

DOUBLE ISSUE

Why did God orchestrate proof of His existence as an intelligent voice emanating from flames?

Addressed in "Shavuot"

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Holidays

Shavuot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"I am Hashem your G-d which took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." (Shemot 20:2)

Eliyahu, the prophet, challenged Bnai Yisrael to choose between the worship of Hashem and the worship of the Ba'al - an idol that was popular at the time. He asked the people, "How long will you skip between the two opinions? If you choose Hashem, go after

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The Torah's Primary Message

SHAVUOS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

"...Behold I will cut a treaty, against all your people I will do wonders that have never been created in all the land and with all the nations, and all the people that you are among will see the acts of God that they are fearful, that I do with you." (Exod. 34:10)

"And God said to Moses, 'Behold I come to you in thick cloud, in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they shall believe forever...' (Exod. 19:9)

"And it was when Moses descended from Mount Sinai and the two tablets of testimony were in Moses hand when he descended from the mountain, and Moses

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Him. If you choose the Ba'al, go after it."[1]

This is an amazing statement. It is appropriate for Eliyahu to urge the people to follow Hashem. But, Eliyahu continues beyond this point. He tells the people that if they cannot completely devote themselves to Hashem, then they should follow the Ba'al. Would it not be better to leave those undecided in their state of confusion? Why encourage these doubters to totally abandon the Almighty for the Ba'al?

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik Ztl explained that the answer to these questions requires a clear understanding of the fundamental principles of the Torah. Maimonides outlines thirteen basic convictions. These convictions are the basis of Torah Judaism. These thirteen principles are different from the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot. If an individual repeatedly violates a mitzvah, this does not excuse this person from observance whenever possible. For example, a person who eats non-Kosher food in restaurants is not permitted to disregard the laws of Kashrut at home. Each opportunity to observe a mitzvah must be seized. A person should not hesitate because of an inability to make a total commitment to observance of this command.

In contrast, belief in the fundamental principles of the Torah must be complete. This stems directly from the definition of the term conviction. Convictions cannot be accompanied by doubt. For example, a person who is in doubt as to the non-corporeal nature of Hashem has not accepted this principle. Similarly, belief that the Messianic era is possible does not represent conviction regarding its reality.

This was the message Eliyahu delivered to Bnai Yisrael. Acceptance of Hashem leaves no option for belief in Ba'al. A person choosing to believe in both lacks conviction in the fundamental principle that only Hashem is G-d. Those in doubt are no different, in this manner, than those following Ba'al wholeheartedly.[2]

"Ribbi Elazar says about the Torah that the major portion of it is written and the minor portion is an oral tradition.. And Ribbi Yochanan says that the major portion of the Torah is an oral tradition and the minor portion is written." (Talmud, Tractate Gitten 60B)

The festival of Shavuot celebrates the revelation of the Torah at Sinai. The Torah received at Sinai is composed of two parts. It includes a written portion and an oral portion. The written portion is recorded in the five

volumes of the Chumash. The Oral Torah was also received from Moshe at Sinai. This Oral Torah is an elaboration on the material in the Written Torah. It was not originally recorded. Instead, it was taught as an oral tradition and communicated through the generations by teacher to student. Eventually, a brief synopsis of this body was recorded as the Mishne. Later, a more detailed written account of the Oral Torah was created. This is the Gemarah. Over the centuries, an enormous body of writings has supplemented these early records of the Oral Torah. These works include all of the interpretations and elaboration on the basic material in the Written Torah. It is the product of the insights of Sages throughout the generations.

The text above recounts a dispute between two Sages. Ribbi Elazar asserts that the major portion of the Torah is contained in the Written Torah - in the Chumash. The Oral Torah is the smaller of the two components of the Torah. Ribbi Yochanan disagrees. He contends that the majority of the Torah is contained in the Oral Torah. The Written Torah is the smaller component of the Torah.

This is a perplexing dispute. One merely needs to look at any library of Torah works to understand the problem. The Written Torah is recorded in the five books of the Chumash. This work can be contained in a single volume. The Oral Torah fills endless volumes. It is true that the published material has grown over the centuries. During the time of Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan, the published or written portion of the Oral Torah was quite limited. Nonetheless, the body of material encompassed in this Oral Torah surely was larger than the five books of the Chumash.

There is another problem with this dispute. Both Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan were great Torah scholars. They certainly had disagreements. However, they studied the same Torah. They were both fully aware of the scope and detail of the Torah. Yet, the disparity between their positions is immense. How could they present such radically different accounts of the material they studied?

In order to answer these questions, we must ask one more important question. How does one measure the relative "sizes" of the Written and Oral Torah? The Written Torah has a size. It has a material form. We can measure the number of words or letters required to record it. But, how do we even measure the Oral Torah? We can count the number of words required to record it. However, this is not its true measurement. The

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Oral Torah existed before it was recorded in writing. It is a set of ideas. How does one assign a size to a set of ideas? How big is the theory of relativity? Is it larger or smaller than the Newtonian mechanics? These are absurd questions! Concepts do not have size.

It is apparent from this last question that Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan are not disputing the relative material size of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. This is not the basis for comparison. We have also shown above that, even if we make the questionable assumption that the Oral Torah can be assigned a size based on the words required to transcribe it, the dispute between the Sages remains enigmatic. They would both have to agree that the Oral Torah fills more volumes than the Written Torah. So, what are they disputing?

In order to understand the dispute between these two Sages, we must consider the relationship between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. We will begin by outlining two fundamentally different possibilities.

The first possibility can be understood though imagining the following scenario. Consider an immense library. Some poor soul has been assigned the enormous task of preparing a single work that summarizes the knowledge contained in this entire library. How might he proceed in accomplishing this task? Let us propose the following. First, he should divide the library into sections. One section would be works on agriculture. Another section might contain all works on business and finance. Once the library has been so divided, these sections will be divided into smaller subsections. The business and finance section would include an accounting section and investment section. Once the sections and subsections are created, the real work can begin. A brief summary should be prepared of each volume in the library. Based on these summaries, a summary will be created of the works in each subsection. The subsection summaries will then be used to create a summary of each section. Finally, using the section summaries, a summary will be created that encompasses the entire library.

The Torah can be understood through applying a similar scheme. Each Tractate of the Talmud can be viewed as the summary of a large subsection of Torah concepts. The Mishne of the Tractate is a summary of the Tractate. The Written Torah is a brief summary of the summaries contained in the Mishne. In other words, the Written Torah can be viewed as the summary of an immense body of knowledge. This body encompasses

all areas of the Torah - the entire Oral Torah.

There is an alternative way to characterize the relationship between the Written and Oral Torah. Again, let us consider an analogy. Shakespeare is probably the most thoroughly studied playwright or author. Let us consider just one of his works - Hamlet. Countless articles and books have been written analyzing and critiquing this work. These books and articles are commentary on Hamlet. They expand upon the issues and insights that the play reveals.

This description can also be used to characterize the relationship between the Written and Oral Torah. The Written Torah can be viewed as the more fundamental component, and the Oral Torah as a commentary and elaboration on the Written Torah. The Oral Torah explores the meaning and significance of each passage and nuance of the Written Torah. It reveals the Written Torah's full meaning.

These two relationships are very different. If the Written Torah is a summary of the entire Torah, it is - by its very definition - smaller than the Oral Torah. The summary is a condensation of the body it describes. However, if the Oral Torah is a commentary on the Written Torah, it is the less fundamental of the two works. Again, this is a result of its very definition. The commentary is an elaboration on the more fundamental work it explains.

We can now understand the dispute between Ribbi Elazar and Ribbi Yochanan. They do not dispute the relative sizes of the Written and Oral Torah. The issue they debate cannot be resolved through taking some measurement. They disagree over the relationship between these two elements. According to Ribbi Elazar, the major portion of the Torah is written. He maintains that the Oral Torah is a commentary and elaboration on the Written Torah. In this relationship, the Written Torah is the fundamental major component. The Oral Torah plays a secondary role. Ribbi Yochanan asserts that the major portion of the Torah is Oral Torah. He understands the Written Torah as a summary of the entire body of knowledge contained in the Oral Torah. In this relationship, the Oral Torah is the major element or partner in the relationship. ■

[1] Sefer Melachim I, 18:21.

[2] Rav Y. Herschkowitz, Torat Chaim, p 203.



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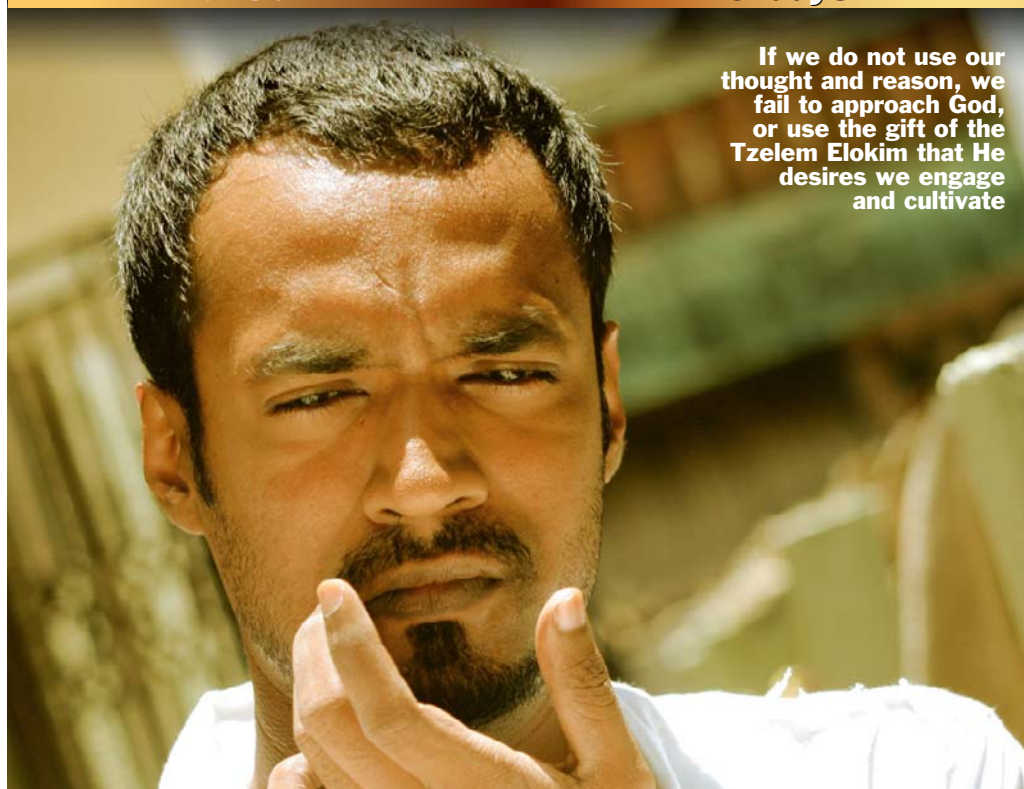
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If we do not use our thought and reason, we fail to approach God, or use the gift of the Tzelem Elokim that He desires we engage and cultivate

did not know that his face beamed with light when He spoke with him. And Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, and behold his face beamed with light, and they feared to draw close to him.” (Exod. 34:29,30)

In the book of Joshua (10:12) Radak says that the words “I will do wonders that have never been created in all the land and with all the nations” refer to the miracle of God causing the sun and moon to stand still in Joshua’s days. Radak says, “acts of God that they are fearful” refer to the miracle of Moses’ face shining with light. Through these two miracles, God demonstrates His sustained providence over the Jews: from Moses through Joshua. Thus, miracles with similar objectives are placed in a single verse. And miracles at times may serve to endorse leaders. For a miracle does not happen on account of someone who violates God, but someone completely deserving of God’s feats.

