



**TO THE TRUTH**

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LIVING UP  
to the Truth

by Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb  
Third Revised Edition

Originally Transcribed by Joshua Hermelin  
Under the Title *The Search for Truth*



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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND REVISED EDITION

In the last one and a half years a great deal of progress has been made on this manuscript. There are three very obvious changes. Summaries have been inserted on almost every page so that the reader can have a running formulation of the points that have been made. In fact, it has been suggested to me that one might read the summaries through from beginning to end as a first pass through the manuscript in order to become familiar with the ground to be covered. This strikes me as an excellent idea. In addition, I have placed technical comments in brackets [ ] in a smaller font. These comments are designed for those with a background in philosophy, mathematics, or science - and for those with an intellectually adventuresome spirit. They can be skipped without missing anything essential to the argument. Also, the title has been changed to reflect my better understanding that the argument is based on the principles of responsible living.

Not so obvious is the care that has been taken to tighten the formulations, to make the expression of ideas consistent, to reorganize the flow of argument, and to correct mistakes. For the first time I think it is approaching the status of written work. On the way to a book, I would call it a second draft. Much work remains to be done. Chapters IV (True Predictions) and V (Archeology) need to be greatly expanded. A substantial amount of documentation must be supplied. The quality of writing could be vastly improved. It still has the status of work in progress. I can only pray that just as G-d has enabled me to get this far, He will also make the further work possible.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of my colleagues and students at Ohr Somayach, especially the summer Jewish Learning Exchange of 1995. Their critical attention revealed a number of problems and some outright mistakes which have been corrected. Taffy Gould provided expert editing advice. Jon Erlbaum read the majority of the manuscript with exquisite attention to both content and editing. [This third edition benefited from the close reading of Eli Linas and Michael Kauffman. I am very grateful for their efforts. - Rosh Chodesh Nisan, 5757] Since I followed their advice selectively, I remain fully responsible for the remaining defects.

*Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb*  
Chanukah, 5756  
Jerusalem





## PREFACE

Joshua Hermelin has provided a very significant service in transcribing three of my lectures. The material presented is complex and controversial. Relying on verbal transmission is not ideal for careful perusal. Having a written version which can be read at one's own pace, reviewed, consulted repeatedly, and used to compare different sections simultaneously, is a great benefit. I hope to have it distributed when the lectures are presented in the future.

It must be recognized that this is the transcription of material presented verbally. Were I writing this material, the text would be substantially different. There is much repetition, reformulation, and use of nearly equivalent but somewhat different expression. In a written text more attention would be paid to precision, verbal consistency and economy. More important, certain matters receive very curtailed treatment due to the limitations of the particular audience to which the lectures were given. For example, the mention of Pascal's argument (and game theory in general) needs much more elaborate treatment (which I have done privately, but not presented in lecture). Similarly, the treatment of archeology needs great expansion. Thus the reader should not regard this "text" as a complete argument, but rather as an outline of how the argument goes. He can assess its internal logic and try to anticipate how it will be finished, but the whole scope of the argument is not yet present. (Work is underway to put it in written form.)

In spite of these limitations, the availability of the version of the lectures is a great step forward in making this material available to the thoughtful "quest for truth" as Joshua puts it. If the lectures continue to have an impact it will be due in significant measure to his efforts.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge comments of these who read this material, especially Professor David Wierderker and Dr. Yisroel Asher. I am especially indebted to Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro for his patience and expert help in preparing the manuscript.

*Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb*  
Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5754  
Jerusalem



## FOREWORD

**B**efore you, the reader, embark on this most fascinating journey through significant events of the history of the Jewish people, with its purpose being the revelation of the verification of the Torah, and thus the truth of Judaism, it is relevant to first determine your objective, and subsequently your mind set in approaching this most significant of topics. There are people who although they attempt to, are unable to see the truth of events. So, before continuing, you should examine how you evaluate new information. It is crucial, especially in the area that we will be discussing, that you approach this information with an open mind, for if you do not, you will automatically reject it. As an example, consider this question: Do you associate positive or negative feelings with the term 'wedding,' - does the word 'wedding' generate in you feelings of joy or feelings of despair?

Let me illustrate what I am trying to express in terms of an appropriate mind set that an individual must necessarily have before commencing reading of the essay at hand by way of the following proposition: Let E be an event such that E elicits an emotional response from the viewer. Let's also suppose that there exists a certain truth to the quality of E. Now, let there be two people, A and B, that are viewing E such that from the outset, person A will have an open mind towards E, and person B will not have an open mind towards E. Most likely, person A will be able to see the truth of E, and person B will not be able to see the truth of E. That is the proposition.

