's* special gifts and abilities discussed in this book, the belief that the spiritual vision of a *tzaddik* is a phenomenon that originated with the chassidic movement is a common misconception. His ability to possess these qualities is a fundamental principle of Jewish belief.

Our increased focus on a *tzaddik's* holy vision is a function of the spiritual necessity of our generation, but the holy vision of *tzaddikim* has existed since the beginning of time.

1. People encountered, and events that occurred, in past lifetimes will often need to be revisited or replayed in a current lifetime in order to rectify wrongs committed or complete a spiritual mission.

2. Both *ruach hakodesh* and prophecy derive from Divine inspiration, but as will be explained later in the chapter, they differ in their degree of revelation.

humiliating for the boy. Finally, some kind soul broke the lock on the box which allowed the boy to run away."

Hearing this sparked the *melamed's* memory and he did, in fact, remember that he was the one who showed such kindness to the boy. Then, to his shock, the official identified himself. "I was that little boy. I have felt indebted to you all my life and wanted to pay you back, but I didn't know your name or where to find you. As Minister of Education, I am in a position of great power and wealth and can arrange for you to have anything you want. Please allow me to pay you back for what you did for me."

When the *melamed* heard these words, he almost fell off his chair. He told the minister that he didn't want anything for himself but would like a favor for one of the friends who had accompanied him to the park. He proceeded to relate the story of how the Alter Rebbe sent this publisher to Vilna to obtain a permit for his printing house, knowing in advance how it would all work out.

Needless to say, all involved were overwhelmed by the great vision of the Alter Rebbe who foresaw every detail of this whole episode. Able to see the future, he knew that the Minister of Education would not be in Petersburg but in the city of Vilna, and that he had a debt to pay this *melamed*. And able to see the past, the Alter Rebbe knew the story of how the *melamed* freed the prisoner, as if the whole thing happened right before his eyes.

The ability to do this is only because of the *ruach hakodesh*, the spiritual capacity, of the *tzaddik*.

be of help in this situation. Nevertheless, since the Rebbe sent him to Vilna, he went, and after much searching, found the *melamed*.

“Why on earth did the Rebbe send you to me?” asked the bewildered *melamed*. “I am an ordinary person with no connections and no knowledge of politics at all!” Stumped, the two of them went to a third chassid, one of the leaders of the Vilna community, to make a plan. Although this chassid did have some political connections, he also did not understand why the Rebbe would send the publisher to Vilna. Nevertheless, all three decided that if the Rebbe sent him there, something would eventually turn out.

Tired of sitting around for days waiting for something to happen, they walked to the center of town and wandered aimlessly around a local park to discuss their possible next steps. They noticed a well-dressed Russian official scrutinizing the *melamed*, and before they knew it, the official approached them and asked the *melamed* to meet him the next day at his hotel.

With trepidation, the *melamed* arrived at the hotel the following day, and to his surprise, the official was awaiting him with a warm smile. He asked the *melamed* if he recognized him, but the *melamed* had no idea how or where he would have met a Russian official of such high stature.

“Do you remember the town of Shklov, where you lived as a child? There was a boy in your town who was a bit wild, and after he violated the Torah in a very serious way, the community decided to punish him. In order to publicly embarrass the boy, they put him in a sort of cage-like structure and placed it in a well-trafficked section of town where everyone could see him. Needless to say, it was devastatingly

Prophecy

The entire Jewish religion is founded on the “Thirteen Principles of Faith” as compiled and written by the *Rambam*. The sixth of these fundamental principles is the belief in prophets and prophecy. In his work *Mishneh Torah*, the *Rambam* writes that certain men and women who devote their entire life to G-dliness and live a pure G-dly life in thought, speech and action; who always act according to G-d’s will and never violate it any way, have the possibility of raising themselves to the spiritual level of a *navi* (prophet),³ a person in whom the spirit of prophecy descends and dwells.

By definition, therefore, a prophet is someone who possesses the above qualifications.

What is prophecy? Simply put, it is the ability to receive G-dly insights that include knowledge of past and future events here on earth, events taking place in heaven, and deep levels of G-dliness.