We learn, that upon Moses’ descent from Mount Sinai, God deemed it essential that a miracle accompany Moses for the remainder of his life, in the form of his face beaming light. What was this necessity?

God also said, “Behold I come to you in thick cloud, in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they shall believe forever” referring to His revelation at Sinai. The purpose was so the people witness God, His selection of Moses as His prophet,

and remain loyal to Moses forever. How can loyalty to Moses endure “forever”, since Moses died? Of course, it means that Moses will be eternally accepted as God’s prophet to mankind. However, even though the people attest to Moses’ selection by God and communion with Him on Sinai, will they accept all of Moses’ future words as divine?

Revelation: Two Goals

These questions, and verses above point to the two purposes of Revelation at Sinai, what we are celebrating on this Shavuot holiday. That is exactly what God said, “in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they shall believe forever”. God desired that Sinai act as, 1) a proof of His existence and communication with Moses (man); and 2) an eternal endorsement of Moses, upon whom all future Torah truths depend.

We cannot know what God is: for we can detect only that perceived by our five, biological senses, and God is not detectable by any of them. This concealment of God’s true nature from our senses, and ultimately, our minds, is conveyed by the words “Behold I come to you in thick cloud”. Cloud is that which conceals other things. God wished to convey the impossibility of man to know God’s essence. Even Moses could not know God’s essence, “...for man cannot know Me while alive”. (Exod. 33:20) Moses too tells the Jews many

times “you saw no form [of God]” on Sinai.

The second part of the verse says “in order that the people hear when I speak with you” teaching that God’s intent in revelation is to prove His existence. And the last part, “and also in you they shall believe forever” is to sustain the system, by endorsing its primary teacher. As a Rabbi once taught, Maimonides uses the term “yesode”, or “fundamental” in connection with only two principles: 1) God’s existence, and 2) prophecy. (Maimonides’ Fundamentals of Torah; first word of both 1:1, 4:1) It is these two truths that are indispensable for Judaism: 1) the truth of a Creator, and 2) His communication with man. For without God, impossible as it is, nothing can be, and without communication, there can be no adherence to His word, His “religion”. How precise is the Torah that this single verse above formulates what the true religion must contain. And this was the objective of Sinai: to commence Judaism by instilling in man the knowledge of an unknowable Creator, who communicates His will to mankind. (Joseph Albo agrees to these two fundamentals, adding Reward and Punishment as his third.)

But there is more to this verse. Let us read it again: “And God said to Moses, ‘Behold I come to you in thick cloud, in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they shall believe forever...’” This also teaches that God desires to work within man’s frame of reason. He creates revelation in order that humans will arrive at truths based on reasoning. The words “in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they shall believe forever” that God orchestrates His plan on how man perceives it. God works only with man’s intellect. And we then must work with this intellect to perceive God’s plan for mankind.

Revelation teaches God’s desire that man obtain “proof” for religion. This explains why He created an undeniable event, where intelligence emanated from fire: the only element in which known life perishes. Intelligence emanating from fire teaches that the Source of that intelligence must not be of Earthly origin, thereby establishing an undeniable proof of a supernatural, intelligent existence.

In essence, God is complying with the human design He had cast years ago in Adam and Eve, His perfect will being unchanging for us today. He granted man intelligence, and demands that man use this faculty. And when God desires man to apprehend something, He desires this apprehension be based on what is provable to human senses, reason, or trust in the prophets. Sinai conforms. It is via these

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three vehicles alone that Maimonides states we view information as true:

"It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things: 1) clear proof deriving from man's reasoning; 2) what is perceived through one of the five senses; 3) what is received from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: 'This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason.' Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said 'The simple believes everything'. (Prov. 14:15) (Maimonides Letter to the Community of Marseille)

Returning now to our initial questions: why God did create the beams of light on Moses' face? Would the Jews accept all of Moses' words subsequent to Revelation as truly divine, or as Moses' invention?

To satisfy the third criterion above, God desired a continued demonstration that He endorsed all that Moses taught. All events subsequent to Sinai were not received at Sinai in that first, incomplete Torah. Otherwise, Moses could not have questioned God's later actions, as he would already know the answers, had the entire Five Books been given to him. Additionally, there would be no free will for any person, as the entire nation would know their future sins, before they committed them. Therefore, as Moses would be instructing the Jews in God's name, with commands not received at Sinai but only later, a method of divine substantiation was required, lest some Jews accuse Moses of writing his own Torah. The 'continuous' miracle of the beams of light did just that: it demonstrated beyond any doubt that Moses continually acted and taught on behalf of God, long after Sinai. Had Moses deviated from God's words, God would have killed Moses, and would not have bestowed miracles upon his face. Miracles mean that the Creator of miracles endorses the recipient. This continued into Joshua's era, when God halted the sun and moon.

Revelation at Sinai proves God's existence and His prophesy to man, thereby proving Judaism to be the only divinely inspired religion, as all other imposter religions are based on the lies of one or a few men. Revelation was manifested precisely in a manner that satisfies the human mind beyond all doubt,

since God's desire is that man engages his intellect to "prove" what is real, and not simply follow blind faith, which proves nothing. "And God said to Moses, 'Behold I come to you in thick cloud, in order that the people hear when I speak with you, and also in you they shall believe forever...'"

Application

This Shavuos holiday, let's obtain and apply the true lesson of Revelation on Mount Sinai: God desires man to use reason in all areas of his life, starting with his and her Judaism. We all must cease from our fear of the masses and peers, and their approval: for if we all live for others, no one lives for himself! And who determines if other Jews are correct: their numbers? Their reputations? If so, numbers exist in far greater quantity within Islam and Christianity. Do we then say those religions are correct, and Judaism is false? We also witness famous people who err. So, reputations and masses are no measure of truth. What we must use as our barometer are God's words, and those of the Prophets and Writings.

From God's intent of Revelation to prove His existence via human reason, to the successful outcome when the Jews admitted they witnessed God's created voice (Deut. 5:21), Shavuos addresses the central lesson of our lives: to engage our reason. Minds far greater than anyone today, from Maimonides, Saadia Gaon, Rashi, Rabbi Bachya, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Sforno, all attest to this primary mandate from God. Therefore, when you hear notions in the name of Judaism that are inexplicable, mystical, demanding faith and no reason like pop-Kabbalistic notions, or notions that contradict Judaism's fundamentals, be not impressed by their popularity, emotional appeal, or their author. You must be told a source, and you must see it...and not just any source, but any notion must be rooted in only Torah, Prophets or Writings. And the explanation you accept must fit the words without force, "Pshuto K'mashmaoh". The Rabbis teach that Torah verses cannot teach outside the confines of the plain textual meaning, "Ain mikra yotzei miday pshuto" (Tal. Sabb. 63a).

Only with this allegiance will you know what is authentic, and save yourself from acting contrary to God and reason. Although our culture provides freedom of religion, that carries the danger – and proven success – of alien doctrines seeping into the Jewish mindset.

Sinai and Torah were intended to separate us

from those infantile and primitive religious beliefs, replacing our decision-making with reason, where we abandon all things inexplicable like Egyptian and Kabbalistic mysticism, reincarnation, superstition, omens, signs, blind faith, magic, and human deification. "Reasoning" is the only barometer for truth. If you forfeit it, reality will forfeit you, just as the Rabbi Shimone said, "Yom ta-azveni, yomayim eh'azvecha", "If you abandon me (Torah) one day, I will abandon you for two." (Rabbi Shimone, quoting from Megilas Chasidim, Jerusalem Tal. 68a) ■

But, if we do make use of our reason, we will uncover an entirely new world of wisdom that makes all other enjoyments pale by comparison, and we enable ourselves to fulfill God's mission for us: to know and love Him.

We will arrive at intelligent conviction, no longer satisfied with simple faith. All our interests will turn towards uncovering greater truths, and life will reach a state of deep meaning, where we finally find the true, deep satisfaction we always knew we could achieve.

We will finally be capable of discerning truth from falsehood; between Judaism and the practices of our brothers and sisters corrupted by alien, religious influences.

We will be independent, living in line with reality.



Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Letters

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Picture Perfect

Reader: My daughter came home from school very upset. After she drew a picture of Rabbi Akiva, the girls in her class told her one was not permitted to draw a picture of one of the Avot. We have asked our shul Rabbi, who had heard of this, but did not know its source. Another Rabbi in shul also didn't know its source. By the way, all the girls who were present for the shul discussion had also heard this. Any thoughts?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Tonight is Shavuot, the holiday celebrating God's gift of His Torah to the Jews on Mount Sinai. In Exodus 20:4, in the second of the Ten Commandments prohibiting idolatry, God says as follows: "Do not create a statue or any likeness of that which is in heaven above, and that is on Earth below, and that is in water below the Earth." We learn two prohibitions: not to create a "statue" – a 3-dimensional image – and not to create a "likeness", referring to an image drawn or painted on a flat surface.