Now, let me depict this by way of example. Let's suppose that the event in question here is a wedding. Now, a wedding is a very emotional event that generally leaves strong emotional feelings in the heart and mind of the viewer. I think it is fair to say that weddings can be considered to be events, or occasions, that are joyous. That is the quality of truth to be attached to a wedding. Now, there are two individuals at this wedding. The first individual, person A, has no pre-conceived prejudices towards weddings and arrives at the wedding with an objective mind set able to distinguish the quality of truth that we attached to a wedding, namely, joy. The second individual, person B, has not necessarily had the best of experiences at weddings. Person B has been divorced three times, and on person B's most recent attempt to get married, was left at the alter. Therefore, person B cannot be considered to have the appropriate mind set to appreciate the quality of truth to the wedding: joy. Most likely,



Person A will be able to see the joy in the wedding, and thus the truth, and person B will not be able to see the joy in the wedding because he/she harbors negative feelings towards weddings, and thus, no matter how clear the quality of truth is at a wedding, person B will simply not be able to see it. Person B will not be able to be objective, and thus will not see the truth.

Similarly with respect to this essay. The event at hand is the essay. The topic of the essay is the historical verification of the Torah - and in a sense, G-d, a topic that has been known to elicit quite powerful emotional responses from individuals throughout history. There exists in this essay a certain quality of truth, namely, evidence and logical support that verifies the truth of the hypothesis. Now, one can either approach this essay with an open mind, or one can approach it with a closed mind. There are those individuals who have made up their minds that there is no G-d, and who even after support and proof is given that validates G-d's existence and the Torah, will say "Well, that's fine, but I still don't believe." Those individuals are not investigating for the truth. Those individuals have already made up their minds whether or not there is a G-d, and thus the effort put into the proof is futile. If there is a table in a room, and I say "Oh, wow, isn't that a nice table?" and you reply, "Tables do not exist. However, occasionally I hallucinate and think that I see a table. When this occurs I immediately go and lie down and try to regain composure." I don't think that any proof I would give to you that tables indeed exist would sway you towards the truth. If you are operating within this frame of mind, nothing I do will convince you that tables exist.

Now, some may try to raise an objection to what we have said. Some might say "Well, that's fine, and it makes a lot of sense, if you believe in the original premise as to the quality of truth to an event. Maybe I disagree with that premise, maybe I don't think that events have any specific quality of truth. Maybe I don't think weddings are joyous events at all." Now, to this individual I have only one response. You do believe that events have a certain quality of truth attached to their essences. Your intuition tells you they do. Let's think back to the beginning of the foreword. I asked you a seemingly out of place question about whether a wedding elicits in you feelings of joy or despair. How did you answer that question? You answered that a wedding gives you tremendous feelings of joy and happiness. So, based on your own feelings, and your own intuition, the premise holds. We are not simply raising an objection to hear ourselves speak. We are not interested in raising objections to satisfy some need we have not to hear the truth. Save that for the PC crowd in America. We want to see that given certain circumstances one option



has more evidence and support in its favor than does any other option. And, based on your own intuition, the proposed proposition is most valid. This is not me speaking for you and telling you what you are thinking. This is your thoughts, your mind, your heart, your intellect, your emotions, and your intuition that have lent support to this thesis.

I only hope that I have been able to convey to you, the reader, the importance of a proper frame of mind upon entering this most stimulating task that is ahead of you. It is very easy to fool others, and even yourself, into truly believing that you have analyzed certain information or events objectively. Yet, if one really is able to stand back, and give oneself that objective outlook, he has hurdled the most difficult step to belief. In his book *The Closing Of The American Mind*, Allan Bloom writes “Yet if a student can -and this is most difficult and unusual draw back, get a critical distance on what he clings to, come to doubt the ultimate value of what he loves, he has taken the first and most difficult step toward the philosophic conversion.” One can say or believe whatever one wants with respect to objectivity, but if one hasn’t truly become objective in his analysis, he will never let go of a belief that he possesses. Only you can determine the true frame of mind that you possess. Whatever your mind set may be and whatever you decide to do in terms of proceeding, it is important to always keep in mind what we have discussed here in the foreword. If at any time you seem to be rejecting an argument outright for reasons that do not necessarily seem altogether adequate in your eyes, refer back to this short foreword and try to determine for yourself if you are being entirely objective in your thoughts and analysis of what is written. I can assure you that immense care has been taken in what has been written here in this essay, and that apparent deficiencies in the arguments may often be resolved by simple introspection on the part of you, the reader.

The best of luck in your quest for truth,

*Joshua Hermelin*

## I THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGION

The question is whether religion is relevant. The truth is that this question is incoherent. The question makes no sense. However, I am afraid that if I argue this directly you will take it as an excuse for not being able to answer the question. So, I am going to adopt the following strategy. First I will pretend to answer the question, and then I will tell you why it is illegitimate.

