Rabbi David Cohen's Book *Kol Ha-Nevua* and the Philosophy of Dialogue: New Perspectives

**Abstract:**

The personality and thought of “the Nazirite Rabbi,” Rabbi David Cohen (1887-1972), are exceptional in the landscape of modern Jewish thought.

While the nineteenth century saw a multitude of “crossings over” from the traditional *beit midrash* (house of study) to European philosophical culture (for example, Salomon Maimon and Rabbi Nachman Krochmal), in the early twentieth century such “crossing over” takes place in the opposite direction: Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig attempt to create a new Jewish thought whose foundation is the Western philosophical tradition and the operate from the positional consciousness of “returners.”

The approach of the “Nazirite Rabbi” is different again. Rather than a unidirectional crossing over, it is instead characterized by restless conceptual and geographical wanderings as he moves back and forth between two different worlds: traditional values, on the one hand, and European philosophical culture, on the other.

The Nazirite Rabbi’s master work – upon which he labored for more than fifty years – is a book entitled *The Voice of Prophecy* (*Kol Ha-Nevua*). In it, the author seeks to demonstrate the existence of a “Hebrew Auditory Logic” unique to the Jewish people, and his ultimate ambition is to uncover the traces of this logic in Jewish philosophy and in Kabbalistic literature.

There are a very few studies dealing with the thought of the Nazirite Rabbi in general, and the book, *The Voice of Prophecy*, in particular. Dov Schwartz has focused on the Nazirite’s attitude to his master, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Ha-Cohen Kook, and on logical and juridical aspects of R. David Cohen’s thought, as part of a wider discussion concerning religious Zionism (and more specifically its conception of Messianism).

In my own book, *The Mystical Philosopher* (*Ha-Filosof Ha-Mequbbal*), I attempted to expand the scope of the conversation and show how the Nazirite Rabbi’s thought is linked to his mystical experiences on the one hand, and with different viewpoints from modern Western philosophy on the other.

This lecture seeks to examine the concept of “Hebrew Auditory Logic” through the lens of the philosophy of dialogue, and to put forward evidence of its epistemological, ethical and even pedagogical relationships. Such an approach will reveal surprising and original connections between the thought of the Nazirite and Western philosophy of the same period.