Halacha (Jewish law; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 141) states that one is prohibited to create a 3-dimensional replica of an entire human being. However, animals, fish, trees, and plants may be created, even in three dimensions. We learn that King Solomon built a large, copper bathing laver for the priests, which incorporated twelve oxen in its design. (Kings I; 7:23-26)

If one sculpts a man partially, i.e., with no legs no nose, he has not violated the Halacha. (Some hold even a human head alone is prohibited when created in 3-dimensions) This is only regarding a 3-dimensional image, since God says we may not create idols of man for fear of worshipping something other than God. But with regards to creating a 2-dimensional image (drawings, paintings, weavings, etc.), there is no prohibition except for the heavenly spheres (stars, sun, moon and planets), which are prohibited even in two dimensions unless for purposes of study and teaching (ibid, 141:6), in which case even 3-dimensional replicas are permitted.

The reasoning for the difference in these laws is based on human perception: since we perceive man in three dimensions (front and back) that is precisely how we cannot duplicate him. Therefore, a drawing is permitted: since that is not how man is experienced, our replica is inaccurate and does not violate the law. But since we do not perceive the heavenly objects, except as flat disks in the sky (we cannot move behind them to experience their 3-dimensional depths) even drawing them is prohibited, for that is an exact replication as visually perceived. Certainly a 3-dimensional replica is prohibited, since that is certainly its true form.

However, there is no distinction between people (patriarchs or others) with regards to creating their likeness in either dimension. Just as we cannot create a sculpture of a complete man, for example our neighbor, we also cannot create a sculpture of the patriarchs. And conversely, since we can draw our neighbor, we can also draw the patriarchs. In fact, I praise your daughter for her drawing, as this displays her interest in our Torah leaders, in contrast to the typical, notebook doodles of other students! Tell her to please draw me a picture of the patriarchs, perhaps we'll use it in the JewishTimes!

I wonder why the Rabbi of whom you spoke with did not immediately recall how many books exist today containing Rabbis' photos, or Jewish newspapers that report events displaying Rabbis' photos throughout. Such photos are permissible replicas, and no different than drawings of the patriarchs. Suggesting the Patriarchs possess a higher level of prohibition elevates them to more than what they were: human beings. This suggestion that the patriarchs possessed such prohibitions, inapplicable to other men, smacks of human deification, which violates Torah. The patriarchs were greatly perfected, but that plays no role in creating replicas of their bodies, in which they are no different than any other man. Furthermore, it is impossible to draw someone we never met, so your daughter is not even drawing "Rabbi Akiva", as she was accused! I would say it is a good thing as we develop into adults, that students create pictures of the patriarchs and great individuals, as it inspires their lives.

Thinking about this rationally, we learn that prohibitions exist only when creating 3-dimensional replicas of entire human figures. Drawings are not prohibited. We then wonder from where came this popular notion that drawing everyday people is permissible, but drawing patriarchs is prohibited. What is the concern: that we are "looking" at the patriarchs? But if that were a true concern, the patriarchs would have never let others see them 1000s of years ago! If today, people feel there is something "holy" about the patriarchs, and therefore we cannot draw them, the response is again: no one today knows what they looked like. And even if we did know what Rabbi Akiva looked like, what could possibly be problematic about drawing him: does our drawing invest the image with "holiness"? And even if it did, there is no problem with possessing holy items, since we will in the future dedicate animals for Temple worship, those animals being holy. Alternatively, if people feel we must not look at a likeness of the patriarchs, why then did this prohibition not exist in the times of the real, living patriarchs? A picture is far less related to the patriarch, than his living body.

We conclude: 1) we cannot invest holiness in drawings; 2) and even if we can, there is no prohibi-

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Letters

tion; 3) no problem exists in looking at the patriarch, alive or in picture form; 4) pictures of anything except heavenly bodies are permissible to illustrate. Your daughter is perfectly in line with the Torah when she draws the Avot.

As you can see, such notions are not founded on rational thought, but are based in inexplicable fears and emotions...not part of Torah. Moses was the only person who used a veil due to the miraculous light shining from his face. But all other prophets, matriarchs and patriarchs confronted people in normal conversation, and others with them, as the patriarchs did not elevate themselves above others in any way...they were truly humble, and Moses was "more humble than any man on the face of the Earth". (Num. 12:3) Had drawings of patriarchs been prohibited, the Shulchan Aruch would have said so in that section.

At the same time, if pictures of great people were essential to our perfection, it would have been a Torah law to draw them. But as it is not, we learn that the path to perfection is one where God retains our focus, and not people. But this is at an older age. For now, a child should not be dissuaded from such a genuine preoccupation with great people. Many years from now she can be taught the difference between youthful identification with leaders, and a mature outlook where we should direct our attention towards the Creator alone. But even though there is no law to create pictures and it is unnecessary for perfection, the bottom line is that drawings are not prohibited, so your daughter's art is picture perfect.

An important lesson is learned from your question, besides the Halacha: one must not repeat what they feel or hear, in the name of Torah, if they are not certain of its authentic source in either the Written Torah, Prophets or Writings, or in the Oral Law of the Mishna or Talmud.

Reader: You made her day! My daughter said she will draw you a picture and especially loved where you said since she never met Rabbi Akiva she wasn't really drawing him. ■

Drawing the Line

Reader: Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, You wrote, "the punishment is so severe, if a gentile learns Torah other than what applies to his seven Noachide Laws." My questions are: Does it mean

that I cannot read the whole Torah? If so, how can I be sure of which part I can read, and which not? What about hearing a Jew talking about any part of Torah: may I do so? May I participate? Does it mean that there is something in the website Mesora that I cannot learn or read? How can I recognize it? If someone paraphrases something from Torah that I don't know belongs, or not to the seven Noachide Laws, can I get interested? What should I do?

Please help me understand this because it makes me feel very insecure and sometimes sad, especially because I am not sure of what I can and what I cannot read/learn. Is there a difference between reading and learning Torah?

Your answers to all this questions are very important to me because I am very confused at this point but I want to go.

Thanks in advance, Dawn

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Dawn, I conferred with Rabbi Reuven Mann and he confirmed that aside from the 7 Noachide laws, you can learn the following:

1. All laws addressing human perfection, such as charity, prayer, kindness and so on, including Biblical stories of the patriarchs and prophets that exemplify such perfection;

2. You can study any law you wish to keep in addition to the 7 Noachide laws, but if you do not plan to observe another law, then mere theoretic study is prohibited. I mentioned in the past the reasoning is that the Jew must remain the Torah authority. And this is to insure that others with no obligation in observance are not viewed as authorities, since one with no obligation has less incentive to fully grasp, and thus teach, Jewish law;

3. I also feel you must learn those areas imparting greater knowledge of what God is, such as Revelation at Sinai, His 13 attributes, and so on. I cannot imagine that you

would not be able to study what appeals to your mind as a genuine interest in this area;

4. Reading and study of Torah is the same thing;

5. If a Rabbi or Jew is giving a class on Jewish laws that do not apply to you, you cannot attend. But if the class is concerning areas of human perfection that apply equally to Noachides, then you can attend.

To answer your other previous questions, I feel you can join any topic in our Discussion Forum (which is primarily philosophy), as well as read any article that appears to address Torah philosophy, fundamentals, and Chumash Parsha accounts, since they apply to perfection. But articles that address specific commands (mitzvahs) that do not apply to Noachides, concerning which you have not selected to follow, you must avoid. If however you are not sure if you wish to follow a new command in addition to the 7 Noachides, it appears to me you can investigate that command sufficiently, so as to determine if you wish to follow it. This of course precludes laws of Sabbath, Holidays, (and Tefillin and circumcision to my mind), all addressing the distinction of the Jew as a Torah authority, or possessing a covenant with God. ■



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Job

the Book of Job

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

PART XII ELIHU AND CREATION

Chapter 32

Elihu said he is young. Maimonides maintains this to mean his ideas are “young”: he had something different to say than Eliphaz, Bildad and Tzofar. An old opinion (those of the three) is that which is most common among people; something considered “old”.

If Elihu stated that it is the spirit of God, which gives understanding, and not age, why did he wait for the three to give their arguments? He should have voiced his opinion earlier. The reason why he waited is because he maintained that age adds two things, 1) time, 2) and experience through which wisdom may be attained. He felt no right to assume that he was superior to the three, who were older. Therefore he said, “Let years speak”. But once Elihu saw that the three had erred, he stepped in.

Chapter 33

In Verse 5, Elihu says, “If thou can answer me, set thy words.” This shows that Elihu has a different opinion. He is not merely saying what he feels is right, allowing Job to maintain what he too felt. He is not interested in a face off with Job where each contends that their respective opinions are valid. Elihu was being objective. In verses 6 and 7, Elihu means to say that the ‘answer will talk’ (unveil who is correct): the ‘person’ will not be recognized here;

“Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. 7. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.” 8. “I have heard your voice.”

This means that Elihu is accepting Job's words as truths. He is not questioning whether what Job said was true or false, as did the three.

Maimonides says in his Guide, that Elihu seems to be repeating the ideas particular to the three. But Maimonides continues, that the difference in Elihu can be found in the metaphor of the angel who intercedes on behalf of man:

“22. Yea, his soul draws near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. 23. If there be an angel with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness: 24. Then he is gracious unto him, and says ‘Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom’. 25. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: 26. He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. 27. He looks upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that

which was right, and it profited me not; 28. He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. 29. Lo, all these things works God twice or three times with man, 30. To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.”

There are two explanations for this idea of the angel:

1) The angel refers to man's intellect. Meaning, if man reflects (one in a thousand means even a minute reflection) God will save the individual. This follows Maimonides' explanation, as he maintains that God's Providence is directly inline with the perfection of man's intellect. If he is highly perfected, God's Providence will be directly inline with him. And if he is corrupt, God's Providence will not relate to him. What is the idea of “once or twice”? This means that God's Providence offers man two or three chances in life to follow the intellect. But if this person keeps falling back into the emotions, that individual is too corrupt for God's two or three mercies, and Divine Providence is removed from him. Maimonides states this in his Laws of Teshuva, “For the first three sins, a person is forgiven.”

2) The second explanation of the angel refers to “nature”. Maimonides explains in the Guide that “angel” refers to a force of nature. The Rabbis also state, “every blade of grass has an ‘angel’ helping it grow.” This means that certain laws of nature govern every blade of grass – no matter how minute. This second view of “angel” maintains that when man falls sick, a natural phenomena can occur (two or three times, but not always) in which the man gets well (viz., healing). But this only happens two or three times because when one usually gets very sick, he does not recover. After recovery, the saved individual may tell his friends about his miraculous “close call.” He feels that the natural phenomena that saved him have to do with God desirous of his health; he now feels that God saved him. This religious feeling is based on the desire to have God take care of him.