Is religion, or in our case historical Traditional Judaism, relevant? Yes, of course it is. Historical Traditional Judaism is relevant because, given the concerns that people typically have, the Torah has a very good track record of producing results.

Take for example the quality of family life. Marriage and the family are still fairly popular institutions in the United States and the Western World. No one goes into marriage looking for a divorce. No one goes into marriage looking for the kinds of tensions and unhappiness which make people wish they had divorces. Stable and fulfilling family life is a goal for many people. Those of you whom have had any contact with the Traditional Jewish community know very well that the Torah way of life has a very good track record in producing successful families. Granted the record is not perfect, but it is greatly superior to the general society. For example, the divorce rate is comparatively low, and quality of relationships between parents and children, and between husband and wife, is something of which the traditional Jewish community is proud.<sup>1</sup>

A second area of concern is freedom from addictions. I don't have to tell you that if we put together all the alcoholics and all the drug addicts, and include in the drugs the middle and upper class pills which are openly prescribed by doctors and which are perfectly legal and to which people are also addicted, we would have a large percentage of the population battling addictions. If 10-15% of the population is addicted to alcohol, and another 5-10% are addicted to drugs in the sense that we described, we would be talking about approximately 20% of the population that has a problem with addictions. The Torah community is very proud that it is relatively free of these addictions. I say relatively free because again the record is not perfect. No one is claiming that it is perfect, but vis-a-vis

1. The following references are taken with permission from *Permission to Receive* by Lawrence Keleman (Targum: 1996). Lower rates of divorce for 1968 and 1978 are reported in Chaim Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1983), 163; The 1970 National Jewish Population Survey; Bumpass and Sweet, "Differentials in Marital Instability: 1970," *American Sociological Review*, v. 37, 763. For 1981 see Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 94. Relatively greater happiness in Jewish marriages is reported by Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 157.



the general society, if you would observe the phenomena the way a sociologist would observe it, plot a curve, and do a statistical analysis of the information, you would see that the incidence is much smaller.<sup>2</sup>

A third area of concern is crime. Everyone wants to live with as little crime as possible. Again, Jewish Tradition is very proud that within Torah communities, crime, violent crime in particular, is almost unknown. Imagine interviewing the presiding police officer in a precinct in Williamsburg, Borough Park, Flatbush, Monsey, Monroe, or any place where you have large concentrations of Traditional Jews. Ask him how many times he is called out on a murder charge, rape, assault and battery, mugging, child abuse, etc. The incidence of these sort of crimes in Orthodox communities is very low.<sup>3</sup>

A fourth area is literacy. In traditional communities the rate of literacy for children with the capacity to read is 100%. And this usually means competence in two languages. This is far in excess of the national or regional averages.

No one is claiming that the Torah way of life makes all its adherents perfect. This is obviously not true and is not being claimed. However, what we do expect, and what we do find, is that it makes the Torah community significantly better than the average surrounding communities. So much so, that if we return to our original question, in asking whether the Torah is relevant, and given the standard concerns for quality of life, then the answer is yes, the Torah is of course relevant.

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2. H. Wesley Perkins, "Religious Traditions, Parents, and Peers as Determinants of Alcohol and Drug Use Among College Students," *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 27, 21 writes: "Catholic students exhibit the greatest consumption followed by Protestants, students with no religious background and then Jewish students with the least alcohol consumption...Negative consequences follow a very similar pattern with ...Jewish students experiencing the least....Differences in alcohol use remained among religious groups [even] when controls for peer group attitudes, fraternity affiliation, and other social context factors were introduced in multivariate analyses....less than 1% of students from Jewish families noted having a parent who was diagnosed or treated for alcoholism, as compared with 7.5% of students from Protestant families and 6.4% from Catholic families." Charles Snyder, *Alcohol and the Jews*, (London: Feffer and Simons, 1978) 95 writes: "Men who recite the prayers daily, attend synagogue frequently, and regularly observe the ceremonial of the Sabbath are likely to be sober even though they drink alcoholic beverages frequently...But Jews who are removed from daily and weekly religious activities do not adhere to norms of moderate drinking with equal consistency." He found that the percentage of Jewish students who had been drunk twice or more was: Orthodox, 10; Conservative, 20; Reform, 38; Secular, 42.

Adlaf, Smart and Tan, "Ethnicity and Drug Use: A Critical Look," *The International Journal of the Addictions*, vol. 24 (1989), 10, found a general rise in Jewish cannabis use and an extraordinary negative relationship between rates of use and attendance at Jewish religious services such that Jews who regularly attended services were even less likely to use cannabis than non-Jews who attended services with the same regularity. [This is a tiny sample of Keleman's massive documentation. The reader who is interested in the full story is referred to *Permission to Receive*.]

