

What is Torah?

<p>1] <u>Genesis Rabbah Parashat Bereishit, Parasha 8</u> “With ראשית (Beginning=Wisdom) God created...” (Genesis 1:1) T. Oshaya opened: “[Wisdom says:] And I will be by Him <i>amon</i> and I will be a delight...”(Proverbs 8:30)... <i>Amon</i> is a craftsman. Torah says: I was the crafting tool of the Holy One Blessed be He. In the way of the world, a flesh and blood king builds a palace not from his own knowledge but from the knowledge of a craftsman, and the craftsman builds it according to blueprints which he has to know where to make the rooms and the small passageways. Likewise the Holy One Blessed Be He looked in the Torah and Created the world. Torah says: “With <i>Reishit</i> God created...” and <i>Reishit</i> is none other than Torah, as Scripture states: “The Lord acquired/created me (=Wisdom = Torah) at the beginning (<i>reishit</i>) of his path....(Proverbs 8:22)</p>	<p><u>בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק)</u> <u>פרשת בראשית פרשה א</u> א (א) בראשית ברא אלהים וגו'. ר' אושעיא פתח ואהיה אצלו אמן ואהיה שעשועים (משלי ח ל)... [ד"א] אמן אמן התורה אומרת אני הייתי כלי אומנתו של הקב"ה, בנוהג שבעולם מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין ואינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן, והאומן אינו בונה אותה מדעתו אלא דיפטראות ופינקסות יש לו לידע היאך הוא עושה חדרים ופשפשים, כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה ובורא העולם, והתורה א' בראשית ברא אלהים ואין ראשית אלא תורה היך מה דאת אמר י"י קנני ראשית דרכו וגו' (משלי ח כב).</p>
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<p>2] <u>Exodus Rabbah Parashat Ki Tissa Parashah</u> <u>41:6</u> “And God gave to Moses when he finished speaking with him two tablets ... of stone written with the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:18) R. Abbahu says: “All forty days that Moses was up there, he was learning Torah and forgetting. He said, ‘Master of the Universe, I have been here for forty days and I don’t know anything.’ What did the Holy One Blessed Be He do? When forty days were completed, He Gave the Torah to Moses as a gift, as it is stated, ‘He gave to Moses.’ Did Moses learn the entire Torah? It is Written in Scripture (Job 11:9): “It (Wisdom) is longer in measure than the earth and wider than the sea” and Moses learned it in forty days?! Rather, God taught Moses the general principles (kelalim). That’s what the verse means to say with the words <i>kikhaloto ledaber ito</i> (=speaking with him in general principles)</p>	<p><u>שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשת כי</u> <u>תשא פרשה מא סימן ו</u> ו ד"א ויתן אל משה, אמר ר' אבהו כל מ' יום שעשה משה למעלה היה למד תורה ושוכח, א"ל רבון העולם יש לי מ' יום ואיני יודע דבר, מה עשה הקב"ה משהשלים מ' יום נתן לו הקב"ה את התורה מתנה שנאמר ויתן אל משה, וכי כל התורה למד משה כתיב בתורה (איוב יא) ארוכה מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים ולארבעים יום למדה משה אלא כללים למדהו הקב"ה למשה, הוי ככלותו לדבר אתו</p>
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3] **Eruvin 21a: Rav Hisda said: Mari bar Mar interpreted homiletically: What is the meaning of that which is written: "I have seen a limit to every purpose; but Your commandment is exceedingly broad" (Psalms 119:96)?**

This idea with regard to the breadth of the Torah was stated by David, but he did not explain it; it was stated by Job, but he too did not explain it; it was stated by Ezekiel, but he also did not explain it, until Zechariah, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, came and explained it.

Rav Hisda explains: This idea was **stated by David, but he did not explain it, as it is written: "I have seen a limit to every purpose; but Your commandment is exceedingly broad,"** i.e., he stated that the Torah is exceedingly broad, but he did not explain how broad. And likewise this idea was **stated by Job, but he too did not explain it, as it is written: "Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea" (Job 11:9).**

And similarly, it was **stated by Ezekiel, but he also did not explain it, as it is written: "And He spread it,"** the scroll, **"before me, and it was written inside and outside; and in it was written lamentations, and melody [hegeh], and woe [vahi]" (Ezekiel 2:10)...**

But nonetheless, Ezekiel did not explain the extent of the Torah, **until Zechariah, son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, came and explained it, as it is written: "And he said to me: What do you see? And I said: I see a flying [afa] scroll; the length of it is twenty cubits, and the breadth of it is ten cubits" (Zechariah 5:2).** Since the scroll was flying, the implication is that it had two equal sides, so **that when you open it, it is twenty by twenty cubits. And it is written: "And it was written inside and outside,"** i.e., on both sides. **And when you peel them apart and separate the two sides, how much is it? Its entire area amounts to forty by twenty cubits, or eight hundred of God's cubits.**