The most well-known instances of prophecy include the prophecy of Moses and that of the other prophets of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. On a level of his own, Moses is known to have received direct communication from G-d, while the lesser prophets received G-dly communication through dreams and visions.⁴

3. It states in the *Mishneh Torah*: It is [one] of the foundations of our faith to know that G-d grants prophecy to man. Prophecy is bestowed only upon a very wise sage of strong character who is never overcome by his natural inclinations in any regard. ... He must work upon himself until his mind is constantly clear and directed on high. ... He must furthermore contemplate the wisdom of G-d in everything and understand its significance, whether it be the highest spiritual entity or the lowliest thing on earth. One who does this, immediately becomes worthy of Divine inspiration. (*Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Sefer HaMada*, “Laws of the Foundation of the Torah,” ch. 7, *halachah* 1; Moznaim Publishing Co., Brooklyn, NY, 1989.)

4. *Ibid.*, chs. 7-10. For the difference between Moses and the other prophets, see ch. 7, sec. 6.

Many people believe that all prophecy ceased after the destruction of the First *Beis HaMikdash*.⁵ This misconception is based on a misinterpretation of the wording of the *Talmud*. The *Talmud* did indeed say that the *era* of prophecy ceased — i.e., that prophets are no longer as common as they used to be — but not that prophecy itself ceased to exist.⁶ It does state, in fact, that exceptional people do still exist who can be called prophets as defined by the *Rambam*.⁷

In addition, even though we don't find many prophets today, a *tzaddik* possessing *ruach hakodesh* is much more common. This was true not only before and after the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, but in our day as well.

The difference between *ruach hakodesh* and prophecy will be discussed in the next two sections.

Levels of Prophecy

The *Rambam* writes that as many prophets as there were,⁸ there were that many different levels of prophecy, much as different people have all different levels of intellect.

If we were to categorize a section of the population as highly intelligent, for example, there would still be as many

5. The First *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed by the Babylonians in 423 BCE, 410 years after having been built by King Solomon.

6. *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 14, p. 72ff; *Sefer HaSichos*, 5751, p. 788; p. 790, fn. 101.

7. *Bava Basra* 12a. Rabbi Avdimi of Haifa said: From the day that the (First) Temple was destroyed, the prophetic gift was taken away from the prophets and given to the Sages (Rabbis).” The *Gemara* asks: “[Can it be] that before the destruction of the Temple, no Sage was a prophet? What Rabbi Avdimi meant to say was that, when the Temple was destroyed, although prophecy was taken from the prophets (who were not Sages), prophecy was not taken from the Sages (i.e., they retained their prophetic power even after the Temple's destruction).” See *ibid.* for a protracted discussion of this subject. (English translation from the *Schottenstein Edition of Talmud*, Artscroll.)

8. According to some opinions, there were 1,200,000 prophets from the time the Jewish people left Egypt until several years after the destruction of the First *Beis HaMikdash* (see *Megillah* 14a).

do whatever was necessary to reveal what was ordained for the person in actuality.¹⁶

In one such situation, a wealthy person would often come to the Baal Shem Tov and beg him relentlessly for a blessing for children. Finally the Baal Shem Tov told him, “If you want such a blessing, you'll have to accept the fact that if you have a child you will lose all your wealth.” The person mulled it over and finally agreed; and indeed, that is what happened: a baby was born but the man lost all his wealth.

The Baal Shem Tov explained that in heaven, the amount of *chesed* (kindness) the man was destined to receive was limited — enough for either children or wealth, but not both. Seeing this, the Baal Shem Tov was able to provide the man with a choice, which ultimately led to the fulfillment of his desire for children.¹⁷

In another story, a chassid in the publishing business wanted to publish and print Torah books but needed a permit from the Russian Minister of Education. Since the Russian government was not too favorably inclined toward the Jews, and how much more so when it came to publishing Jewish books, the chassid was very concerned.

Not knowing what to do, he went to the Alter Rebbe for a blessing and advice. The Alter Rebbe told him to go to the city of Vilna and speak to a certain Torah teacher (*melamed*) who taught first grade in the city.

The chassid was puzzled because not only was the Minister of Education located in Petersburg and not Vilna, he could not imagine how a simple individual like a *melamed* could possibly

16. See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1138, regarding the extent of the spiritual vision of the Baal Shem Tov, the Maggid of Mezritch, and the Alter Rebbe.