3. Citing again from *Permission to Receive* by Lawrence Keleman: Robert St. John writes: "In every category of crime — from first degree murder to petty larceny and juvenile delinquency — official statistics show the rate for Jews to be considerably lower than the population at large." " *Jews, Justice and Judaism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 350. Frank Bushee of the American Economic Association writes: "Another nationality with a small criminal record in the Jews...The Mosaic law has been ground into the natures of the Jews for so many years that now they seem by inheritance to possess a certain moral stamina which is little affected by unfavorable surroundings." Landman, *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, 417. [This again is a tiny sample of Keleman's documentation.]



A fifth concern that most people share is the meaningfulness of life. As Viktor Frankl (the founder of existentialist psycho-therapy) said, we suffer from an existential vacuum, the angst, or the ennui that the existential philosophers have written about. We want to know where we are going, why we are going there, and what the importance of going in one particular direction or another is.

Meaningfulness is a function of relationships, of context, of consequences, and of connections. In order to understand the meaning of one's life, one has to have a picture of the historical perspective of the past, a vision of the future, and how one's life relates to that historical perspective. Judaism provides that kind of perspective. There is a recording of important episodes of history, and a view of the dynamics of history, the laws of history if you will, where it comes from, where it is going, and what its purpose is. One can achieve for oneself a picture of one's own position in that flow, and the meaningfulness of what one does.

In addition to viewing life vis-a-vis the outer environment, we also analyze different periods of life. For example, each year, or each crucial event whether it be birth, achieving adulthood, marriage, having children, or experiencing death. Each of these is a stage on an integrated path, so that each step on the path is related in a determinate way to the preceding steps, and contributes in a determinate way to the following steps, and hence gives oneself a clear picture of the meaning of each particular step. There is an integration of life, a plan which enables one to organize all the details of life around a central theme, so that each detail contributes to the expression of that overall theme. Even though they are tiny details, they contribute to the overall impact of the theme which is trying to be expressed. Likewise, that in turn confers a meaningfulness on those individual choices, and enhances the meaningfulness of life. So, in so far as we are concerned about the meaningfulness of our lives, the Torah is again quite relevant.

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### SUMMARY

*Judaism is relevant because it contributes to our goals - specifically to successful marriage, reduction in addictions and crime, universal literacy, and a meaningful life.*

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Finally, in addition to being beautiful, profound, noble, challenging, mind expanding et cetera, the Torah is true. And since it is true, of course it is relevant. If I want to live successfully in the world around me, if I want my actions to be intelligently related to my ends, then I have to know the nature of that world.

Also, not only is truth relevant to choosing means, but also in adopting ends themselves. The reason is that goals are sometimes incompatible with one another. One may no longer be



able to realize all his goals because the world does not allow all of them. If you realize one, you will therefore prevent yourself from realizing one of the others, and then a choice must be made. Ignorance of the world can lead one to extend oneself and to commit one's efforts to goals which cannot be simultaneously realized, which is of course a tragedy.

For example, it could be argued that the failure of communism was due to the incompatibility of two of its goals: centralized control of society and a successful economy. If individual freedom is necessary for the effort and innovation needed to drive the economy, then communism is futile.

As a second example, consider the twin goals possessed by many people that Judaism should survive as a distinct culture because it has an important distinct contribution to make to the world, and simultaneously should be modified with some sort of cultural compromise to current Western ideas. Now, if one studies history, in particular Jewish History, one will quickly come to the conclusion that those two goals are incompatible with one another. This path of cultural compromise, of accommodation with host civilizations, is a path which has been tried many times in the past. In each case it has resulted in cultural failure, complete cultural disintegration. [For the full argument on this point, see below *Historical Verification of the Torah, Part V.*]

Similarly, someone who wants to simultaneously contribute to the moral maturation of mankind, and also wants to contribute to Western Civilization, for such a person the experience of Germany should give him second thoughts. Germany represented the flowering of Western Civilization. They were great in art, literature, science, poetry, music et cetera. Yet, morally speaking, they were capable of sinking, in one

decade, to the lowest depths that humanity has ever trod. So, one has to ask whether Western Civilization, morally speaking, is only skin deep and does little if anything to tame the beast that rages within. (Perhaps it helps in creating that kind of bestiality?) At any rate, surely those two goals have to be scrutinized to see if they can be made to live together. This is an example of how knowing the truth is crucial not only for choosing means to our ends, but also for choosing our ends intelligently by making sure that they are jointly realizable.

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**SUMMARY**  
*Judaism is relevant because it provides truth about the world which helps us to make fruitful decisions by choosing appropriate means and realizable ends.*

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So much for the treatment of the question in a serious fashion. Now, what I want to tell you is the truth, which is that the question is really no



question, that it can't be asked, and that it is really incoherent. Why?