In order to determine the measure of God's cubit, the Gemara cites a verse that describes the size of the span between God's thumb and little finger, in a manner of speaking. **And it is written: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure" (Isaiah 40:12).** If the entire world measures one square span, which is a quarter of one square cubit, **we find according to this calculation that the entire world is one part in three thousand and two hundred of the Torah.**

אמר רב חסדא דריש מרי בר מר
מאי דכתיב לכל תכלה ראיתי
קץ רחבה מצותך מאד דבר זה
אמרו דוד ולא פירשו אמרו איוב
ולא פירשו אמרו יחזקאל ולא
פירשו עד שבא זכריה בן עדו
ופירשו אמרו דוד ולא פירשו
דכתיב לכל תכלה ראיתי קץ
רחבה מצותך מאד אמרו איוב
ולא פירשו דכתיב ארוכה
מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים
אמרו יחזקאל ולא פירשו דכתיב
ויפרש אותה לפני והיא כתובה
פנים ואחור וכתוב אליה קינים
והגה והי קינים זו פורענותן של
צדיקים בעולם הזה וכן הוא
אומר קינה היא וקוננוה והגה זו
מתן שכרן של צדיקים לעתיד
לבא וכן הוא אומר עלי הגיון
בכנור והי זו היא פורענותן של
רשעים לעתיד לבא וכן הוא
אומר הוה על הוה תבא עד
שבא זכריה בן עדו ופירשו
דכתיב ויאמר אלי מה אתה
רואה ואומר אני רואה מגילה
עפה ארכה עשרים באמה
ורחבה עשר באמה וכי פשטת
לה הויא לה עשרין בעשרין
וכתיב היא כתובה פנים ואחור
וכי קלפת לה כמה הויא לה
ארבעין בעשרין וכתיב מי
מדד בשעלו מים ושמים בזרת
תכן וגוי נמצא כל העולם כולו
אחד משלשת אלפים ומאתים
בתורה

How might the description of Torah in the sources above be related to the hypothesis suggested in the following discussion of a few contemporary physicists?

4] **Brian Greene, Professor of Physics, Columbia University (on Nova, "Fabric of the Cosmos," aired 11/9/2012, at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/physics/fabric-of-cosmos.html#fabric-space>):**

As we examine the fabric of the cosmos ever more closely, we may well find far more surprises than anyone ever imagined. Take me, for example. I seem real enough, don't I?

Well, yes. But surprising new clues are emerging that everything, you and I, and even space, itself, may actually be a kind of hologram.

That is: everything we see and experience, everything we call our familiar three-dimensional reality, may be a projection of information that's stored on a thin, distant two-dimensional surface, sort of the way the information for this hologram is stored on this thin piece of plastic.

Now, holograms are something we're all familiar with from the security symbol you find on most credit cards, but the universe as a hologram? That's one of the most drastic revisions to our picture of space and reality ever proposed. And the evidence for it comes from some of the strangest realms of space: black holes.

LEONARD SUSSKIND: This is a real disconnect, and it's very hard to get your head around: modern ideas, coming from black holes, tell us that reality is two-dimensional, that the three-dimensional world, the full-bodied three-dimensional world, is a kind of image of a hologram on the boundary on the region of space.

S. JAMES GATES, JR.: This is a very strange thing. When I was a younger physicist I would have thought any physicist who said that was absolutely crazy.

BRIAN GREENE: Here's a way to think about this. Imagine I took my wallet and threw it into a black hole. What would happen? We used to think that since nothing, not even light, can escape the immense gravity of a black hole, my wallet would be lost forever, but it now seems that may not be the whole story.

Recently, scientists exploring the math describing black holes made a curious discovery. Even as my wallet disappears into the black hole, a copy of all the information it contains seems to get smeared out and stored on the surface of the black hole, in much the same way that information is stored in a computer.

So in the end, my wallet exists in two places: there's a three-dimensional version that's lost forever inside the hole black and a two-dimensional version that remains on the surface as information.

CLIFFORD JOHNSON (University of Southern California): The information content of all the stuff that fell into that black hole can be expressed entirely in terms of just the outside of the black hole. The idea, then, is that you can capture what's going on inside the black hole by referring only to the outside.

BRIAN GREENE: And, in theory, I could use the information on the outside of the black hole to reconstruct my wallet.

And here's the truly mind-blowing part: space within a black hole plays by same rules as space outside a black hole or anywhere else. So if an object inside a black hole can be described by information on the black hole's surface, then it might be that everything in the universe, from galaxies and stars, to you and

me, even space itself, is just a projection of information stored on some distant two-dimensional surface that surrounds us.

