

Eliezer Livneh's analysis of the relationships between Prophet and King in ancient Israel should be read not only for the interesting light it sheds on the history shared by the two in the biblical era, but also—perhaps primarily—for the relevance of this analysis for modern Israel. The ideal function of Religion vis-a-vis the State is traceable to the role of the Prophet in the ancient Judean and Israelite monarchies. Mr. Livneh's remarks, particularly those about King Uzziah, represent a powerful critique of much that has often been accepted unquestioningly in the State of Israel. Mr. Livneh previously contributed "Secular Civilization at an Impasse" to our Spring, 1959 issue. Editor of *Be'terem* and one of the founders of *Ha-Mishtar Ha-Chadash*, a new grouping in Israeli political life, he is a prolific author and a man of affairs. The present article was translated by Rabbi Herschel Schacter of Bronx, N.Y.

PROPHECY AND MONARCHY:

Religion and State in the Biblical Era

The unique expression of Hebraic creativity is prophecy. The turning point in the spiritual life of our people is "when prophecy ceased in Israel." In the course of generations, in the process of adjustment to the vicissitudes of life in the Diaspora, there has become blurred the awareness that both historically and essentially Prophecy and Monarchy are intertwined.

At the very dawn of Israel's history there emerged the towering image of Moses. In his unique personality were fused both political sovereignty and spiritual authority. This unique synthesis was ordained only for the specific era: that of the spiritual formation of our people at Sinai and during the forty years in the desert. With

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the close of the first critical period this essentially singular phenomenon ended, for it was not intended to be the pattern for the normal national existence—"for from afar shalt thou see the land and there thou wilt not come." With the end of the period of physical conquest and material settlement of the land, and during the height of the climactic struggle between the Israelites and the Philistines, which was to determine the spiritual gestalt of our people, Prophecy and Monarchy make their appearance side by side in two separate individuals. Prophecy did not develop slowly from within and then fortuitously attach itself to the monarchical element. Rather, it burst forth spontaneously, precisely at the moment of national yearning for full political independence. Its primary function was clear from its inception: to establish Israel's monarchy firmly, to guide it, and to serve as an *ezer ke 'negdo*, in the dual and contradictory connotation of this expression: as helpmate and as critic. Only one generation before the anointment of King Saul, during the Prophet Samuel's youth, we are told: "The word of the Lord was precious in those days, there was no frequent vision" (I Samuel 3:1). Yet only one generation later, with the first blossoming of Monarchy, the land was filled with groups of prophets and a "band of prophets" set out to meet the man who was destined to be the first king of Israel, on his first journey to royalty. It was the Prophet who established the Monarchy. With all the contradictions of Monarchy and despite the prophet's awareness of these contradictions, he did not consider his mission complete until he had firmly set the foundations of Israel's kingdom. When the first attempt failed, he reestablished it in another form, which, in the collective conscience of the people, became the symbol of its freedom and independence: the Kingdom of the House of David.

The Prophet's primary function is in relation to the King, to the Kingdom of Israel, to the Jewish State. Although the Prophet, by his very nature, is not dependent upon the King and the activities of the State, but is rather called upon to admonish them occasionally and to dramatize their misdeeds, he is nevertheless deeply attached to the very existence of the Monarchy. From one point of view he may be considered an integral part of Jewish sovereignty. Indeed, when the prophet Gad came to reprove King David for his serious transgression, he appears before him not merely on the strength of

his Prophecy but also by dint of his royal function. "And the word of the Lord came to Gad the Prophet, *the Seer of David*, saying . . ." (II Samuel 24:11). The first historical prophet, Samuel, appears on the national scene simultaneously with the first monarch, Saul. With the termination of Monarchy comes a diminution of Prophecy. Tradition hints at the lower degree in the status of the Prophet Ezekiel in comparison with the great prophets who preceded him, despite his many "visions." "All that Ezekiel saw was seen by Isaiah. To what can Ezekiel be compared?—to a villager who saw the king. To what can Isaiah be compared?—to the dweller of a metropolis who saw the king." (*Chagigah* 13b). During most of the days of the Prophet of the Diaspora, Israel was not independent in its own land. The prime target for his barbs had become blurred and his forcefulness was taken from him.