What does relevance mean? Relevance is a relative term. We have to ask: Relevant to what? When I say that something is relevant, what I mean is that it is relevant to some given concerns, goals and values. For example someone is applying for a job. Is the fact that he is 5'2" tall relevant? It depends: if they want an accountant then no, but if they want a basketball player then yes! Every question of relevance presupposes a context of accepted goals and values. For me to ask whether religion is relevant is to measure religion against my goals and values. But, this presupposes that I already have goals and values. We could raise the question: How were they chosen? How were they established and justified?

Now in our case, the Torah doesn't allow itself to be a tool with which we can realize our extra-Jewish or our extra-Torah goals and values. The reason is *that the Torah itself provides a complete set of values*. The Torah itself dictates what our goals shall be. Thus, *the Torah contains its own complete standard of relevance*. The *only way in which I can ask if the Torah is relevant is to decide not to treat it as true*, not to take it in terms of its own self-conception. This would mean deriving the standard of relevance from another source. The Torah dictates for itself its own standards of relevance, and so to ask whether it is relevant or not is to ask an incoherent question.

I'll give you an analogy. There is an international commission which determines the rules of international chess competition. Now when they publish the latest rules we cannot ask: "Are those rules really valid? Are they correct rules of chess?" We can't ask that because they determine the rules of chess. Similarly here, if the Torah is going to dictate my ultimate values and goals, and these are my standards of relevance, then I can no longer ask whether the Torah is relevant. The Torah is that which determines relevance for everything else. The question then becomes not: Is the Torah relevant to me, to mankind, to society? and so forth, but rather: Am I relevant to the Torah? Is my life a relevant life? I become the *subject matter* of the question, not the *one who asks* of the question.

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### SUMMARY

*Relevance is relative to a standard set by our goals and values. To ask if religion is relevant is to evaluate religion by a standard external to religion itself. Judaism contains its own goals and values, and thus is itself a complete standard of relevance. Therefore it falsifies Judaism to assess its relevance to external standards. Judaism is the standard of relevance for everything else.*

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This idea that the Torah can dictate goals and values is going to run counter to the intuition of many. Many people think that they think that values are relative. (Or rather many people *think* that they think that, because I am going to argue that they don't really think it.) Relative values means that each person chooses his own values, each person makes his own commitments, no one can tell anyone else how they are going to live and what they should pursue. In short, the question of values, ethics and morals is purely a personal question, a subjective question. I am not drawing fine distinctions between relativism, nihilism, subjectivism et cetera. Let's just lump it all together: there is no objective standard of right and wrong. That, anyway, is what they think they think.

Now, I am not going to address this question philosophically simply because 2500 years of philosophical ethics has produced nothing conclusive on the question. We are still floundering around much as we were before Plato and Aristotle started the current tradition. So, instead of arguing about the question philosophically, I am going to argue to you as people. I am going to argue what is called *ad homonym*. I want to show you that you do not hold this position. You may think you do, you may have been taught the phrases, but I can pull out of you intuitions which are very much at variance with this conception. I will try to show you that you are believers in absolute universal binding values, and the only question is what particular values are the correct values.

Consider the following two conflicts. Number one, you have two conflicting desires. You want to go to the rock concert and you want to go to the hockey game, but they are at the same time. So, you have to decide what to do. So you say "Well let's see, the concert costs \$35, the ice hockey game costs \$45, that one's farther away, this one would be more exciting, but that one happens more rarely, but this one my friend wants to go to, or that one not," and so on. You make up a calculation and you decide "Okay, I'm going to the concert." That is the first case.

Number two: you have a rock concert to go to and you have a promise to keep, and there is a conflict and you cannot do both. Again you weigh up that the rock concert only happens once a year, but then again, I made this promise, these people need it and so on. Again, you weigh up all the factors, and you make a decision to go to the concert. That is the second case.

Now let's suppose that in both cases, later, you feel as if you have made a mistake. You go back over it and you say "No, I should not have made that decision, I should have made the other decision. I wish I had made the other decision. If I could do it all over again, I would do it the other way."



I suggest to you that in the choice of the rock concert over the promise (the second case), it is relevant, reasonable, and coherent to feel guilty. I am not saying that you have to feel guilty, or that you will feel guilty. But, if a person does happen to feel guilty, it is a normal response to have that feeling. Whereas in the choice of the rock concert over the hockey game, guilt is completely inappropriate. It is not logically relevant to feel guilty for having chosen the wrong one of your desires. This is now not a point about psychology, but rather a point about logic. The conflict of desires on the one hand, and the conflict of a desire with a recognized obligation on the other hand, produce the relevance of an entirely different kind of emotion - the logical relevance of guilt. But if values are relative, chosen subjectively without any independent validity, the relevance of guilt is a mystery. Why should violating a value be any more serious than choosing the wrong desire? In both cases only my own feelings are at stake. The relevance of guilt indicates that we do not regard values as relative or subjective.