Maimonides categorized three differences in Elihu's words. The first was the idea of the “angel.” The second is the method of prophecy. Maimonides says, “this is likewise new.” In accordance with this second view, an individual might view God in an infantile framework, like a security blanket. The person will view prophecy as well in an infantile light. That is, Job felt God would relate to an individual because this is what God is concerned with. However, Maimonides' view is just the opposite: God relates to an individual in so far as his knowledge is sound: it is a natural result. Maimonides, in describing Elihu's account of prophecy says that Elihu supports his theory and description by bringing descriptions of many natural phenomena such as thunder, lightning, rain and winds. But what does this have to do with prophecy? Maimonides teaches that Elihu – according to Maimonides view on prophecy – maintains that there is a science to God's Providence (prophecy) just as

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Job

there is a science to the physical world. Elihu attempts to break down Job's feeling that he knows how God should treat him. Job feels that there is no science to God's Providence. If he did, he would not have felt that God should work this way or that, but rather, that God works in a certain way and he (Job) does not have that knowledge, nor claim against his fate.

Elihu's third deviation from the three is his attempt educate Job based on natural considerations; "You cannot assume how God should work, the same way that you cannot assume how nature works." (Maimonides writes, "We are unable to comprehend how these transient creatures come into existence, or to imagine how their natural properties commenced to exist, and that these are not like the things, which we are able to produce. Much less can we compare the manner in which God rules and manages His creatures with the manner in which we rule and manage certain beings.")

Again, Elihu first told Job about the angel, thereby teaching this idea about intercession is based on the infantile. And when he told Job that it happens "once or twice", he meant to alert Job to the reason why he was still suffering: he missed these two times the "angel" could intercede. Job felt since he was sick, he should have been saved. And when he was not saved, he was floored. Since Job was not under God's Specific Providence (Hashgacha Pratyos) due to his lack of knowledge, he fell under God's General Providence (Hashgacha Klalyos) and under God's General Providence, this fate Job experienced happens.

Elihu criticizes Job for maintaining two false views: that God knows man's suffering and therefore God is vicious, or God doesn't know. Elihu answered both. Thus, God knows and is vicious is not true because your sufferings are from God's General Providence, i.e., not ordained by God: that is, man may fall under God's General Providence based on his insignificance as an individual. He would be as an animal, where God does not will that individual member's life or death: he is subject to natural law, and such was the case of Job. And of course the other possibility is not true because God knows everything.

Elihu accused Job of fabricating his own feelings regarding God's methods of "Divine government". Job had a complaint that he should have been treated differently. Meaning, he felt he knew how God should work. But from where did Job obtain this feeling, if not from himself? Hence, Elihu's entire argument is to teach Job how his understanding of God's Providence was false.

Job harbored another false view of God. Job, like many others, felt that God works within a system of rights. Meaning, God does not have the right to do certain things. However, God, being the Creator, is above "rights": He needs no rights or permissions to act. Therefore, Job was incorrect in assuming that God was wrong.

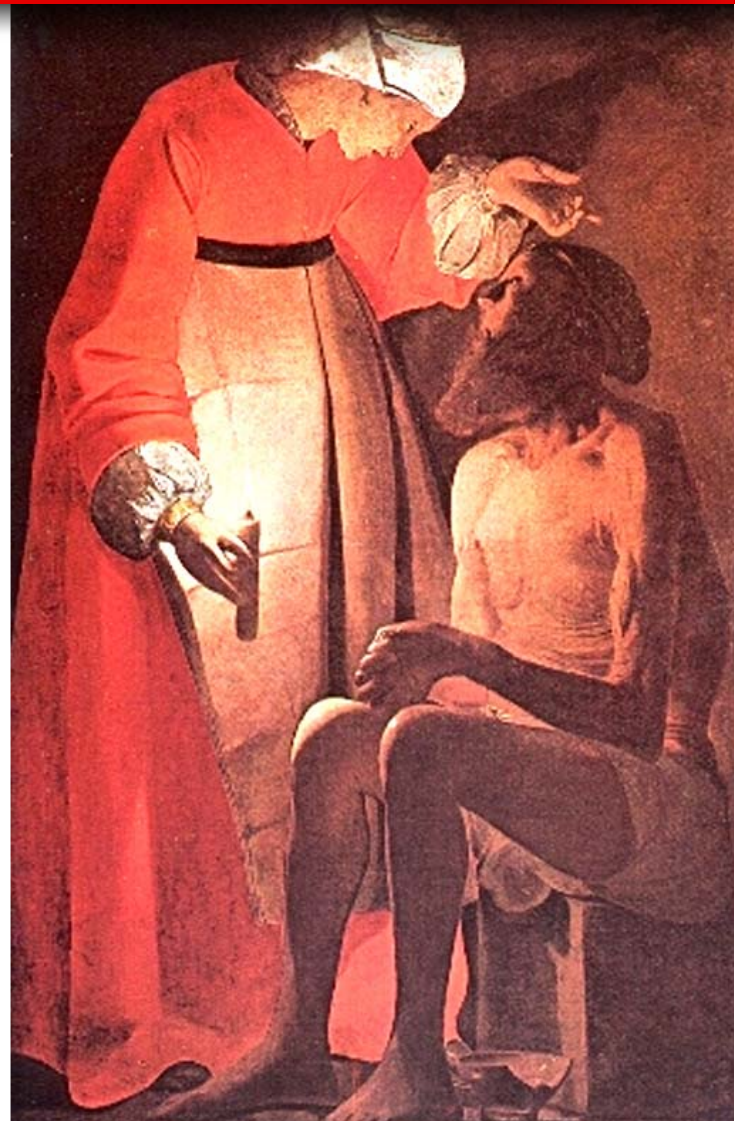
Chapter 36

What does it mean, "God is great but doesn't despise?" (36:5) It means that God gives out His Providence even though God is so great. Elihu showed Job that man is nothing in comparison to the entire universe. But he goes on to tell Job that nonetheless, God's Providence exists for man.

The purpose of Elihu's wavering between describing God's Providence and man's finitude is to impress upon Job the fact that we really don't understand how God works. In other words, "See how things appear at odds and with no set pattern." The reason this forms the core of Elihu's argument is because Job's opinion, although not verbalized explicitly, is that man is great enough that he can have a complaint against God. Therefore Elihu impressed upon Job how small man really is so as to show Job that his argument was based on an emotion and not based on careful understanding. If Job had accepted the fact that he has no understanding of God, he would not have had a complaint against God.

A review of Elihu's arguments: First, Elihu says that Job is working on an infantile level. Then he says that God knows everything that happens. Hence, God is not ignorant of you and did not "cast you out." Then, in 35, Elihu shows God's kindness in creating man with the intellect and impresses on Job that the system which God created is the best: "Just because you are downtrodden, should God remove the whole system?" Also, "Do not feel that since you are downtrodden, therefore the rest of the system is no good." From this chapter comes the idea that God's system of justice is different than man's sense of how it should operate in his favor.

Until chapter 36, Elihu did not mention God's Specific Providence. Thus, Elihu states "God is great but doesn't despise" (36:5) In other words, there is Specific Providence. "The wicked will not live" (35:6) means that God's Specific Providence won't assist a Rasha. In Verse 19, Elihu asks in other words, "do you want a life without afflictions which can correct your mistakes?" Emotionally, a person despises afflictions. But if he would recognize the



good they afford man, he would crave them. So when Elihu says, "will thy riches avail thee" he means that life where God does not afflict us to correct us, is not a worthwhile life. ("Those whom God loves does he afflict." – Proverbs, 3:12)

Chapter 37

At the end of this chapter Elihu describes how the true follower of God lives. The true relationship between man and God is when man appreciates God's wisdom: not someone who is looking for his own personal gain. One who seeks wisdom in the universe displays the true relationship; he puts aside his own considerations and yearns for knowledge. In other words, just the opposite of Job.

What does Elihu mean by "shall it be told to God that which I speak?" And, "Men do therefore fear him." Elihu tells Job that one can never obtain the answers to your questions in terms of how God performs specifics. We must realize our ignorance concerning God's methods. ■

TORAH FROM SINAI

The JewishTimes is once again delighted to reprint what we consider the "Definitive Article" on Proof of God from Sinai

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Introduction

Judaism, as seen through the eyes of the scholars of the Talmud, has its own unique religious orientation. While basing itself on a cataclysmic event - revelation, it does not look to miracles as the source of its intimate relationship with God. God's revelation at Sinai was a one-time occurrence never to be repeated. This is expressed in Deuteronomy 5:19, "a great voice which was not heard again."⁽¹⁾ In the mind of the Talmudic scholar God continuously reveals himself not through miracles but through the wisdom of his laws. (2) These laws manifest themselves in Torah - the written and the oral law - and in nature.

The Psalmist expresses this view most clearly. He speaks freely of the wonders of nature and the awe-inspiring universe as in Psalm 8:4, "When I look at the heavens, the work of Your fingers; the moon and stars which you have established". Psalm 104, dedicated to the wonders of nature, climaxes with the exclamation, "How many are Your works, O Lord! You have made them all with wisdom." Regarding the sheer intellectual joy one derives from studying Torah, he states, "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul, the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making wise the simple person. The precepts of the Lord are upright, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is lucid, enlightening the eye. The statutes of the Torah are true; they are all in total harmony. They are more to be desired than gold, even fine gold, and they are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb."

When speaking of man's search for God the Psalmist states, "The Lord, from heaven, looked down upon the children of man, to see if there were any man of understanding searching for God (14:2)." Man discovers God only through understanding. Accordingly, the righteous are depicted as being constantly involved in this process of searching for and discovering God. "But only in the Torah of the Lord is his desire, and in His



Torah he mediates day and night" (Psalms 1:2). Maimonides sharply criticizes those who consider themselves religious and search for God through the miraculous. "Say to a person who believes himself to be of the wise men of Israel that the Almighty sends His angel to enter the womb of a woman and to form there the foetus [sic], he will be satisfied with the account; he will believe it and even find in it a description of the greatness of God's might and wisdom; although he believes that the angel consists of burning fire and is as big as a third part of the Universe, yet he considers it possible as a divine miracle. But tell

him that God gave the seed a formative power which produces and shapes the limbs - and he will turn away because he cannot comprehend the true greatness and power of bringing into existence forces active in a thing that cannot be perceived by the senses." (3)

While Judaism is based on a supernatural event, it is not oriented toward the supernatural. The essence of Judaism is not realized through religious fervor over the miraculous but through an appreciation of God's wisdom as revealed both in Torah and the natural world. A miracle, being a breach of God's law, does not contribute to this

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appreciation. This distinction is crucial since it gives Judaism its metaphysical uniqueness.