In other words, what we experience as reality may be something like a hologram.

LEONARD SUSSKIND: Is the three-dimensional world an illusion, in the same sense that a hologram is an illusion? Perhaps. I think I'm inclined to think yes, that the three-dimensional world is a kind of illusion and that the ultimate precise reality is the two-dimensional reality at the surface of the universe.

This idea is so new that physicists are still struggling to understand it. But if it's right, just as Newton and Einstein completely changed our picture of space, we may be on the verge of an even more dramatic revolution.

What did Moshe receive at Mt. Sinai?

<p>5]Ex. 31:18 When [God] finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him two tablets of the Testimony. They were stone tablets, written with God's finger.</p>	<p>שמות פרק לא:יה ויִתֵּן אֶל מֹשֶׁה כְּכַלְתּוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֵתוֹ בְּהַר סִינַי שְׁנֵי לַחַת הָעֵדוּת לַחַת אֲבֵן כְּתוּבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים:</p>
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Now reread source 2] above, particularly the last half.

Why do you think the tablets are referred to as tablets of **Testimony**?

How is the Testimony Moshe received at Sinai connected with God’s supernal Torah?

6] Rambam (Maimonides), Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishna

Know that every commandment which God revealed to Moshe, it was revealed with its interpretation. God would say the wording (of the Scriptural commandment), then He would say its interpretation and explanation and everything which was implied in the precise wording....

And when Moshe died, peace be upon him, after he had charged Joshua with the explanations which had been revealed to him, Joshua and his contemporaries devoted themselves to thoroughly studying and understanding and applying [these laws with their revealed explanations]. But there was no question about whatever he or any of the Elders had heard explicitly from Moshe, and there was no debate over it. The ramifications [of these statements] which were not explicitly heard from the Prophet’s lips, peace be upon him, they derived through legal analysis using the thirteen methods of Torah interpretation given on Mt. Sinai. Some of those laws so derived had evoked no controversy upon their proposal and were unanimously agreed upon. But some of them were subject to a difference of opinion: One authority would analyze one way, come to a certain conclusion, and be convinced of it, and another would analyze differently, as is liable to occur in application of logical rules of deduction [to the revealed laws and interpretations]. When such a controversy would arise among the authorities, they would follow the majority opinion, as the Torah prescribes for such a situation: “... you shall decide according to the majority” (Exodus 23:2 – אחרי רבים להטות).

And know that prophecy is not effective when it comes to legal analysis of the interpretation of Torah and deriving its ramifications through the thirteen methods [of interpretation]. Rather Joshua and Phinehas did the same type of legal analysis that Ravina and Rav Ashi (the editors of the Talmud) did....

And when Joshua died, peace be upon him, he had charged what had been related to him (by Moshe) of the interpretation [of Torah], as well as what was derived in his time --both matters over which there was no disagreement and matters over which there had been a disagreement but which he decided according to the opinion of the majority – to the Elders (זקנים). These Elders are mentioned in Joshua 24:31: “And Israel served Hashem all the days of Joshua and all the days of the Elders who outlived Joshua, and who knew first-hand all of what Hashem did for Israel.” Afterwards, those Elders charged the Prophets, peace be upon them, with all they heard from Joshua, and each prophet instructed the next – but there was never a time in which there was an absence of either analysis of the given laws or of deriving new laws from prior ones.

The Sages of each generation treated the statements of the preceding ones as the foundation: they would derive new rulings and inferences from them, but they would not disagree with the foundational sources which were related to them through the time of the Men of the Great Assembly (אנשי כנסת הגדולה)... They also analyzed the statements of their predecessors as the prior sages did, and issue decrees (גזירות) and enacted [Rabbinic] enactments (תקנות). The last of this pristine group was the earliest of the Sages first mentioned in the Mishnah – Shimon the Righteous....

What role does legal analysis and disagreement between authorities over the results of that analysis play in connecting what Moshe received (both Oral and Written Torah) with God’s supernal Torah?