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#### SUMMARY

*Many people think they believe that values are relative. But they recognize that a failure to live up to one's values makes guilt a relevant reaction, which is not the case for a failure to satisfy desires. This indicates that we experience our values differently from our desires.*

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Now consider this. The following story appeared in the Wall Street Journal a number of years ago. There was a student at a philosophy course who was assigned to write a paper on ethics. In his paper he defended the thesis that there are no universal objective values. Everyone can more or less do what one likes, choose one's own commitments and so on. He received the paper back with an "F" on it. He went to the professor and said: "Why did you fail me?" The professor replied: "Because you're wrong," and the student said: "Prove it!" The professor took out all the standard arguments that prove why there are objective values, and to each argument, the student said: "I don't believe that...I'm not committed to that," or, "I don't accept that...that doesn't persuade me," and so on down the line. After a half an hour, the student said: "Well, see, you tried out all your arguments and I am unmoved." The professor then replied "I'm going to fail you anyway, and not only that, I'm going to fail you in the course." The student, feeling a little unsettled and worried, said: "You can't do that!" The professor replied: "Of course I can. I put an F right here, see? Then, I sign my name over here. There's nothing to it!" The student then said: "No, no, you have no *right* to do that!"

What did the student say? "You have no *right* to do that?" This is the



student who has denied the objectivity of value, thus denying the universality of value. Who is he to tell the professor what rights he has? Suppose the professor says, "My value that I have chosen is the following. I fail all those who disagree with me, and I give A's to all those who agree with me." Now, the student, given his position, cannot criticize the professor because he has just defended the thesis that anybody may choose whatever values he likes.

Now let me ask you: with whom do you agree in this story? Do you side with the student, or with the professor? I think we should side *morally* with the student - he is clearly a victim. But then what about his paper? His thesis that values are relative gives him no room to complain when he is treated unjustly! If the student wants to condemn the professor, he needs to have objective values which apply to the professor *no matter what the professor thinks*.

If you reject objective values then you give up the ability to condemn even the most outrageous injustice. What can you say even to a Nazi? He will tell you: "You chose your values, I chose mine. Who are you to tell me what values to choose? You mollicoddle Jews; I kill them. The future will be decided by the stronger army!" When you protest that what he does is unjust, evil, you are only expressing your private choices. Why should that be of any relevance to him?

The fact is that there is a deep inconsistency here. When someone wants to stifle a nagging conscience, when he wants to throw off the ideals of a society with which he disagrees, then he becomes a nihilist, a subjectivist, a relativist, and says that everyone can choose their own their own values and make their own commitments. But, the minute that someone tries to interfere with him, the minute someone tries to limit his freedom, he then suddenly becomes a universalist, an absolutist: he trumpets his universal values and expects the other person to pay attention.

We don't merely fight it out with the Nazi, we don't believe that the reason Democracy should triumph over the Nazis is because we have more guns than they do. We brand the Nazi as evil! Also, we expect all the people who have moral conceptions, and who are not evil themselves, to agree with us. When we declare the Nazi as evil, we don't think of ourselves as just letting off steam the way some philosophers would have it. We want our own freedom that we expect other people to respect. That being the case, we all believe in absolute, universal and binding values. The only question is, which ones are they?




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### SUMMARY

*The fact that people are willing to condemn injustice in others despite their choice of different values shows that people believe in universal objective values.*

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So, which absolute, universal and binding values are the ones which we should believe in? When you come down to cases there is a lot of difficult discussion, and that is where the real interesting and important issues lie. Some people will say that it is patent: The absolute value and the absolute responsibility is not to interfere with other people. But this is not so obvious. Interference can be defined in a variety of ways. Take for example zoning

laws. When someone buys a plot of land you tell him: “No! No two family houses, just one family houses.” The purchaser will respond: “But it’s my plot of land, they are my bricks, I hired the workers, why can’t I build whatever I like? I don’t care about your desire to preserve a certain quality to the neighborhood.”

Well that’s too bad, because even though it is his land, he will still not be allowed to build whatever he wants. Social legislation in general is like this. You tell someone who owns his own restaurant that he has to serve the public indiscriminately. But suppose he says “I only want to serve blue eyed people, I like blue-eyed people. Brown-eyed people make me nervous.” Well that is too bad. He can’t keep brown eyed people out. Why not? What counts as freedom from interference is a difficult matter, and it is going to be discussed and debated because people have different ideas.