Part I

The foundation of our faith is the belief that God revealed himself to the people of Israel a little over three thousand years ago. The revelation consisted of certain visual and audible phenomena. The elements of fire, clouds, smoke pillars, and the sound of the shofar were present. God produced an audible voice of immense proportion that He used to speak to Moses and then to the people. The voice conveyed intelligible Laws of great philosophic and halachic import. The event left no doubt in the minds of those present that they had witnessed an act of God. The Torah describes the details of the event in two places, first in Exodus 19 and then in Deuteronomy 4, where Moses recounts the event to the people before his passing. What was the objective of the event? In both places the Torah very clearly tells us the purpose of the revelation. The statement that God made to Moses immediately before the event reads as follows:

"I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that all the people will hear when I speak to you. They will also then believe in you forever." (Exodus 19:9)

When Moses recounts the event to the people he says,

"Teach your children and your children's children about the day you stood before God your Lord at Horeb. It was then that God said to me, 'Congregate the people for Me, and I will let them hear my words. This will teach them to be in awe of Me as long as they live on earth, and they will also teach their children.'" (Deuteronomy 4:9-10)

God clearly intended the event to be a demonstration that would serve the present and all future generations. Nachmanides and others consider it one of the 613 commandments to teach the demonstration of the event at Sinai to every generation. We are therefore obliged to understand the nature of this demonstration and how it was to be valid for future generations. An understanding of the foundations of a system offers insight into the character and philosophical milieu of that system. Comprehension of Torah from Sinai provides the most rudimentary approaches to the entire Weltanschauung of Torah.

Part II

The very concept of a proof or evidence for the occurrence of the event at Sinai presupposes

certain premises. It sets the system of Torah apart from the ordinary religious creed. The true religionist is in need of no evidence for his belief. His belief stems from something deep within himself. Indeed, he even senses in the idea of evidence for his belief a mixed blessing, as it were, a kind of alien ally. He does not enjoy making recourse to reality. Judaism, on the other hand, doesn't just permit evidence; it demands it. If one were to say he believed in Torah from Sinai and does not need any evidence, he would not be in conformity with the Torah. The Torah demands that our conviction that it was given to us by God be based on the specific formula of the demonstration He created for us. Nachmanides states further that were it not for the event at Sinai we would not know that we should reject a false prophet who performs miracles and tells us to abandon any of the laws or ways of the Torah. It is written in Deuteronomy 8:2-6 that we should not follow such a prophet. But, says Nachmanides, were it not for the demonstration at Sinai we would be totally in a quandary, unable to know whether we should follow the Torah based on miracles that occurred in Egypt or follow the false prophet based on his miracles. (4) The event at Sinai resolves this dilemma. After the event at Sinai the Jew remains unimpressed even by miracles that would lead an ordinary person to conclude that the words of the false prophet are true. We shall return to this point later.

Clearly then, the basis on which one's religious convictions are built differ in the cases of the strict religionist and the man of Torah. The difference might be stated in the following manner: The religionist believes first in God and then in his mind and senses, while the man of Torah, who bases himself on evidence, accepts his mind and his senses and then proceeds to recognize God and His Torah by means of these tools. Only the man of Torah perceives God as a reality as his ideas concerning God register on the same part of his mind that all ideas concerning reality do. (5)

Let us proceed to the demonstration that took place at Sinai. We must understand not only how this event would serve as proof for those immediately witnessing it but for future generations as well, as it is stated in Deuteronomy, "and they will also teach their children." We must define at the outset what we mean by proof. The term proof as it is commonly used has a subjective meaning. We mean proof to the satisfaction of a given individual. As such it is subject to a wide range of definitions and criteria. There are those for whom even the world of sense perception is doubtful. In order not to get lost in the sea of epistemology let us state that the Torah accepts a framework similar to the one a scientist employs. It accepts the world of sense perception and the human mind. The

events that occurred at Sinai are according to Torah valid evidence from which a rational person would conclude that a). There exists a deity, b). This deity is concerned with man, and c). This deity entrusted Moses with the task of conveying his system of laws to the people. To anyone who maintains that even if he were at Sinai he would remain unconvinced, the Torah has little to say.

The Torah addresses itself to a rational mind. It must be remembered that every epistemological system that is defensible from a logical standpoint is not necessarily rational. Rationality demands more than logical consistency; it requires clear intellectual intuition. One may argue, for instance, that we possess no real knowledge of the atom. One might contend that all electrons and protons conspired to act in a certain way when they were being observed. It may be difficult to disprove such a hypothesis, but it is easy to see that it does not appeal innately to the human mind. (6) Our intuitive intellect rejects it. (7)

Part III

Let us now proceed to the question of how the events at Sinai, which occurred over three thousand years ago, were to serve as evidence for all succeeding generations. We may begin by asking what kind of event, if any, could possibly be performed that would qualify as evidence long after such an event has transpired? What criteria could we set forth that would satisfy such a requirement? Let us analyze how we as human beings gain knowledge. What methods are available to us? It would seem that there are two methods we use to obtain knowledge. The first is by direct observation. This course seems simple enough and for our purpose requires little analysis. Very little of our knowledge, however, is obtained through direct observation. We would know little or nothing of world history if we limited ourselves to direct observation. Even in science little or no progress could be made if one were limited to direct observation. We could not rely on textbooks or information given to us by others. Instead, each scientific observer would have to perform or witness all experimental evidence of the past firsthand. Knowledge in our personal lives would be equally restricted. When we place ourselves on the operating table for surgery we have very little firsthand knowledge about our physical condition or even whether the practitioner is indeed a physician. We put our very lives on the line with almost no firsthand, directly observed evidence.

Why do we do this? Are there any criteria we use that can rationally justify our actions? Here we come to the second class of knowledge available to us - secondhand knowledge. Secondhand knowledge seems to us quite reasonable provided

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certain criteria are met. When secondhand knowledge comes to our attention we are immediately faced with the question: Is this piece of information true or false? We cannot directly know whether or not it is true since we have not witnessed it directly; we can, however, know if it is true by way of inference. If we can remove all causes of falsehood we can infer that it is true. How can we remove all causes of falsehood? The rationale is simple. If the information that others convey to us is false, it is so for one of two reasons. Either the informer is ignorant and mistaken in what he tells us, or his statement is a fabrication. If we can rule out these two possibilities, there remains no cause for the information to be false. We then consider it to be true.

How can we eliminate these two possibilities? For the first one, ignorance, we only need to determine whether the individual conveying the information to us is intellectually capable of apprehending it. We deal here with a direct relationship. If the information is simple we may trust an average person. If it is complex or profound we would only trust someone capable of understanding such matters. The more complex the matter, the more qualified a person is required to be; the more simple the matter, the less qualified an individual needs to be. If an ordinary person would tell us it was raining we would be inclined on the basis of the first consideration to believe him. If he would tell us about complex weather patterns we would doubt his information. If, however, an eminent meteorologist would describe such patterns to us, we would believe him. The day President Kennedy was assassinated word spread almost instantly that he was shot. This report remained accurate although it passed through many hands. The details about how or where he was shot were confused. The shooting was a simple item of news capable of being communicated properly even by many simple people. The details of how and where were too complex for ordinary people to transmit properly.

Sometimes our criteria are fulfilled in concert with each other. We may believe a layperson's testimony that another individual is a well-qualified physician and then take the physician's advice. In another case we may accept a layperson's assertion that a text is the work of notable scientists. We would then proceed to accept as true ideas stated in this text even though they seem strange to us. We would not accept these very same ideas from the original simple person. Our acceptance of the information found in textbooks is always based on this process.

Now we come to the consideration of fabrication. Here again we operate through inference. We may rule out fabrication when we trust the individual or think he has no motive to lie. If we do

not know the individual we work with a second criterion. We accept the information if many people convey it, and we doubt it when its source is only one individual. The rationale is based on the assumption that one individual may have a motive to lie, but it is unlikely that a group of people would have a collective motivation to lie. If we met someone who told us that the 8:30 train to Montreal derailed we might at first be doubtful, but if several passengers gave us the same report we would accept it. We deem it unreasonable to assume a universal conspiracy. Our acceptance of the authorship of books by those named on the covers is based on this assumption. The moment we hear information our minds automatically turn to these two factors. We ask ourselves if the informant is capable of apprehending the information he is conveying and if there is any reason to assume fabrication. If we can answer in the affirmative to the first question and in the negative to the second question, we accept the information as true.

These are the criteria, which guide our lives. They determine the choices we make in both our most trivial and most serious decisions. With this *modus operandi* we conclude that so and so is a highly qualified physician. If we suspect his integrity or his capabilities we consult a second physician or even a third. If all of them agree we would submit to even a serious operation on the grounds that a universal conspiracy is absurd.

Our acceptance of all historical data is based on the previous considerations. We are satisfied with the verisimilitude of certain historical events and unsatisfied with others depending on whether or not our criteria for reliability have been met. We are quite sure of simple well-known facts. For example, no one would dispute the claim that World War I occurred. Again, we are quite certain that George Washington existed, but we are not so sure of what size shoe Washington wore. A simple fact readily observable by many individuals we accept as true. Details we doubt. For these and for complex information we require qualified individuals. By ruling out fabrication we accept their communications as true. Because of our system we often arrive at gray areas when our criteria have not been adequately fulfilled. To the degree that they are not satisfied we are infused with doubt.

We are now in a position to determine what event could be performed that would retain its validity for future generations. Since future generations cannot observe the event directly, it would have to be an event that rules out in its process of communication the causes of doubt due to the ignorance of the communicators and due to fabrication. A simple event grasped easily by the senses that occurs before a mass of people who

later attest to its occurrence would fulfill the requirements. Such an event would have all the credibility of the most accepted historical fact. If we doubt either a simple event attested to by masses of people or a complex event attested to by qualified individuals, we would ipso facto have to doubt almost all the knowledge we have acquired in all the sciences, all the humanities, and in all the different disciplines existing today. Moreover we would have to desist from consulting with physicians, dentists, lawyers, mechanics, plumbers, electricians, or specialists in any field who work from an accepted body of knowledge.