7]

Tosefta Massekhet Sota ch. 7	תוספתא מסכת סוטה (ליברמן) פרק ז
<p>9. An incident with R. Yohanan ben Beroqa and R. [E]liezer Hisma who came from Yavne to Lod and greeted R. Yehoshua in Peqi'in. R. Yehoshua said to them, “What <i>chidush</i> (innovatation) was there in the Beit Midrash (House of Study) today?” They said to him, “We are you disciples and your waters (Torah) we drink.” [R. Yehoshua] said to them, “It is impossible that there would not be any <i>chidush</i> (novel interpretation) in the Beit Midrash. Whose Shabbat was it [to deliver the drasha]?” They said to him, “It was the Shabbat of [E]lazar ben Azaria....</p>	<p>הלכה ט מעשה בר' יוחנן בן ברוקה ור' לעזר חסמא שבאו מיבנה ללוד והקבילו פני ר' יהוש' בפקיעין אמ' להם ר' יהושע מה חידוש היה בבית המדרש היום אמרו לו תלמידיך אנו ומימך אנו שותין אמ' להם אי אפשר שלא יהא חידוש בבית המדרש שבת של מי היתה אמרו לו של ר' לעזר בן עזריה היתה....</p>

<p>11. And yet another matter he (Elazar ben Azaria) expounded: “The Words of the Sages are like cattle prods and like planted nails [masters of the assembled, given by one shepherd].” (Kohelet 12:11) Just as this cattle prod directs the cow (in its plowing) to bring life to the world, so words of Torah are only life for the world, as it is</p>	<p>הלכה יא ועוד אחרת דרש דברי חכמים כדברונות וכמסמרות נטועים מה דורבן זה מכוין את הפרה להביא חיים בעולם אף דברי תורה אינן אלא חייך לעולם שנ' עץ חיים היא וגו' או מה דורבן זה</p>
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<p>stated: "It is a tree of life...." (Proverbs 3:18) Or you might think that just as a cattle prod is moveable, so also words of Torah? The verse specifically teaches, "and like planted nails" – just as a plant is fruitful and multiplies, so also words of Torah are fruitful and multiply. "Masters of the assembled," - these are the ones who enter and sit assembled and say about the impure that it is impure and about the pure that it is pure, about the impure in its place, and about the pure in its place.</p>	<p>מיטלטל יכול אף כך דברי תורה ת"ל וכמסמרות נטועים [או אינן חסירין ולא יתירין תלמוד לומר נטועים] מה נטיעה פרה ורבה אף דברי תורה פריין ורבין בעלי אסופות אילו שנכנסין ויושבין אסופות אסופות ואומ' על טמא טמא ועל טהור טהור על טמא במקומו ועל טהור במקומו</p>
<p>12. Lest one say to himself, "since Beit Shammai say it is impure and Beit Hillel say it is pure, so-and-so prohibits and so-and-so permits, why should I learn Torah from now on? Torah teaches: [and God spoke all of] these words (Ex. 20:1). All of the words were "given by one shepherd." One God created them, one Sustainer gave them: The Master of all Creations, Blessed Be He said them. So you should make your heart rooms of rooms and enter into them the words of Beit Shammai and the words of Beit Hillel, the words of the ones who impurify and the words of the ones who purify. He (R. Yehoshua) said to them: "The generation that R. (E)liezer lives in is not an orphan generation."</p>	<p>הלכה יב שמא יאמר אדם בדעתו הואיל ובית שמאי מטמין ובית הלל מטהרין איש פל' אוסר ואיש פל' מתיר למה אני למד תורה מעתה ת"ל דברים הדברים אלה הדברים כל הדברים נתנו מרועה אחד אל אחד בראן פרנס אחד נתנן רבון כל המעשים ברוך הוא אמרו אף אתה עשה לבך חדרי חדרים והכניס בה דברי בית שמאי ודברי בית הלל דברי המטמאין ודברי המטהרין אמ' להם אין דור יתום שר' ליעזר שרוי בתוכו</p>

8]

Midrash Tehillim, Chapter 12

R. Yannai said: The Torah was not given as clear-cut decisions. Rather, for every commandment that God stated to Moses, He also stated 49 reasons for it to be pure and 49 reasons for it to be impure

[Moses] said before Him: "Master of the Universe, how long will the matter be unclear?"

[God] replied: "Follow the majority. When the majority impurify, it is impure. When the majority purify, it is pure."

מדרש תהלים (בובר) מזמור יב

אמר ר' ינאי לא ניתנה דברי תורה חתיכין, אלא על כל דבור שהיה אומר הקב"ה למשה היה אומר מ"ט פנים טהור, ומ"ט פנים טמא,

אמר לפניו "רבוננו של עולם עד מתי נעמוד על בירורו של דבר?"

אמר ליה "אחרי רבים להטות, רבו המטמאין טמא, רבו המטהרין טהור."

When and why is it necessary for disputes to be decided?