17. *Derech Mitzvosecha: A Mystical Perspective on the Commandments*, by the TzemaCh Tzedek. (In English translation by Sichos In English, Brooklyn, NY, 2004), p. 169. In Hebrew original (Kehot), see 106b.

remembered that a Rabbi lived in a nearby village and headed in that direction. Frenzied, he somehow managed to arrive at the Rabbi's house where he hoped to obtain some relief from these frightening visions.

When he told the Rabbi the story, the Rabbi became very puzzled. "Indeed," he said, "I am a Rabbi. If you ask me a question in Torah law — what you are or aren't allowed to eat — I can give you an answer. But I cannot help you with this sort of thing. Not far from here is a city called Lubavitch. There is a Rebbe there who understands dreams and can help you."

So he set out immediately for Lubavitch and fortunately was able to receive an audience with the Rebbe Maharash. But before the man could say a word, the Rebbe looked at him and said, "What a terrible thing that a son should shoot his father!" Hearing these words, the man fainted on the spot.

Upon awakening, he realized that he was in the presence of a G-dly man, a great *tzaddik* with true *ruach hakodesh*. Witnessing this G-dly revelation propelled him to choose, right there and then, to return to Judaism, and that's how he became a chassid of the Rebbe Maharash.

Another aspect of a Rebbe's *ruach hakodesh* is being able to see what is transpiring in heaven. There are countless stories of the Baal Shem Tov and other *tzaddikim* who could see heavenly judgments decreed on a community or an individual and reverse the decree through prayer or rousing whoever was involved to *teshuvah*.¹⁵ Sometimes they would see a positive decree destined for a person and would instruct him or her to

different levels of intellect among them as there are people in that group. The same is true with prophecy. But how can there be *levels* in prophecy? Isn't it true that a prophet either knows what's happening on a higher spiritual plane or doesn't?

The answer is that there are many spiritual levels in the G-dly realms. As we learn in chassidic and Kabbalistic teachings, there are four spiritual worlds — *Atzilus*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* — and each is defined by the quantity and quality of G-dly revelation within it. Within these four spiritual worlds, each has ten levels which are known as the ten *sefiros*.⁹ Within each of the ten *sefiros*, there are not only several more levels but hundreds and thousands of levels. This basically means that within each world there are hundreds, thousands and even millions of additional levels of spiritual existence.

So when we say that a prophet is a person who has raised him or herself to a higher spiritual plane and can now see things on a higher spiritual level, the question is, which level? Does he or she have the ability to see things on the level of *Atzilus*? The level of *Beriah*, the level of *Yetzirah* or *Asiyah*?

Once it is established that a prophet perceives holy vision from a particular spiritual world, at what level is his prophecy within that world? If there were thousands of prophets who could perceive spiritual realities as high as the world of *Beriah*, for example, it is possible that the level of perception would be different for each one of them. Each could possess the ability

9. The ten *sefiros* are the ten attributes, or building blocks, with which G-d creates and sustains the world. The first three, *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas* — wisdom, understanding, and knowledge — are intellectual attributes, while the remaining seven, *chesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchus* — kindness, severity, compassion, endurance, humility, bonding and sovereignty — are the emotional attributes. Within each *sefirah* there exists on a lesser level the same configuration of ten, *ad infinitum*, for example, there may exist the quality of *chesed* within the *chesed* that is within *gevurah*, that is in *netzach*, etc.

15. The simple translation is "repentance," regretting the wrongs one did in the past and resolving to change one's ways in the future. On a deeper level, *teshuvah* means to advance in spirituality by developing a deeper connection to G-d.

to perceive on any one of the infinite levels of spiritual reality existing in that world.

So when we speak about a prophet's specific level and manner of prophecy, we are referring to the spiritual world and level within that world to which he is connected.

Many people think that the definition of a prophet is one who communicates his or her spiritual vision to others. In reality, a person has the designation of prophet when he or she fulfills the qualifications mentioned earlier in the chapter. Relaying G-dly communications such as foretelling future events and warning people to change their behavior, for example, are *acts* of prophecy, but are not factors in determining who is a prophet.