The event at Sinai fulfills the above requirements. The events witnessed as described were of a simple perceptual nature so that ordinary people could apprehend them. The event at Sinai was structured with the same built-in ingredients that cause us to accept any historical fact or any kind of secondhand knowledge. Moses himself points this out (Deuteronomy 4:9-13,32-36). Moses notes that those events that transpired before the entire nation were clearly perceived. He states,

"You are the ones who have been shown, so that you will know that God is the Supreme Being and there is none besides Him. From the heavens, He let you hear His voice admonishing you, and on earth He showed you His great fire, so that you heard His words from the fire."

Someone may ask how we know that these events were as described in the Torah, clearly visible, and that they transpired before the entire nation. Perhaps this itself is a fabrication? The answer to this question is obvious. We accept a simple fact attested to by numerous observers because we consider mass conspiracy absurd. For the very same reason no public event can be fabricated, for we would have to assume a mass conspiracy of silence with regard to the occurrence of that event. If someone were to tell us that an atomic bomb was detonated over New York City fifty years ago, we would not accept it as true because we would assume that we would have certainly heard about it, had it actually occurred. The very factors, which compel us to accept as true, an account of an event of public proportion safeguards us against fabrication of such an event. (8) Were this not so all of history could have been fabricated. Had the event at Sinai not actually occurred anyone fabricating it at any point in time would have met with the stiff refutation of the people, "had a mass event of that proportion ever occurred we surely would have heard of it." Fabrication of an event of public proportion is not within the realm of credibility.

History corroborates this point. In spite of the strong religious instinct in man, no modern

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religion in over two thousand years has been able to base itself on public revelation. A modern religion demands some kind of verifiable occurrence in order to be accepted. For this reason the two major Western religions, Christianity and Islam, make recourse to the revelation at Sinai. Were it not for this need and the impossibility of manufacturing such evidence, they certainly would not have based their religions on another religion's revelation.

Part IV

We now face one question. One may argue that we are to accept Torah much as one would accept any major historical event, and we may put our lives on the line based on no stronger evidence, but doesn't religion demand certitude of a different nature? Here we are not looking for certitude based on some formula, which we are forced to employ in our daily lives but certitude, which gives us conviction of an absolute and ultimate nature.

To answer this question we must proceed with an examination of the tenets involved in the institution of Torah from Sinai, to which the rest of this paper is dedicated. Maimonides states that the nation of Israel did not believe in Moses because of the miracles he performed. (9) Moses performed these miracles out of simple necessity. They needed to escape from Egypt, so he split the sea, they needed food, so he brought forth manna. The only reason the people believed in Moses and hence God and Torah was because of the event at Sinai where they heard a voice that God produced speaking to Moses and instructing him to teach the people. But we may ask, weren't the miracles in Egypt enough to convince the people of Moses' authenticity? Didn't they follow him out of Egypt based on what they observed of God's miracles? And doesn't the Torah itself state at the splitting of the sea (Exodus 14:31),

"The Israelites saw the great power that God had unleashed against Egypt, and the people were in awe of God. They believed in God and his servant Moses."

But Maimonides is thoroughly supported by the Bible itself since after this very statement, after the splitting of the sea, God says to Moses (Exodus 19:9),

"I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that all the people will hear when I speak to you. They will then also believe in you forever."

It is clear, as Maimonides concludes, that there was something lacking in the previous belief for if it were complete the very motive for the Revela-

tion, as stated clearly in the Torah, would be lacking.

A belief instilled by miracles, even miracles of cataclysmic proportion forecasted in advance and occurring exactly when needed is lacking according to Maimonides. They do not effectuate total human conviction. It is, in the words of Maimonides, "a belief which has after it contemplation and afterthought." It may cause one to act on it because of the profound improbability of coincidence but it is not intellectually satisfying. The mind keeps returning to the event and continues to ponder it. God wished Torah to be founded on evidence that totally satisfies the human mind - Tzelem Elokim - which He created. He wished Judaism to be based on a sound foundation of knowledge, which would satisfy man's intellect completely. Miracles may point to something. We may be convinced that coincidence is improbable but such conclusions are haunted by afterthoughts. When the voice produced by God was heard from the heavens there was no further need for afterthought. It was a matter of direct evidence. Only then could it be said that the people knew there is a God and that Moses was His trusted servant. The requirements for knowledge were complete.

Maimonides concludes, "Hence it follows that every prophet that arises after Moses our teacher, we do not believe in him because of the sign he gives so that we might say we will pay heed to whatever he says, but rather because of the commandment that Moses gave in the Torah and stated, 'if he gives you a sign you shall pay heed to him,' just as he commanded us to adjudicate on the basis of the testimony of two witnesses even though we don't know in an absolute sense if they testified truthfully or falsely. So too is it a commandment to listen to this prophet even though we don't know if the sign is true. Therefore if a prophet arose and performed great wonders and sought to repudiate the prophecy of our teacher Moses we do not pay heed to him. To what is this similar? To two witnesses who testified to someone about something he saw with his own eyes denying it was as he saw it; he doesn't listen to them but knows for certain that they are false witnesses. Therefore the Torah states that if the sign or wonder comes to pass do not pay heed to the words of this prophet because this (person) came to you with a sign and wonder to repudiate that which you saw with your own eyes and since we do not believe in signs but only in the commandments that Moses gave how can we accept by way of a sign this (person) who came to repudiate the prophecy of Moses that we saw and heard." (10) The Jew is thus tied completely and exclusively to the event at Sinai which was formulated to totally satisfy the human mind. (11)

This explains the main idea of the chapter of the

false prophet given by the Torah in Deuteronomy 13:2-6.

"If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder of which he spoke to you comes to pass, and he says, 'Let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them.'"

"Do not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. God your lord is testing you to see if you are truly able to love God your Lord with all your heart and all your soul."

What is this test? The test is to see if your love (12) of God is based on true knowledge, which He has taught you to follow and embrace, or if you are to fall prey to the unsound primitive emotions of the moment that well up from the instinctual source of man's nature. The faith of the Jew can never be shaken by dreamers or miracle workers. We pay no attention to them. Based on the rationally satisfying demonstration of Sinai we remain faithful to God through His wisdom and knowledge. (13) Our creed is that of His eternal and infinite law. When we perfect ourselves in this manner we can say that we truly love God with all our hearts and with all our soul. We then serve God through the highest part of our nature, the Divine element He placed in our soul.

Part V

We have so far dealt with the actuality of the event at Sinai and with the nature of this event. We must now concern ourselves with the purpose of this event. When the Jews received the Torah at Sinai they uttered two words, naaseh v'nishma, "we will do and we will hear", the latter meaning we will learn, understand, and comprehend. The commitment was not just one of action or performance but was one of pursuit of knowledge of the Torah. Rabbi Jonah of Gerundi asks, (14) how can one do if he doesn't understand? A performance of a rational person requires as a prerequisite knowledge of that performance. Rabbi Jonah answers: The event at Sinai served as a verification of the truth of Torah. The Torah set up a system of scholarship to which its ideas are entrusted. "We will do" means we will accept the authority of the scholars of Torah concerning proper religious performance until we can understand ourselves by way of knowledge why these performances are correct. The commitment of naaseh (action) is preliminary until we reach the nishma, (hearing) our own understanding. Our ultimate objective is the full understanding of this corpus of knowledge known as Torah. We gain knowledge of Torah by applying our intellects to its study and investiga-

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tion. The study of Torah and the understanding of its principles is a purely rational and cognitive process. All halachic decisions are based on human reason alone.

Until rather recently the greatest minds of our people devoted themselves to Torah study. Since the tradition of our people has lost popularity, the great intellectual resources of our people have been directed to science, mathematics, psychology, and other secular areas from which eminent thinkers emerged. In former years our intellectual resources produced great Torah intellects like Maimonides, Rabbeinu Tam, and Nachmanides. In modern times these same resources produced eminent secular giants like Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, and Sigmund Freud. I mention this so that the layman may have some understanding of the intellectual level of our scholars, for just as it is impossible to appreciate the intellect of an Einstein unless one has great knowledge of physics, it is impossible to appreciate the great minds of Torah unless one has attained a high level of Torah knowledge.

The greatest thinkers of science all share a common experience of profound intellectual humility. Isaac Newton said that he felt like a small boy playing by the sea while the "whole ocean of truth" rolled on before him. Albert Einstein said, "One thing I have learned in a long life: that all our science measured against reality is primitive and childlike - and yet it is the most precious thing we have." The human mind cannot only ascertain what it knows; it can appreciate the extent and enormity of what it does not know. A great mind can sense the depth of that into which it is delving. In Torah one can find the same experience. The greatest Torah minds throughout the centuries have all had the realization that they are only scratching the surface of a vast and infinite body of knowledge. As the universe is to the physicist, Torah is to the Talmudist. Just as the physicist when formulating his equations can sense their crudeness against the vast reality he is attempting to penetrate, so too the Talmudist in formulating his abstractions comes in sight of the infinite world of halachic thought. As the Midrash states, "It is far greater than the earth and wider than the sea, and it increases infinitely." The reason for both experiences is the same. They both derive from God's infinite knowledge.

Let me elaborate further on this point. When the scientist ponders the phenomena of nature and proceeds to unravel them, he finds that with the resolution of each problem new worlds open up for him. The questions and seeming contradictions he observes in nature are gateways that guide him to greater understanding, forcing him to establish new theories, which, if correct, shed light on an

even wider range of phenomena. New scientific truths are discovered. The joy of success is, however, short-lived, as new problems, often of even greater immensity, emerge on the horizon of investigation. He is not dissuaded by this situation because he considers his new insight invaluable and looks forward with even greater anticipation to future gains in knowledge. The scientist is propelled by his faith that nature is not at odds with itself, that the world makes sense, and that all problems, no matter how formidable in appearance, must eventually yield to an underlying intelligible system, one that is capable of being grasped by the human mind. His faith is amply rewarded as each success brings forth new and even more amazing discoveries. He proceeds in his infinite task.

When studying man-made systems, such as United States Constitutional Law or British Common Law, this is not the case. The investigator here is not involved in an infinite pursuit. He either reaches the end of his investigation or he comes upon problems that do not lend themselves to further analysis; they are attributable to the shortcomings of the designers of the system. The man-made systems exhibit no depth beyond the intellect of their designers. Unlike science, real problems in these systems do not serve as points of departure for new theoretical insights but lead instead to dead ends.