In any case the general point remains: No one believes across the board in the subjectivity or the relativity of values. That being the case, I hope that you can at least accept the possibility of a philosophy, like the Torah, which says that there is an objective, universal, binding standard.

People may still try to argue as follows. Values cannot be objective because in the last analysis, I have to choose my own values. I have to make the choice. You can talk to me, you can show me the relevant facts, you can ask me to read the important philosophical works or novels which will have an impact on me, but in the last analysis, I have to make the choice. So, how could it possibly be objective? How can there be a universal standard if everyone has to make his own choice?

Now, that is nothing but a complete, irrelevant fallacy, and I will prove it to you. We will compare it with truth, in particular with science. Suppose someone said: “There can’t be an objective truth, there can’t be a reality, because in the last analysis, I have to decide what to believe. You could present me with the evidence, you could present me with the arguments, you could present me with all the theories and how they fit the



data, but in the last analysis, I will have to make the decision to believe it or not to believe it. Therefore, there can't be any universal objective standard. Each person's standard is his own standard for himself."

No one is going to buy that in science because science distinguishes between my choice of what to believe on the one hand, and the standard for correctness of belief on the other hand. Of course I will decide what I am ultimately going to believe. But that means I can decide to believe what agrees with the real world, and is true, or I can to decide to believe what disagrees with the real world, and hence is false. The fact that I am making the decision does not imply that there is no correctness or incorrectness to the decision. The same thing is true with respect to values. The mere fact that I am going to decide what values to espouse and what values to commit myself to has nothing to do with the question as to whether or not there is an objective, universal standard.

[This argument does not rest on equating values with science - that would be absurd. Rather, the point is purely negative. Just as the necessity for each of us to decide what to believe in science does not deprive science of objective standards determining which beliefs are true, so the necessity for each of us to decide on our values does not imply by itself that there are no objective standards determining which values are correct. If other differences between values and science are thought to support that conclusion, that is another argument.]

As we will see in detail in chapter II, there are two basic attitudes toward religion. There is the pragmatic attitude and the realist attitude. One either looks at religion as a tool for self-realization, for self-actualization, for development of character, all as part of our cultural heritage. Or, one looks at religion as the picture of reality that we live in. Now then, from this point of view, if someone is going to look at it as reality, reality now not only includes factual reality, not only where did the world come from, how is it governed, where is it going, what is the essence of mankind and so on. It is also going to give us an objective account of what are values, of what are obligations, and what are goals that are universal and binding. So, in a rather convoluted way, we can come back in the end to the question of relevance.

If one is committed to understanding the world in which we live, if one wants to grasp reality mentally so as to live in it consciously, then discovering the truth of religion becomes one of life's most relevant projects. If there is a possibility, if there is some evidence for the truth of Judaism in particular, then one has an overriding interest, it seems to me, in sifting that evidence, in investigating the possibility so as to come to a reasoned and informed conclusion as to whether or not it is true. Because, if it is true, then it will contain the objectively correct values and so it will then become the standard of relevance: it will dictate the ultimate meaningfulness and significance of our lives.



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### SUMMARY

*There is controversy in particular value judgments, but that does not contradict the existence of objective values. Nor does the fact that each person must make his own value commitments contradict objective values; just as in science each person decides what he will believe and yet there is a standard of correctness, so too for value.*

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## II

## RELIGION: PRAGMATISM OR TRUTH?

There are two fundamental attitudes towards religion. I believe that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, that is to say, that everyone adopts exactly one of these two attitudes. I call them the pragmatic and the realist. In this chapter I will describe to you these two attitudes, and argue that the realist attitude is more fundamental. Then, we will see how the realist attitude should be implemented.

The pragmatic attitude starts with the self. I am a person with goals, desires, hopes, fears, projects, scruples and so on. There are various things that I want to accomplish, and I look at the world as a set of resources to accomplish my projects. All of human history and human culture can be seen as resources to further my goals.

This attitude, the pragmatic attitude, can be applied, among other things, to religion. Religion can also be used to serve goals. It can unite society by coordinating activities and creating mutual understanding and support. It can serve personal goals by increasing sensitivity, providing a feeling of oneness with the universe, strengthening courage, and so on. (Sometimes these goals are combined. If someone convinces the rest of his citizens that he is a demi-god, then he will have both a political and a personal benefit!)

The pragmatic attitude towards religion leads to the expectation that different cultures, and different historical periods will have different forms of religious expression because their goals, needs, and values will be quite different - we expect the religions of ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, and modern Los Angeles to differ from one another. Similarly, we expect the religious expression of an individual to vary through his lifetime. The goals and aspirations of a seventeen year old, a thirty-five year old and a sixty year old are usually different.