In the days of the return from Babylonia, with an awakening of the hopes for a renewal of the Davidic dynasty and complete independence, Prophecy too is renewed. Haggai's opening remarks to Zerubbabel follow the same traditional pattern, and possess the same forceful demands and admonitions, as did the words of the earlier prophets during the Davidic dynasty. At the close of his prophecy, Haggai hints at the meaning of his remarks: the throne awaiting Zerubbabel and the imminent political independence (Haggai 2:22-23). However, when it became clear, with the passage of time, that the hope for the freedom of Israel was futile, that the people of Judea were not absolute masters of their own destiny and their own land, and that there was no one to charge with the fulfillment of the religio-ethical and socio-political demands, then Prophecy began to fade. The spiritual power to demand was weakened when the "addressee" was gone.

The reign of the Hasmoneans was too short-lived and much too involved with foreign rulers for the people to consider it a legitimate extension of the Israelite Monarchy. Nevertheless, this bold attempt to renew statehood was accompanied by attempts to revive Prophecy. We find their traces in the remnants of Apocryphal books that have survived to our day. After the downfall of the Hasmonean dynasty, the nation turned once more to the Davidic dynasty. Despite this, in all Jewish history since the destruction of the First Temple, the spiritually most flourishing era, incomparable in its strength, in its richly varied facets, and in its influence upon

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the Gentiles, was this era of confused and wavering national independence from the time of Judas Maccabeus until the revolt of Bar-Kochba.

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Prophecy is bound up with Israel's political freedom not only historically, but also in terms of its very essence. There is no more authoritative affirmation of this fact than the testimony of Prophecy itself. The constant and recurring conflict between Monarch and Prophet is not the antagonism between two mutually exclusive opposites, but rather the joining of two vital forces that arouse and motivate one another. The prophet Samuel foresees the severe failings of the State and the inevitable consequences of its existence. He knows full well that these are the weaknesses of every state, however democratic, when the candidate for rulership is of the "minority tribes of Israel," shy and retiring, who to begin with entertains no desire to rule. Nevertheless, despite all fears and hesitations, the conclusion is clear. "Now therefore harken unto their voice; howbeit thou shalt earnestly forewarn them, and shalt declare unto them the manner of the king that shall reign over them" (I Samuel 8:9). The Prophet himself, filled with deep apprehension and concern, enthrones the first King over Israel and blesses his endeavors.

When the nation was compelled to decide the destiny of the land—as between themselves and the Philistines—there was no choice; Prophecy affirmed the authority of Monarchy. From then on, the whole history of the relationship between Prophecy and the State, between Seer and King, is a story of mutual struggle. However, the struggle is conducted amidst full recognition of mutual dependence. It is not only the King "who acts justly in the eyes of the Lord" who accepts the admonitions of the Prophet and abides by his every utterance; the Prophet too accepts the yoke of the Kingdom of Israel. He must commit himself to its welfare even if he is not in complete accord with its policies. The Prophet is charged not only with the abstract promulgation of righteousness, but with its embodiment within the context of an independent Israel. Therefore he is not exempt from communal responsibilities and governmental decrees. There is perhaps no more stirring and symbolic illustration of this phenomenon of interdependence than Samuel's departure from Saul. After the Prophet has informed the

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King that the Almighty has rejected both him and his family because of his transgression in showing compassion to the Amalekites (a problem remarkably relevant to our own day), Saul turns to the Prophet and says: "I have sinned; yet honor me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God." "So Samuel returned after Saul; and Saul worshipped the Lord" (I Samuel 15:30-31).

A mutual relationship of this sort existed between Prophet and King not only when the Monarch was of sterling character. The status of the kingdom in Israel obligated both sides—the Prophet and the King—to an interdependence that defies comparison in any royal form of government existing among other nations. It is difficult to describe a greater personal and spiritual conflict than that between the Prophet Elijah and Ahab the son of Omri, King of Israel. Yet, after the test on Mt. Carmel, the Lord spoke to the prophet who then "girded his loins and ran before Ahab to Jezreel" (I Kings 18:46). When King Joash of Israel, of whom it is written "and he did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not leave all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nevat," became aware of the prophet Elisha's fatal malady, he was stirred to the very depths of his soul: "And Joash, the King of Israel, descended to Elisha and cried before him and said, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and his horsemen. . . .'" In this same encounter we behold one of the most gripping scenes in Scripture, which reveals to us the remarkable relationship between King and Prophet: "And Elisha said unto him, fetch a bow and arrows. And he fetched unto him a bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, place thy hand upon the bow. And he placed his hand upon it and Elisha laid his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then said Elisha, shoot. And he shot. And he said, the arrow of victory from the Lord, and the arrow of victory over Syria; and thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till they be consumed. And he said, take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, strike upon the ground. And he struck three times and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him, and said, thou shouldst have struck five or six times; then wouldst thou have smitten the Syrians till they had been consumed . . . And Elisha died . . ." (II Kings 13:15-20).