9]

<p>Deuteronomy 17:8-12</p>	<p>דברים פרק יז</p>
<p>17:8 If you are unable to reach a decision in a case involving capital punishment, litigation, leprous marks, [or any other case] where there is a dispute in your</p>	<p>(ח) כִּי יִפְלֹא מִמֶּךָ דָּבָר לְמִשְׁפָּט בֵּין דָּם לְדָם בֵּין דֵּין וּבֵין נָגַע לְנָגַע דְּבָרֵי רִיבֹת בְּשַׁעֲרֵיךָ וְקָמְתָּ וְעָלִיתָ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְסֵר יְקֻנְךָ אֲלֵהֶיךָ בּוֹ:</p>

<p>territorial courts, then you must set out and go up to the place that God your Lord shall choose</p>	
<p>17:9 You must approach the Levitical priests [and other members of] the supreme court that exists at the time. When you make inquiry, they will declare to you a legal decision.</p>	<p>(ט) וּבֵאתָ אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם וְאֶל הַשֹּׁפֵט אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וְדַרְשָׁתָּ וְהִגִּידוּ לְךָ אֶת דְּבַר הַמִּשְׁפָּט:</p>
<p>17:10 Since this decision comes from the place that God shall choose, you must do as they tell you, carefully following their every decision.</p>	<p>(י) וַעֲשִׂיתָ עַל פִּי הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ מִן הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְקֹנֵק וְשִׁמְרָתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יֹרֹד:</p>
<p>17:11 [Besides this, in general,] you must keep the Torah as they interpret it for you, and follow the laws that they legislate for you. Do not stray to the right or left from the word that they declare to you.</p>	<p>(יא) עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יֹרֹד וְעַל הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר יֵאמְרוּ לְךָ תַּעֲשֶׂה לֹא תִסּוּר מִן הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל:</p>
<p>17:12 If there is any man who rebels and refuses to listen to the priest or other judge who is in charge of serving God your Lord there [as leader of the supreme court], then that man must be put to death, thus ridding yourselves of evil in Israel.</p>	<p>(יב) וְהָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה כַּנִּדּוֹן לְבִלְתִּי שָׁמַע אֶל הַכֹּהֵן הָעֹמֵד לְשָׁרֵת שָׁם אֶת יְקֹנֵק אֱלֹהֶיךָ אוֹ אֶל הַשֹּׁפֵט וּמַת הָאִישׁ הַהוּא וּבְעֶרְתָּ הָרָע מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל:</p>

10]

<p><u>Rashi on Deuteronomy 17:11</u> (based on Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:2)</p>	<p><u>רש"י דברים פרק יז פסוק יא</u></p>
<p>Right or Left – Even if he tells you about the right that it is left and about the left that it is right, and all the moreso when he tells you about the right that it is right and the left that it is left.</p>	<p>(יא) יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל - אִפִּילוּ אוֹמֵר לְךָ עַל יָמִין שֶׁהוּא שְׂמֹאל וְעַל שְׂמֹאל שֶׁהוּא יָמִין, וְכֹל שֶׁכֵּן שֶׁאוֹמֵר לְךָ עַל יָמִין יָמִין וְעַל שְׂמֹאל שְׂמֹאל:</p>

How are Science and Torah (Oral and Written) related?

How do we deal with cases where Oral Torah appears to contradict Science/Reason?

When should Torah be reinterpreted (chiddush) to align with scientific opinion?

When should Torah NOT be reinterpreted to align with scientific opinion?

What do these questions have to do with connecting what Moshe received at Sinai with God’s supernal Torah?

11] Maimonides (Rambam) Commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction of Pereq HaCheleq (Sanhedrin ch. 10) – two pages which follow. (Note: this is from the translation by Lampel, who translated from a Hebrew translation of Rambam's Judeo-Arabic original. I have corrected a major error which resulted from this method on the second page by the notation *1. The mistranslation I put in (parenthesis). The correct translation from the Judeo-Arabic original for that bracketed segment is typed in below.

See next two pages.

11
 "What Is Torah" Shayvuot Learning for KITC 5780

You must know that the words of the sages are differently interpreted by three groups of people.

The first group is the largest one. I have observed them, read their books, and heard about them. They accept the teachings of the sages in their simple literal sense and do not think that these teachings contain any hidden meaning at all. They believe that all sorts of impossible things must be. They hold such opinions because they have not understood science and are far from having acquired knowledge. They possess no perfection which would rouse them to insight from within, nor have they found anyone else to stimulate them to profounder understanding. They, therefore, believe that the sages intended no more in their carefully emphatic and straightforward utterances than they themselves are able to understand with inadequate knowledge. They understand the teachings of the sages only in their literal sense, in spite of the fact that some of their teachings, when taken literally, seem so fantastic and irrational that if one were to repeat them literally, even to the uneducated, let alone to sophisticated scholars, their amazement would prompt them to ask how anyone in the world could believe such things true, much less edifying.