Therefore, a person who fulfills the *Rambam's* requirements of being a vessel for prophecy can also receive this heightened spiritual awareness solely for his or her own spiritual growth. If they so choose, they may never communicate these revelations to others, but they are prophets nonetheless. This may give some insight into why, among the hundreds of thousands of prophets who prophesized during the age of prophecy, only 48 male and 7 female prophets¹⁰ are recorded in *Tanach*.¹¹

So while some prophets may warn, foretell or convey their holy vision to others, a qualified prophet need only possess a deep level of spiritual understanding of G-d and of the Torah, and a deeper understanding of world events.

children. In every area of his life, he was totally disconnected from Torah and the Jewish way of life.

He earned his livelihood by dancing and performing at weddings and other occasions. One night, in a dream, he saw his father who had long since passed away. His father said to him, "Moshe! It's time to return to your people and ask G-d to forgive you. Change your life!"

The man woke up in shock but told himself, "Relax! Don't worry. It's only a dream. Don't take it too seriously." He washed his face with cold water and went back to sleep.

The following night he had the same dream. Again, his father begged and pleaded with him to change his life and return to Judaism, but when he awoke, he washed his face and dismissed it. When the dream repeated itself a third night, he began to feel very uncomfortable but quieted his jittery nerves by reassuring himself that the whole affair was simply ridiculous.

That week, he was performing at a wedding, and, while dancing in front of a crowd, he suddenly saw the image of his father hovering over his head. Again, the father pleaded with him saying, "Moshe! Change your life. Become a Jew!"

At this point, he lost control of himself, yelling, "Leave me alone! Leave me alone!" Pulling out a gun, he shot at the image several times to chase it away. Naturally, the people watching this spectacle did not see any father, nor did they hear any words that would provoke him to behave in such a way. All they saw was a man pulling out a gun for no apparent reason and shooting it wildly into the air.

Assuming that he had gone mad, everyone quickly began to flee the room. Also fearing he had lost his mind, the man began to run frantically, as fast and as far as he could go, trying to escape this "ghost" he imagined was chasing him. He

10. *Talmud, Megillah* 14a, which also lists there the names of the seven recorded female prophets. For the names of the 48 male prophets, see *Seder Olam*. Prophets whose prophecies did not apply to all future generations were also not recorded.

11. An acronym for Torah (the Five Books of Moses), *Neviim* (Prophets), and *Kesuvim* (Writings).

He prepared a question in the *Talmud* (from Tractate *Erachin*)¹³ to ask the Alter Rebbe — a question none of the scholars in his day were able to answer. By the Alter Rebbe's ability to answer the question, Reb Hillel would know whether this *tzaddik* was indeed greater than the other *tzaddikim* of his generation and whether he would become his chassid.

He knew the time for his much anticipated meeting with the Alter Rebbe had finally arrived when he heard him entering the room. But just as Reb Hillel was about to emerge from under the bed to pose the question, he heard the Alter Rebbe saying: "If a young man has a question in *Erachin*, he must first evaluate himself [before he asks questions to others]." When Reb Hillel heard these words, he fainted, and by the time he was aroused, the Alter Rebbe had already gone.¹⁴

It was obvious that the Alter Rebbe knew exactly what Reb Hillel was thinking, and the astonishment of witnessing such clear *ruach hakodesh* caused the latter to faint. Reb Hillel never met the Alter Rebbe; in fact, he never saw him again, but he eventually became a chassid of the Alter Rebbe's son, the Mittlerer Rebbe.

Another aspect of a *tzaddik's ruach hakodesh* is the ability to know what is transpiring in a person's life, even if the *tzaddik* has never seen the person or the person lives in a distant city.

A certain Jew related the following story of how he became a chassid of the Rebbe Maharash. He had grown up in a religious home but he himself left Torah observance. He became so assimilated that he married a woman who was disassociated with Judaism completely and with whom he had

It is not uncommon to hear stories of *tzaddikim* who possess *ruach hakodesh*. While many may also qualify as prophets as defined by the *Rambam*, the majority do not. The following section provides clarification into this level of spiritual awareness.

The Difference Between Prophecy and Ruach HaKodesh

If both prophets and those who possess *ruach hakodesh* can see the future and perceive higher spiritual realities, what is the difference between them?