Those who are familiar with the study of Torah know that the Talmudist encounters the same situation as the scientific investigator. Here difficulties do not lead to dead ends; on the contrary, with careful analysis apparent contradictions give way to new insights, opening up new highways of intellectual thought. Wider ranges of halachic phenomena become unified while new problems come to light. The process is infinite. The greatest human minds have had this experience when pondering the Talmud; indeed, the greater the mind, the greater the experience. We are dealing with a corpus of knowledge far beyond the ultimate grasp of mortal man. It is this experience, this firsthand knowledge of Torah that has been the most intimate source of faith for Torah scholars throughout the ages.

The ultimate conviction that Torah is the word of God derives from an intrinsic source, the knowledge of Torah itself. Of course this source of conviction is only available to the Torah scholar. But God wants us all to be scholars. This is only possible if we do the nishma, the ultimate purpose of the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

The revelation at Sinai, while carefully structured by the Creator to appeal to man's rational principle to move him only by his Tzelem Elokim, is only a prelude to the ultimate direct and

personal realization of the Torah as being the work of the Almighty. The revelation at Sinai was necessary to create the naaseh, which is the bridge to the nishma where anyone can gain firsthand knowledge of Torah and the truth it contains. As Rabbi Soloveitchick once said, the study of Torah is a "rendezvous with the Almighty". When we begin to comprehend the philosophy of Torah we may also begin to appreciate how the revelation at Sinai was structured by God in the only way possible to achieve the goals of the Torah - to create a religion, forever secure, by means of which man worships God through the highest element in his nature.

Postscript

A statement of Nachmanides warrants inclusion here. Nachmanides says that we can infer the truth of the Torah from the principle that a person would not bequeath a falsehood to his children. At first sight this seems inexplicable. Idolatry could also avail itself of the same argument. We must obviously say that the principle, it may be true, must be amended to read a person would not transmit intentionally a falsehood to his children. How then does this show Judaism is true? All religious people believe their religion is true and that they are bestowing the greatest blessing on their children by conveying to them their most cherished beliefs.

The words of Nachmanides become clear when we realize that his inference is based on a certain level of Torah knowledge. Either the emotions or the intellect generates a belief. But Torah is a vast system of knowledge with concepts, postulates, and axioms. If such a system were fabricated it would have to be done so intentionally. Nachmanides therefore states his proposition that a person does not bequeath a falsehood to his children.

For the purpose of Nachmanides' inference, one would have to attain at least a basic familiarity with Torah. The ultimate recognition of Torah as a science would of necessity require a higher degree of knowledge. Nachmanides' proof is partially intrinsic, whereas the demonstration of Torah from Sinai is totally extrinsic. There are then three levels of knowledge of Torah from Sinai: the demonstration, the intrinsic verification through knowledge, and that of Nachmanides.

Epilogue

Torah completely satisfies the needs of the Tzelem Elokim in man's nature. Every human mind craves Torah. Man was created for it (see tractate Sanhedrin 99b). Following the example of Maimonides, who said "Listen to the truth from whomever said it (Introduction to Avos)," and his

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son Reb Avraham, who endorsed the study of Aristotle in the areas in which he does not disagree with Torah, (15) I take the liberty to quote Bertrand Russell: "The world has need of a philosophy or a religion which will promote life. But in order to promote life it is necessary to value something other than mere life. Life devoted only to life is animal, without any real human value, incapable of preserving men permanently from weariness and the feeling that all is vanity. If life is to be fully human it must serve some end, which seems, in some sense, outside human life, some end which is impersonal and above mankind, such as God or truth or beauty. Those who best promote life do not have life for their purpose. They aim rather at what seems like a gradual incarnation, a bringing into our human existence of something eternal, something that appears to the imagination to live in a heaven remote from strife and failure and the devouring jaws of time. Contact with the eternal world - even if it be only a world of our imagining - brings a strength and a fundamental peace which cannot be wholly destroyed by the struggles and apparent failures of our temporal life." (16)

Torah makes our lives worthwhile. It gives us contact with the eternal world of God, truth, and the beauty of His ideas. Unlike Russell the agnostic, we do not have to satisfy ourselves with a world of "our imagining" but with the world of reality - God's creation. How fortunate we are and how meaningful are the words we recite each day, "for they [the Torah and mitzvos] are our lives and the length of our days."

End Notes

1. See Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra on this verse.

2. In his description of the Torah scholar, Rav Soloveitchik states, "He does not search out transcendental, ecstatic paroxysms or frenzied experiences that whisper intonations of another world into his ears. He does not require any miracles or wonder in order to understand the Torah. He approaches the world of halacha with his mind and intellect just as cognitive man approaches the natural realm. And since he relies upon his intellect, he places his faith in it and does not suppress any of his psychic faculties in order to merge into some supernal existence. His own personal understanding can resolve the most difficult and complex problems. He pays no heed to any murmurings of [emotional] intuition or other types of mysterious presentiments." Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*. (Philadelphia: 1983, Jewish Publication Society of America) p.79.

3. Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Trans. by M. Friedlander. (London: 1951 Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd) p. 161.

4. From both Maimonides and Nachmanides who concur on this point, as well as from the plain meaning of the Bible itself with regard to the objective of Revelation, it is clear that Judaism does not give credence to the existence of an authentic inner religious voice. Were this the case, there would be no need for the demonstration at Sinai in order to discredit the false prophet (Deuteronomy 8:2-6). On the contrary, this would be the exact test spoken of, to see if one will be faithful to this inner voice. For Judaism this inner voice is no different from the subjective inner feelings all people have for their religious and other unwarranted beliefs. It stems from the primitive side of man's nature and is in fact the source of idolatry. This is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 29:17, 18:

Today, there must not be among you any man, woman, family or tribe, whose heart strays from God, and who goes and worships the gods of those nations. When [such a person] hears the words of this dread curse, he may rationalize and say, "I will have peace, even if I do as I see fit."

Why does the Torah here as in no other place present to us the rationalization of the sinner? The Torah is describing the strong sense of security these primitive inner feelings often bestow on their hosts and is warning of the tragic consequences that will follow if they are not uprooted.

5. It is imperative that the reader examines the passages in the Torah relevant to this notion. These include Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 4:3,9,34,35, and 36.

6. As a classic example, metaphysical solipsism may be logically irrefutable but is to the human mind absurd.

7. We may even be able to discover why we reject it, let us say, due to Occam's razor, the maxim that assumptions introduced to explain a thing must be as few as possible, but our rejection is not due to a knowledge of Occam's razor but rather Occam's razor is based on our rejection. It is part of the innate rationale of our mental system. Occam's razor, a rather marvelous formula, does not rely on deductive logic. It shows that the natural world somehow conforms to our mental world. The simplest idea is the most appealing to the human mind and is usually the most correct one. The world is in conformity with the mind. In the words of Albert Einstein, "The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible."

8. It should be understood that the mere claim that an event was a public one and its acceptance by people does not qualify the event as fulfilling

our requirements; it is only if the people who accept the information are in a position to reject it that their acceptance is of value. If a person from Africa claims to people of Sardinia that a public event transpired in Africa, the acceptance by the Sardinians is no indication of reliability as they are not in a position to confirm or deny the event. It is only if the claim is made to the same people who were in a position to observe the event that acceptance is of value. Claims made by early Christians about public miracles of the Nazarene do not qualify, as the masses of Jews before whom they were supposedly performed did not attest to them. The same is true of claims made by other faiths (though, as we will see, after Sinai miracles have no credibility value).

9. See Maimonides, Code of Law, Chapter VIII, Laws Concerning the Foundations of Torah.

10. Ibid. Chapter VIII.

11. This point is crucial. It contradicts popular opinion. The Jew remains at all times unimpressed by miracles. They do not form the essence of his faith, and they do not enter the mental framework of his creed. Though the most righteous prophet may perform them, they instill no belief. His credence harks back to only one source - Sinai.

12. See the concept of love of God as described by Maimonides Code, Laws of the Foundations of Torah Chapter II 1,2, and our elaboration on this theme in "Why one should learn Torah."

13. When visiting the Rockefeller Medical Institute, Albert Einstein met with Dr. Alexis Carrel, whose extracurricular interests were spiritualism and extrasensory perception. Observing that, Einstein was unimpressed. Carrel said, "But Doctor what would you say if you observed this phenomenon yourself?" To which Einstein replied, "I still would not believe it." (Clark, Ronald W. Einstein: The Life and Times. (New York: 1971, Avon Books) p. 642). Why would the great scientist not capitulate even to evidence? It is a matter of one's total framework. The true man of science who sees knowledge permeating the entire universe from the smallest particle to the largest galaxies will not be shaken from his view by a few paltry facts even though he may not be able to explain them. Only the ignorant are moved by such "evidence." In a similar manner miracles do not affect a man of Torah who is rooted in Sinai and God's infinite wisdom. His credo is his cogito.

14. Rebbeinu Yonah Avos III 9.

15. Concerning books that are proscribed, this follows the precedent of the Talmud [Sanhedrin 110b], *mili mealyesah deis baih darshinon* - those true things that are contained in them we do study.

16. Schlipp, Paul R. *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell*. (LaSalle: 1989, Open Court Publishing). p.533. ■

The Book of Ruth

A Lesson in Virtues

RABBI BERNARD FOX



“And it was in the times that the judges judged that there was a famine in the land and a man from Bait Lechem in Yehuda went to sojourn in the fields of Moav – he and his wife and his two sons.” (Megilat Ruth 1:1)

One of the issues we encounter in teaching students TaNaCh is that the interpretations of our Sages often seem far removed from the literal translation and intent to the passages. It is important that the teacher relate these interpretations to the passage by explaining the basis for the insight within the wording of the passage.

The above passage introduces the Megilah of Ruth. The pasuk tells us the land of Israel was stricken with a famine. In response, Elimelech left the land of Israel with his family and relocated to the land of Moav. Malbim quotes the midrash that explains the there were actually two famines that afflicted the land of Israel. One was a famine involving a scarcity of foods. In addition, the land was also afflicted with a scarcity of Torah. The midrash does not elaborate on the specific form or nature of this scarcity of Torah. Neither does the midrash explain its basis for this interpretation of the passage. However, Malbim suggests that the nature of this scarcity of Torah is indicated by another teaching of the Sages. Based on his analysis,

he also indicates the basis in the passage for our Sages' comments.