The members of this group are poor in knowledge. One can only regret their folly. Their very effort to honor and to exalt the sages in accordance with their own meager understanding actually humiliates them. As God lives, this group destroys the glory of the Torah and extinguishes its light, for they make the Torah of God say the opposite of what it intended. For He said in His perfect Torah, "The nations who hear of these statutes shall say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. 4:6). But this group expounds the laws and the teachings of our sages in such a way that when the other peoples hear them they say that this little people is foolish and ignoble.*

*See *Guide*, III, ch. 31.

The worst offenders are preachers who preach and expound to the masses what they themselves do not understand. Would that they keep silent about what they do not know, as it is written: "If only they would be utterly silent, it would be accounted to them as wisdom" (Job 13:5). Or they might at least say, "We do not understand what our sages intended in this statement, and we do not know how to explain it." But they believe they do understand, and they vigorously expound to the people what they think rather than what the sages really said. They, therefore, give lectures to the people on the tractate Berakhot and on this present chapter, and other texts, expounding them word-for-word according to their literal meaning.*

*See *Guide*, II, ch. 29.

The second group is also a numerous one. It, too, consists of persons who, having read or heard the words of the sages, understand them according to their simple literal sense and believe that the sages intended nothing else than what may be learned from their literal interpretation. Inevitably, they ultimately declare the sages to be fools, hold them up to contempt, and slander what does not deserve to be slandered. They imagine that their own intelligence is of a higher order than that of the sages, and that the sages were simpletons who suffered from inferior intelligence. The members of this group are so pretentiously stupid that they can never attain genuine wisdom. Most of those who have stumbled into this error are involved with medicine or astrology. They regard themselves as cultivated men, scientists, critics, and philosophers. How remote they are from true humanity compared to real philosophers! They are more stupid than the first group; many of them are simply fools.

This is an accursed group, because they attempt to refute men of established greatness whose wisdom has been demonstrated to competent men of science. If these fools had worked at science hard enough to know how to write accurately about theology and similar subjects both for the masses and for the educated, and if they understood the relevance of philosophy, then they would be in a position to understand whether the sages were in fact wise or not, and the real meaning of their teachings would be clear to them.

There is a third group. Its members are so few in number that it is hardly appropriate to call them a group, except in the sense in which one speaks of the sun as a group (or species) of which it is the only member. This group consists of men to whom the greatness of

our sages is clear. They recognize the superiority of their intelligence from their words which point to exceedingly profound truths. Even though this third group is few and scattered, their books teach the perfection which was achieved by the authors and the high level of truth which they had attained. The members of this group understand that the sages knew as clearly as we do the difference between the impossibility of the impossible and the existence of that which must exist. They know that the sages did not speak nonsense, and it is clear to them that the words of the sages contain both an obvious and a hidden meaning. Thus, whenever the sages spoke of things that seem impossible, they were employing the style of riddle and parable which is the method of truly great thinkers. For example, the greatest of our wise men (Solomon) began his book by saying: "To understand an analogy and a metaphor, the words of the wise and their riddles" (Prov. 1:6).

All students of rhetoric know the real concern of a riddle is with its hidden meaning and not with its obvious meaning, as: "Let me now put forth a riddle to you" (Judges 14:12). Since the words of the sages all deal with supernatural matters which are ultimate, they must be expressed in riddles and analogies. How can we complain if they formulate their wisdom in analogies and employ such figures of speech as are easily understood by the masses, especially when we note that the wisest of all men did precisely that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? I have in mind Solomon in Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and parts of Ecclesiastes.*

* (It is often difficult for us to interpret words and to educe their true meaning from the form in which they are contained so that their real inner meaning conforms to reason and corresponds with truth. This is the case even with Holy Scriptures. The sages themselves interpreted Scriptural passages in such a way as to educe their inner meaning from literal sense, correctly considering these passages to be figures of speech, just as we do.) Examples are their explanations of the following passages: "he smote the two altar-hearths of Moab; he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit" (II Sam. 23:20); "Oh, that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem" (ibid. 23:15). The entire narrative of which these passages are a part was interpreted metaphorically. Similarly, the whole Book of Job was considered by many of the sages to be properly

*See Guide, introduction.

* The translation above is incorrect; the correct translation is as below

And how could one object to interpreting their (the sages') statements and taking them out of their literal meaning so that they will conform with reason and agree with the truth and the revealed Scriptures when they (the sages) themselves interpret passages of Scripture and take them out of their literal meaning and correctly consider them to be parables, as we find that they (the sages) say

understood only in metaphoric terms. The dead bones of Ezekiel (Ezek. 37) were also considered by one of the rabbis to make sense only in metaphoric terms. Similar treatment was given to other passages of this sort.

Now if you, reader, belong to either of the first two groups, pay no attention to my words nor to anything else in this section. You will not like it. On the contrary, it will irritate you, and you will hate it. How could a person who is accustomed to eating large amounts of harmful food find simple food in small quantities appealing, even though they are good for him? On the contrary, he will actually find them irritating, and he will hate them. Do you not recall the reaction of the people who were accustomed to eating onions, garlic, fish, and the like? They said: "Now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all; we have nought save this manna to look to" (Num. 11:6).