After the above preface, the answer now becomes quite simple. Both are a form of spiritual perception, but on different levels: prophecy on a higher level and *ruach hakodesh* on a lower level. After the destruction of the First Temple, the higher level of spiritual perception (prophecy) may be found in only a select few exceptional individuals in each generation. *Ruach hakodesh*, on the other hand, is much more commonly found. *Ruach hakodesh* may not approach the great level of spiritual perception that existed during the era of prophecy, but those who possess it are still able to perceive reality on a vastly higher spiritual level than the average person.

The fact that *ruach hakodesh* exists after the age of prophecy is not an innovation of the chassidic movement. Many of the writings of leading Torah authorities attest to the existence of *ruach hakodesh* in our current era, particularly the writings of Rabbi Yitzchok Luria — the *AriZal* — one of Jewish history's greatest authorities on the *Kabbalah*.

Many stories involving the *ruach hakodesh* of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai and many of his colleagues are found in the *Zohar*.

13. Regarding how to evaluate a person's worth when a man, woman, or child wished to contribute money equal to his or her value to the Holy Temple.

14. *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 2, p. 401. (In English translation, *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, p. 147; published by Vaad LeHafatzos Sichos, 1999.)

Stories of the *ruach hakodesh* of Reb Yehudah HaChassid and the *AriZal* himself are also well known.¹²

The Baal Shem Tov and the other chassidic Rebbes who followed recognized the urgent need to expose the Jewish people to the phenomenon of *ruach hakodesh* to a much greater extent. Because of the depressed spiritual level of the Jewish people in their times, a heightened consciousness and awareness of G-dliness was required in the world to revive one's excitement and passion for G-d, manifesting in deeper levels of Torah study and Jewish practice.

Many areas of a person's spiritual life are infused with vitality when he experiences a *tzaddik's ruach hakodesh*, such as one's service of G-d, love for G-d, and recognition of the Torah as G-dly. As stated in the works of *Kabbalah* and Chassidism, serving G-d with cords of love rather than out of fear of punishment is a superior service, for cultivating one's passion and love for G-d and His Torah inspires a person to greater heights of G-dly service and encourages more and more people to adopt a Torah lifestyle.

Regardless of the degree of his spiritual perception, a *tzaddik's* heightened level of G-dly awareness always existed in varying forms and intensity throughout Jewish history. By teaching a Jew to focus on the importance of connecting to *tzaddikim* and making him aware of the G-dly qualities they possess, the Baal Shem Tov was able to infuse spirituality, develop a love for G-d, and deepen Divine service among the masses in his and future generations.

Stories of Ruach HaKodesh

Among the many stories of *ruach hakodesh* of which we are aware are those in which a Rebbe would read a person's mind and demonstrate that he knew exactly what the person was thinking. This would have a profoundly positive effect on the person involved, as is seen in the following story.

This story took place over 200 years ago involving a chassid by the name of Reb Hillel Paritcher. Reb Hillel was not a Chabad chassid but had heard so much about the greatness of the Alter Rebbe — both for his expositions on *Gemara* and his teachings of Jewish mysticism — that he wanted to see the great Rabbi for himself. If the Alter Rebbe could demonstrate to him that he was superior to the other *tzaddikim* of that generation, Reb Hillel would consider becoming his chassid.

But as Divine providence would have it, every time he attempted to meet the Alter Rebbe, something would go wrong. He would travel to cities where the Alter Rebbe was visiting or lecturing to meet or just see him, but whenever he arrived, he would learn that the Alter Rebbe had already gone. Oftentimes, the Alter Rebbe would have barely left just as Reb Hillel was arriving.

One day he devised a foolproof plan. He would somehow obtain the Alter Rebbe's itinerary in advance and reach a certain city before the Alter Rebbe was scheduled to arrive. That way he would be insured of seeing him.

In one particular instance, Reb Hillel went to the Alter Rebbe's upcoming destination and hid underneath the bed in the room in which the Alter Rebbe would be staying. Using such bold tactics, he thought, would surely guarantee his success.

12. See *Kuntres Etz HaChaim*, by the Rebbe Rashab (Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, NY), p. 78 in the Hebrew original, for a description of the *AriZal's* astonishing spiritual perception.