Thus it was in every generation—the King and his Prophet, the

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Prophet and his Kings: Samuel with Saul and David; Nathan and Gad with David and Solomon; Shemaiah, "the man of God," with Rehoboam—an unbroken chain until the tragic figures of Jeremiah and Zedekiah and their counterparts, Haggai and Zerubbabel. Who knows what is yet concealed in the hidden treasures of Jewish history and what allusions and secrets are yet to be found in its bosom. As long as there was a King in Israel, be he ever so wicked, he yet symbolized by his very being the freedom and Independence of Israel—the "address" for the wrath of the Prophet, the opportunity and objective of his spiritual activity, the channel for his divine message to all the world. When Israel's freedom declined and its independence was shattered, the challenge to the Seer disappeared. The hammer was bereft of its anvil. Prophecy ceased in Israel.

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In order that we may better understand our current status, we naturally direct our attention to ancient times and attempt to learn from Scripture. Progress is then being made in the right direction; but it is hardly adequate. The written Torah is the primeval matter out of which is derived the Tradition of Israel; it is not the Tradition itself. In Scripture are recorded the deeds of early heroes, fraudulent acts of rulers, and intemperate outbursts which are not much different from tales related in various collections of history and legend. Rabbi Ami (*Tamid* 29a) already noted that "the Torah speaks (at times) *divrei havai*—in exaggeration and hyperbole." The Bible became the true spiritual source and the genuine touchstone and criterion of Israel's ideals only after it was hammered out and purified in the refining crucible of the Oral Law and the classic Sages.

The Sages taught: "Three things were given to Israel on condition: Eretz Israel, the Holy Temple, and the kingdom of the House of David" (*Mekhiltah, Yitro*). There are various conditions which are prerequisite for the existence of sovereignty. Sovereignty must never be regarded as an end in itself and as a criterion for our conduct. Obedience to government must never be absolute. Rulers are only human, and corruption is therefore nigh unto their very nature; adoration of them must be limited, their mastery must be curbed, and we must always look with favor upon their exchange and replacement. And our great national heroes are no exception.

Our Sages give to our national heroes an image different from that which we would receive from a cursory reading of the biblical text itself. From a spiritual point of view, the historical and biographical accuracy of these personalities, as they are projected by the Sages, is hardly relevant. The significant fact is that these are the images which were accepted by the collective conscience of our people. "David did not pause for a moment in his religious studies"; and in this the Almighty sees his greatness: "Better is to Me the one day that thou sittest and engagest in learning than the thousand burnt-offerings which thy son Solomon is destined to sacrifice before Me on the Altar" (*Shabbat* 30a). Tradition, of course, knows also of the *other* image of David and his household, to which it clearly reveals its negative attitude. "Rabbi Judah said in Rab's name, David had four hundred children, all the offspring of 'beautiful women' (i.e. captives); all sat in golden chariots and went at the head of armies, and they were the strong men of the House of David, who went to terrorize the world" (*Kiddushin* 76b).

Solomon son of David did not fare much better. Even the greatest achievement of the House of David—the construction of the Temple—was considered by the Sages from their own subjective point of view. Their penetrating insight saw the seeds of the destruction of the Sanctuary at the very celebrations marking its dedication. On the very night when Solomon completed the construction of the Temple, they taught, he married Batya, daughter of Pharaoh, and the rejoicing of Pharaoh's daughter was greater than the celebration of the Temple. "It was then that the Almighty considered destroying Jerusalem, as it is written (Jer. 32:31): 'For this city hath been to Me a provocation of Mine anger and of My fury from the day that they built it'" (*Vayikra Rabba* 12:4).