But if you belong to the third group, when you encounter a word of the sages which seems to conflict with reason, you will pause, consider it, and realize that this utterance must be a riddle or a parable. You will sleep on it, trying anxiously to grasp its logic and its expression, so that you may find its genuine intellectual intention and lay hold of a direct faith, as Scripture says: "To find out words of delight, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth" (Eccles. 12:10). If you consider my book in this spirit, with the help of God, it may be useful to you.

12] Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Part II, Chapter 25. [Translated from the Judeo-Arabic original by Shlomo Pines] – the final two pages.

See next two pages.

CHAPTER 25

Know that our shunning the affirmation of the eternity of the world is not due to a text figuring in the *Torah* according to which the world has been produced in time. For the texts indicating that the world has been produced in time are not more numerous than those indicating that the deity is a body. Nor are the gates of figurative interpretation shut in our faces

or impossible of access to us regarding the subject of the creation of the world in time. For we could interpret them as figurative, as we have done when denying His corporeality. Perhaps this would even be much easier to do: we should be very well able to give a figurative interpretation of those texts and to affirm as true the eternity of the world, just as we have given a figurative interpretation of those other texts and have denied that He, may He be exalted, is a body.

Two causes are responsible for our not doing this or believing it. One of them is as follows. That the deity is not a body has been demonstrated; from this it follows necessarily that everything that in its external meaning disagrees with this demonstration must be interpreted figuratively, for it is known that such texts are of necessity fit for figurative interpretation. However, the eternity of the world has not been demonstrated. Consequently in this case the texts ought not to be rejected and figuratively interpreted in order to make prevail an opinion whose contrary can be made to prevail by means of various sorts of arguments. This is one cause.

The second cause is as follows. Our belief that the deity is not a body destroys for us none of the foundations of the Law and does not give the lie to the claims of any prophet. The only objection to it is constituted by the fact that the ignorant think that this belief is contrary to the text; yet it is not contrary to it, as we have explained, but is intended by the text. On the other hand, the belief in eternity the way Aristotle sees it—that is, the belief according to which the world exists in virtue of necessity, that no nature changes at all, and that the customary course of events cannot be modified with regard to anything—destroys the Law in its principle, necessarily gives the lie to every miracle, and reduces to inanity all the hopes and threats that the Law has held out, unless—by God!—one interprets the miracles figuratively also, as was done by the Islamic internalists;¹ this, however, would result in some sort of crazy imaginings.

If, however, one believed in eternity according to the second opinion we have explained²—which is the opinion of Plato—according to which the heavens too are subject to generation and corruption, this opinion would not destroy the foundations of the Law and would be followed not by the lie being given to miracles, but by their becoming admissible. It would also be possible to interpret figuratively the texts in accordance with this opinion.

1. *ahl al-bāṭin*. In Arabic *bāṭin* may mean "the internal sense." The Ismā'īlī and similar sects are often designated as *ahl al-bāṭin*. An allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ān was part of their faith.

2. Cf. II 13.

And many obscure passages³ can be found in the texts of the *Torah* and others with which this opinion could be connected or rather by means of which it could be proved. However, no necessity could impel us to do this unless this opinion were demonstrated. In view of the fact that it has not been demonstrated, we shall not favor this opinion, nor shall we at all heed that other opinion, but rather shall take the texts according to their external sense and shall say: The Law has given us knowledge of a matter the grasp of which is not within our power, and the miracle attests to the correctness of our claims.

Know that with a belief in the creation of the world in time, all the miracles become possible and the Law becomes possible, and all questions that may be asked on this subject, vanish. Thus it might be said: Why did God give prophetic revelation to this one and not to that? Why did God give this Law to this particular nation, and why did He not legislate to the others? Why did He legislate at this particular time, and why did He not legislate before it or after? Why did He impose these commandments and these prohibitions? Why did He privilege the prophet with the miracles mentioned in relation to him and not with some others? What was God's aim in giving this Law? Why did He not, if such was His purpose,⁴ put the accomplishment of the commandments and the nontransgression of the prohibitions into our nature? If this were said, the answer to all these questions would be that it would be said: He wanted it this way; or His wisdom required it this way. And just as He brought the world into existence, having the form it has, when He wanted to, without our knowing His will with regard to this or in what respect there was wisdom in His particularizing the forms of the world and the time of its creation—in the same way we do not know His will or the exigency of His wisdom that caused all the matters, about which questions have been posed above, to be particularized. If, however, someone says that the world is as it is in virtue of necessity, it would be a necessary obligation to ask all those questions; and there would be no way out of them except through a recourse to unseemly answers in which there would be combined the giving the lie to, and the annulment of, all the external meanings of the Law with regard to which no intelligent man has any doubt that they are to be taken in their external meanings. It is then because of this that this opinion is shunned⁵ and that the lives of virtuous men have been and will be spent in investigating this question. For if creation in time were demonstrated—if only as Plato understands creation—all the overhasty⁶ claims made to us on this point by the philosophers would become void. In the same way, if the philosophers would succeed in demonstrating eternity as Aristotle understands it, the Law as a whole would become void, and a shift to other opinions would take place. I have thus explained to you that everything is bound up with this problem. Know this. |

