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

**Abstract:**

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

If throughout the 19th century there were a multitude of “crossings over” from the traditional House of Study toward European philosophical culture (such as Salomon Maimon or Rabbi Nachman Krochmal), then in the early 20th century the crossing begins to be in the opposite direction: Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig operate from the positional consciousness of “returners” as they come to create a new Jewish thought whose foundation is the Western philosophical tradition.

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: the world of 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 demonstrate the existence of a “Hebrew Auditory Logic” unique to the people Israel, and his ultimate ambition is to uncover the traces of this logic in Jewish Philosophy and in Kabbalistic literature.

There are a very few scholars who occupy themselves with research on the thought of the Nazirite Rabbi in general, and the book *The Voice of Prophecy* in particular. For example, Dov Schwartz has focused on the Nazirite, but specifically concentrates on his attitude to his contemporary opponent, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohen Kook, and on logical and juridical aspects of the thought of *Radakh* (Rabbi David Ha-Cohen, a Jewish thinker of the 15th and 16th centuries), and does so as part of a wider discussion concerning religious Zionism (and more specifically its conception of Messianism).

In my own book *The Mystical Philosopher* (*Ha-Philosoph Ha-Mekubal*) 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.