Malbim begins by referring us to a comment of the Sages quoted by Rashi. According to our Sages, Elimelech was a wealthy person. As a result of the famine Elimelech was approached by many impoverished individuals needing his support. He fled the land of Israel in order to avoid his duty to support the poor. [1] At first glance, this seems to be another amazing comment that lacks any connection to the text. However, a careful analysis does provide significant support for these comments of our Sages.

Our passage describes Elimelech as “a man.” Only in the next passage does the Megilah reveal his identity. Like the Chumash, NaCh does not waste words. Ideas are expressed in as precise a manner as possible. So, we would have expected the Megilah to reveal Elimelech's identity in the first passage instead of referring to him as “a man.” The Sages often comment explain the term *eysh* – a man – usually refers to a person of importance. The Megilah is telling us that Elimelech was a person of significance.

Furthermore, the Megilah is referring to Elimelech as an *eysh* in describing his abandonment of the land of Israel. The implication is that his decision to leave was in some manner associated with his status as a person of significance. What is the connection to

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which the pasuk alludes?

In order to answer this question, we must ask one further question. In what sense was Elimelech an eysh – a person of significance? How was he special? The only remarkable characteristic of Elimelech that is mentioned in the Megilah is his wealth. It seems that the Sages concluded that this must be the distinction to which the Megilah refers in describing Elimelech as an eysh.

Now, we can better understand the message communicated in the passage in relating Elimelech's decision to leave the land of Israel to his status as an eysh. The apparent message of the passage is that Elimelech's wealth was the basis for his decision to leave the land of Israel.

So, how did Elimelech's status as a wealthy person influence his decision to leave the land of Israel? Our Sages conclude that his decision must have been motivated by a desire to preserve this wealth. They continue to explain that as a result of the famine Elimelech was accosted by the poor seeking relief. Elimelech was not willing to provide this support but neither was he comfortable turning the poor away. In order to evade his dilemma, he elected to leave the land of Israel and relocate to the land of Moav.

Based on the comments of the Sages quoted by Rashi, Malbim explains that nature of the famine for Torah. He explains that this famine was characterized by this attitude towards tzedakah – charity – expressed by Elimelech. In other words, the reluctance to provide support for the poor is described by the Sages as a famine for Torah.

In summary, although at first glance it would appear that the comments of the Sages are not reflected in the passage, a careful analysis of the passage does indicate that the Sages are responding to specific problems in the passage and resolving these problems based upon a thorough analysis of the text.

Let us now consider another issue. Malbim continues to explain that this is not the only instance in which the Sages use very harsh terms to describe a person who is remiss in performance of the mitzvah of supporting the poor. Malbim quotes two statements of the Sages. The Sages comment that anyone who hides his eyes from the poor is regarded as serving idolatry. In another instance, the Sages comment that anyone who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness is comparable to a person who has no G-d.

Malbim suggests that the Sages – like the TaNaCh – choose their words carefully.

These two comments are not reiterations of the same idea. The subtle differences in the phrasing are significant. He quotes Rav Hai Gaon. Rav Hai explained that there is an important difference between hiding one's eyes from the poor and not involving oneself in acts of kindness. When one hides one's eyes, the person is attempting to not see something. In other words, there is a situation with which the person is confronted and the person turns away to avoid seeing and needing to respond to the situation. According to Rav Hai, this characterization describes the person that is confronted with a poor person – the poor person is knocking at his door – and he refuses to open the door or – like Elimelech – he flees from his responsibility. In contrast, in referring to a person who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness, the Sages are describing a different behavior. This person makes a decision to not get involved in acts of kindness. Perhaps, if a poor person came to the door, he would respond and provide assistance. But this person will not seek out the poor and those in need of help in order to provide for them.[2]

Although Malbim does not comment on the issue, it is interesting that the Sages refer to the person who hides his eyes as an idolater and the person who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness as not having a G-d. Can we explain the difference between these two characterizations and why each is used in reference to its respective behavior?

When a person turns away and avoids a needy person, a calculation is being made. The person is confronted with someone needing help and is aware of the obligation to respond. At the same time, that person is reluctant to give of his wealth. He balances his love for his wealth against his Torah obligation to support the poor and decides to ignore his obligation in favor of his attachment to his possessions. In this calculation, the person is giving precedence to his love for his wealth over his commitment to Hashem and His Torah. In deciding that the love of wealth comes first, the person has given his wealth a position in his outlook that is reserved for Hashem. He has placed love of wealth above love of Hashem. In assigning this position – reserved for Hashem – to his wealth – he has replaced Hashem with his wealth. In this sense, he is characterized as an idolater.

A person who does not involve oneself in acts of kindness is not making this calculation. In fact, through removing himself from

involvement in acts of kindness – chesed – the person has avoided the necessity of any such calculation. However, this person is also making a clear statement regarding his relationship to Hashem. Who is this person? Our Sages accuse him of abandoning G-d because he does not perform chesed. The implication is that the Sages are referring to a person who is otherwise conscientious in his observance. But in the area of chesed he is remiss. He is establishing boundaries for his relationship with Hashem. He is establishing a realm or framework in which he must serve Hashem and defining a corresponding realm or framework in which duty to Hashem is irrelevant. This person is not denying that he must serve Hashem. Instead, he is establishing perimeters to this service. He relegates his service to the synagogue or the bait hamidrash – the study hall. But he banishes Hashem from important elements of his personal life. The message of our Sages now emerges more clearly. We cannot establish artificial boundaries designed to exclude Hashem from portions of our life. Devotion to Hashem – by definition – requires recognition of Hashem's mastery over all elements of a person's life.

An analogy will help convey this idea. Assume a king decrees that his subjects should pay a five-dollar tax every year. The subjects respond that although you are king, we do respect your right to demand taxes. You do not have authority over our possessions. Does this king truly have power over his subjects or does he rule only by virtue of the indulgence of his subjects? Clearly, he rules by virtue of their indulgence. They have the power to decide the areas over which he does and does not have authority.

Now, let us apply this analogy to our discussion. If we accept that Hashem has complete authority over us – that He is truly our G-d – then He does not need our indulgence in order to dictate behavioral expectations. We must acknowledge His authority in every aspect of our lives. However, if we insist that Hashem does not have the authority to prescribe behaviors in some areas, then we are implying that Hashem cannot dictate to us but instead rules through our indulgence. If Hashem requires our indulgence, then we do not really regard Him as our G-d. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Megillat Rut 1:1.

[2] Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), Geza Yeshai – Commentary on Megillat Rut, 1:1.



AN ENDLESS SEA OF GRAVES

RABBI REUVEN MANN
CONG. RINAT YISRAEL
PLAINVIEW NY

Almighty God - Creator of heaven and earth,

We have gathered here today, men and woman of different backgrounds and persuasions to offer thanks for the privilege of being citizens of the greatest country on earth – the USA. We are ever mindful that the majority of people on this planet live in a state of oppression and enslavement. It is sad to note that many Americans fail to appreciate their country and acknowledge its greatness. Some feel very bitter about America and even root for its defeat, heaven forbid. It is of the greatest importance that we rekindle the spirit of patriotism and transmit to our children a genuine love of America and what it stands for. Those who are born into privilege often take it for granted. This generation needs to hear about America from the perspective of those who witnessed

the worst horrors in history of man's inhumanity to man.

I want to share with you a true and poignant story which I recently heard and which must be repeated. My wife Linda, who is here today, is a child of Holocaust survivors. Both her parents (who are no longer with us) survived Auschwitz, which at its peak with its systematic assembly line efficiency killed 12,000 innocent men woman and children every day. Her mother's first husband and child were killed. Her father's first wife and children were all killed except for his oldest son Oscar, who was 13 when he was taken off to the camps. Father and son stuck together and cheated death many times and finally liberated by allied troops emaciated, skeletal and on the verge of death. Her mother and father met in a displaced persons camp, got married and came to America to rebuild their lives. Her brother Oscar Jacob also came to America, married raised a family and established a successful business in St. Louis. A number of years ago he began telling his Holocaust story at various schools and other organizations who invited him so speak.

This past year he visited New York and we joined him as he recounted his experiences to a spellbound and visibly moved group of high school students nearby in Syosset Long Island. Afterwards he told me this story which makes me shiver. Four years ago his three sons wanted to return to Europe and retrace his journey of survival starting from Auschwitz and moving through all the concentration camps at which he had been incarcerated ending up at Bergen Belsen from which he was liberated. The journey evoked powerful feelings which had been pent up for many years. He suddenly had a desire to visit a cemetery for American soldiers who had fallen in the war. There were none in Germany however, so he traveled to the nearest one in Luxemburg Belgium. He stood there and looked out at the endless sea of graves of soldiers and was overcome by a profound feeling of gratitude for their sacrifice – for his liberation, his life his children and grandchildren, for everything that

America stood for. These powerful feelings welled up within him and he had an uncontrollable urge to express his gratitude. Suddenly, with out any thought or plan, he found himself walking up to the first grave. He paused and said "thank you." He then moved on to the next grave and said "thank you." He spent that entire day going from grave to grave and did not leave until he had said thank you to every soldier.

Ladies and gentlemen I am inspired by that story and I too say thank you, and all of us here say thank you America and to every soldier whoever donned the great uniform of this great nation. Ladies and gentlemen we are at war against an implacable foe who seeks the destruction of civilization as we know it. Let us be inspired by the role America has played in the liberation of mankind. This country has never cowered in fear or backed down from any enemy who confronted us. America's soldiers have been at the forefront of the battle to preserve freedom throughout the twentieth century. The tyrannies of Fascism Nazism and Communism have all fallen before the steely determination of the American people and the American military. Without America's heroism and expertise the light of freedom and democracy would long ago have been extinguished from the world. Ladies and gentlemen let us thank God for the privilege of being an American and pledge to renew our loyalty and dedication to this great nation and its fighting forces that are right now in harms way on dangerous battle fields far from home. Please join me in prayer, may God guide them and protect them and give them the strength and courage to complete the mission in which they have so magnificently preformed. May they speedily return, in sound physical and mental health to their country home and loved ones, and let us say – Amen.

*Presented at the annual Memorial Day Ceremony
Middle School Veteran's Memorial Park
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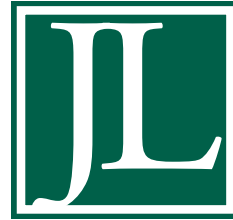
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