Continuing to fill in the gaps in the Scriptural narrative on Solomon, the Sages inform us that the King was barred from his throne and "compelled to go begging for his bare sustenance" (*Tanchumah, Va'era*). A ruler, too, must be sorely tested even with worries over his most elementary needs so that he might sympathetically understand the needs of his people.

Now, if this lesson applies to Solomon, the wisest of all men, how much more so does it apply to others? This restrained attitude toward the bearers of leadership runs through all of the Oral Law. Even in relation to the redemption of captives the king enjoys no

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priority. The explanation is crucial: "Our Sages taught: the wise man takes precedence over the king of Israel; (in being redeemed, if he is a captive) for, upon his death, a wise man cannot easily be replaced, whereas should the king die—every Israelite is worthy of kingship" (*Horayot* 13).

The great failure of Jeroboam was not in the division of the kingdom, as is taught in Israeli schools today. His basic sin, in the eyes of the Sages, was his desire to project political dimensions into areas beyond the domain of politics. "Rabbi Judah said: He (Jeroboam) set a wicked man alongside a righteous man and said to them, 'will ye approve of all that I may do?' They replied, 'Yes.' 'I wish to be king,' he went on; and they again said, 'Yes.' 'Will ye obey all my commands?' he asked. Again they replied, 'Yes.' 'Even for the worship of idols?' Whereupon the righteous declared, 'God forbid.'" The wicked man was a cunning politician and strategist, the story continues. "But," urged the wicked upon the righteous, 'dost thou really think that a man like Jeroboam would serve idols? He only wishes to test you to see whether you will really accept his orders.'" This devious reasoning in the service of the ruler is the true evil. For, as soon as Jeroboam acquired autocratic authority, he turned to idolatry. He was adjudged guilty, "because he caused a rift between Israel and their Father in Heaven" (*Sanhedrin* 101b).

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Scripture relates that only two Kings merited that their biographies be written by Prophets. One was Abijah son of Rehoboam. "And the rest of the deeds of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings are written in the commentary of the prophet Iddo" (II Chronicles 23:18). We do not know very much about Abijah. Chronicles does record that he insisted on the rights and privileges of the Priests and Levites in the Temple service.

The second king was Uzziah. His biography was written by the great Isaiah. What was there in the life story of Uzziah that fascinated Isaiah? Tradition maintains that Uzziah son of Amaziah and Isaiah son of Amoz were contemporaries. Isaiah's royal qualities and statesman-like character are frequently noted in the Oral Tradition. There is truly a regal element in the demeanor of ben Amoz, apparent in his handling of political problems. Isaiah's prophecy commenced "in the year of King Uzziah's death." The end of the latter is linked with the beginning of the former. But it is

extremely doubtful that either their family relationship or their contemporaneity moved Isaiah to write Uzziah's biography. Rather, the motives were spiritual, or, more accurately, politico-spiritual.

We do not know what is hidden in the chronicle of "the rest of the deeds of Uzziah, the first and the last," written by Isaiah (II Chronicles 26:22). Perhaps, in the course of time, we may learn the secret in some yet undiscovered urn. For the time being, however, a careful perusal of II Chronicles 26 will be adequate for us to understand the weightiness of the subject. For indeed there was a vast distinction between the King's first and last acts. His beginnings were marked by intelligent understanding and significant achievements. "And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord . . . And he set himself to seek God . . . And as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper." Uzziah was a mighty conqueror. He eliminated most of the Philistines. He smote the Arabians. He subdued the Ammonites. "His name spread abroad even to the entrance to Egypt." He was a gifted military administrator and fully utilized the arts and sciences for military purposes, especially for ballistics. "And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and upon the corners, wherewith to shoot arrows and great stones." He distinguished himself, equally, in his efforts in behalf of settlement and agriculture. He built towers in the desert. He hewed out many cisterns. "He had much cattle in the lowland and in the plains; he had farmers and vinedressers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields; for he loved the soil." It was he who "built Elat and restored it unto Judah."