3. It seems grammatically more correct to interpret the Arabic word "sh.b.h." as being *shubah*, the plural of *shubho*. "an obscure passage," rather than as *shibh*, a singular meaning "analogy." Ibn Tibbon's translation and that of Munk, which conforms to it, seem to be based on the second interpretation.

4. I.e., if He wished us to accomplish the commandments and not to transgress the prohibitions.

5. I.e., the affirmation of the eternity of the world a parte ante.

6. Or: incoherent. <https://utj.org/viewpoints/videos/what-is-torah/>

What can we learn from the following Psalm about the connection between what Moshe received at Sinai and God’s supernal Torah?

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<p>Psalms 19</p> <p>(1) For the leader. A psalm of David. (2) The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims His handiwork. (3) Day to day makes utterance, night to night speaks out. (4) There is no utterance, there are no words, whose sound goes unheard. (5) Their voice carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world. He placed in them a tent for the sun, (6) who is like a groom coming forth from the chamber, like a hero, eager to run his course. (7) His rising-place is at one end of heaven, and his circuit reaches the other; nothing escapes his heat. (8) The Torah of the Hashem is perfect, refreshing the soul; the Testimony of the Hashem is faithful, making the simple wise; (9) The precepts of the Hashem are just, rejoicing the heart; the instruction of the Hashem is lucid, making the eyes light up. (10) The fear of the Hashem is pure, abiding forever; the judgments of the Hashem are true, righteous altogether, (11) more desirable than gold, than much fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb. (12) Your servant pays them heed; in obeying them there is much reward. (13) Who can be aware of errors? Clear me of unperceived guilt, (14) and from willful sins keep Your servant; let them not dominate me; then shall I be blameless and clear of grave offense. (15) May the words of my mouth and the prayer of my heart be acceptable to You, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.</p>	<p>תהלים פרק יט</p> <p>(א) לַמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: (ב) הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהִים וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ: (ג) יוֹם יוֹם לֵאמֹר וְלַיְלָה לַלַּיְלָה יִסְנֶה דָעַת: (ד) אֵין אִמֵּר וְאֵין דְּבָרִים בְּלִי נִשְׁמָע קוֹלָם: (ה) בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ יֵצֵא קוֹנֵם וּבִקְצֵה תְּכַל מְלִיָּהֶם לְשִׁמְשׁ שֶׁם אֵהָל בְּהֶם: (ו) וְהוּא כְּחֶתֶן יֵצֵא מִחַפְּתוֹ יָשִׁישׁ כְּגִבּוֹר לְרוּץ אַרְחָ: (ז) מִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם מוֹצֵאוֹ וְתִקְוַפְתּוֹ עַל קְצוֹתָם וְאֵין נִסְתָּר מִחַפְּתוֹ: (ח) תּוֹרַת יְקֹנֵק תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ עֲדוּת יְקֹנֵק נְאֻמָּה מְחַכֵּמַת פִּתִּי: (ט) פְּקוּדֵי יְקֹנֵק יִשְׁרִים מְשִׁחִי לֵב מְצֹנֵת יְקֹנֵק בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם: (י) יְרֵאת יְקֹנֵק טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעַד מִשְׁפָּטִי יְקֹנֵק אֱמֶת צְדָקוֹ יַחֲדוּ: (יא) הַנְּחֻמָּדִים מְזַהֵב וּמְפֹז רַב וּמְתוֹקִים מְדַבֵּשׁ וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים: (יב) גַּם עֲבָדָה נְזַהֵר בְּהֶם בְּשִׁמְרָם עֲקֹב רַב: (יג) שְׁגִיאוֹת מִי יְבִין מִנְּסֻתוֹת נִקְנִי: (יד) גַּם מַזְדִּים חֲשׂוֹף עֲבָדָה אֵל יִמְשְׁלוּ בִי אַז אֵיתֶם וְנִקְיִתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רַב: (טו) יִהְיוּ לְרֵצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לִפְנֵי יְקֹנֵק צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי:</p>
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