It is clear, however, that it was not Uzziah's military conquests and colonizing achievements that inspired Isaiah to write his biography. The exploits of Jeroboam son of Joash, King of Israel, were greater than those of Uzziah, yet Isaiah does not write of him. "He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hammath unto the sea of the Arabah" (II Kings 24:25). The greater part of modern Syria, including Damascus and Hammath, were annexed to his kingdom. His heroic deeds were recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel just as were probably those of Uzziah in the annals of the kings of Judah and Israel (although this is not specifically mentioned). Yet, what has all this to do with the *prophet*? It was, then, not the successes of Uzziah that made such an impact upon Isaiah, but rather the spiritual and psychological implications of these very successes

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—the inner deterioration in the heart of the King that resulted from them. “But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against the Lord his God; for he went into the Temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the Altar of incense.” In this sense he was the complete opposite of Abijah.

Arrogance, tyranny, autocracy, and the loss of any sense of restraint are the immediate consequences of such rulers who are viewed as “successful” by themselves or their contemporaries. However, the arrogance of Uzziah took on a unique form. Uzziah was not satisfied merely with his royal status. He insisted on becoming also the High Priest—the political ruler and religious spiritual leader simultaneously. Fortunately for his contemporaries, they were endowed with the strength and vigor to challenge the “successful” king and rebel against him *in time*. “And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men; and they withstood Uzziah the king and said unto him: ‘It pertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron that are consecrated to burn incense; go out of the Sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed!’”

These priests were indeed men of valor who jeopardized their lives. And they achieved an immediate victory. After 2700 years, the poignancy of the drama stands before our eyes, for, in truth, this is an *eternal* drama. “Then Uzziah was wroth; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy broke forth in his forehead before the priests in the House of the Lord, beside the Altar of incense. And Azariah the chief priest, and all his priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from thence; yea he himself made haste also to go out because the Lord had smitten him.” From then on, Uzziah no longer sat on the royal throne. “And Jotham his son was over the king’s house, judging the people of the land.”

These were the last acts of Uzziah.

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The phenomenon known among European nations as “Caesero-Papism”—the ambition to combine imperial temporal power with spiritual authority—is one of the most terrible maladies of human society. It appears periodically in unpredictable forms, and frequently those afflicted are not aware of it until it reaches an ad-

vanced stage. And, alas, all too rarely are there available the "eighty men of valor" to resist it. In the course of Jewish history this curse occurred twice, each time in bold form, and in opposite directions. King Uzziah attempted to attach the Priesthood to his Kingship; whereas Alexander Jannai, who was a High Priest, proclaimed himself as King without relinquishing his priestly prerogatives. The two are diverse in character. But their admirers are identical.

Jewish tradition was crystallized through the unique synthesis of Written and Oral Torah. Whilst the Bible is the common possession of Israel and of the other nations, its words are not always to be understood in a single literal sense. In our day, some Jews have attempted to consider the Bible as merely a book of heroic deeds and conquests. It seems as though our Sages, the bearers of the Oral Tradition, foresaw what their descendants are liable to make of the Bible and its personalities. Therefore they firmly pronounced their final judgment for future generations. Their judgment of Uzziah, the conqueror-settler, is clear: he was included amongst those who err, and cause others to err; who sin, and cause others to sin. "We find Cain, Korah, Balaam, Doeg, Ahitophel, Gehazi, Absalom, Adonijah, Uzziah, and Haman, who set their eyes upon that which was not proper for them; what they sought was not granted to them and what they possessed was taken from them" (*Sotah* 9b). His pioneering settlement of the land and his love of the soil were of no avail to the efficient king. "There were three who were zealous in their devotion to the land but in whom was found no lasting benefit. These are they: Cain, the tiller of the soil; Noah, the husbandman; and Uzziah, the lover of the soil" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 22).

Eretz Israel is not Canaan. Love of the land is not the worship of the soil. The virtue of Israel's rulers lies in curbing their rule.

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The trials of the Jewish State of today are a continuation of the tribulations which accompanied the founding of the First and Second Commonwealths. Behind the modern garb, the recurring spiritual-historical struggle is clearly evident. We know only the beginning. The rest is shrouded in dark mystery. At this moment, we cannot even say whether we are perpetuating the tradition of the Kingdom of Judah, or whether we are pursuing the aims of the Kingdom of Israel as projected by Jeroboam son of Nevat and Jeroboam son of Joash. We too carry the name of the Kingdom of *Israel*. Pray that this *not* be an omen.