Pragmatic religious expression would likely be eclectic. There is no reason to be bound by any one particular tradition. If a Hindu prayer is inspirational on Tuesdays, and a Moslem ritual on Thursdays, and the Jewish Sabbath on Saturdays, there is no reason not to combine them. Indeed, there is no reason to be bound to tradition at all - religious creativity will be encouraged to develop new forms of expression. And of course the pragmatic attitude includes the 'null' option where no religious expression whatsoever is found relevant to any of one's goals, and therefore religion is abandoned altogether.




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### SUMMARY

*The pragmatic attitude takes religion as a means to personal and social goals. Pragmatism expects variations in religious practice in different cultures, individuals, and periods of life. All religious traditions and new creativity provide materials for the individual's religious expression. For some, zero religious expression will best serve their goals.*

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The second is the realist attitude. The realist wants truth. Every religion has some story to tell. Where did the universe come from? What is its fundamental nature? What forces guide its development? What is the nature of the human being? What will the future be? The realist wants the religion whose story is true.

[I am skirting a difficult problem here: are pragmatism and realism really distinct? One might say that among my goals is to know the truth. Then pragmatism defined as seeking means to achieve my goals will

include realism. But it is not obvious that we want truth *as a goal*. We all appreciate that truth is an indispensable means to our other goals; perhaps this is all we want from truth. In any case, if you think that truth can be a goal, then think of pragmatism as defined to exclude truth, i.e. pragmatism means the assessment of everything as a means to achieving my goals other than acquiring truth. Then the two positions will be distinct.]

Now put this way, it is obvious that everyone is a realist and everyone is a pragmatist. Everyone has goals, desires, hopes, and projects, and looks to his culture for resources to further those projects. Similarly, everyone has an interest in the truth, since truth is an indispensable means to achieve other goals. When I say that these two attitudes are mutually exclusive, what I mean is what a person will do if he is forced to choose.

So, for example, suppose that you are exploring different religions and you come across one which as a pragmatist is ideal - it inspires you, it ennobles you, it increases your sensitivities, and it furthers the social projects in which you are interested. It fits your personality like a glove. But there is no evidence whatsoever that its account of the world is true. In fact, there may be considerable evidence against it. In such a condition you would have to choose between pragmatism which is satisfied, and realism which is not.

You could have the same conflict working in the opposite direction. You could come across a religion where there is a complete misfit in pragmatic terms: it dashes your hopes, it violates your scruples, it requires a reorganization of your world view, your goals and your focus. But the evidence seems to indicate that its picture of the world is true. Under those conditions you again have to make a choice between pragmatism and realism, and there the criteria obviously will conflict. So that when it comes to crucial choices of this kind, all people adopt one or the other



of these two attitudes: the pragmatist or the realist.

[Of course, even a realist who accepts a religion on the grounds of truth may not live up to all of its rules and values. Acceptance implies only the acknowledgment of its truth, and the obligation to fulfill its requirements as best one can.]

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### SUMMARY

*The realist attitude assesses religion in terms of the truth of its description of the world. The two attitudes will conflict for religions which are pragmatically useful but lack evidence of truth, and for religions which are pragmatically useless but do possess evidence of truth. Then a choice must be made between the attitudes.*

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Now, it is obvious that there are hundreds of millions of pragmatists at the very least, and hundreds of millions of realists. The world has many people of both types. The question is, are these two attitudes equally appropriate and equally valid, and people are split in terms of their personalities and preferences? Or is one of the attitudes more fundamental and more appropriate?

It seems to me that the fundamental attitude with which one must begin any investigation is the realist. *As long as there is the possibility of truth in any subject, one has the responsibility to search for the truth.* Only if we can conclude that there is no truth to be had is it justifiable to make our decisions on a pragmatic basis.

I will give you some examples of why this is so. Imagine that you are a teacher and that you have caught one of your students cheating. You call in the parents for a conference, and you tell the parents that their child has a problem: "Your child cheats on exams, copies homework from other children," and so on. Suppose that the parents say that you are a liar, and that you have a vendetta against their child. Furthermore, they tell you that they have an uncle who is on the school board, and that if you keep persecuting their child, they will have you fired. Why would we not respect that sort of reaction? Because the child's cheating is a matter of *fact*. You presumably have evidence of the cheating. A parent who disregards the evidence and believes what he thinks it is convenient for him to believe, is regarded as irresponsible and irrational for so doing.

Similarly, some people who smoke have said to me that smoking isn't really injurious to your health. All the research is phony, it is paid off by underground left-wing groups who want to discredit the big tobacco companies. Why don't we credit that type of response? Because the danger to your health is a matter of fact. If there is evidence the least a person must do is survey the evidence. If he has an objection to it, he should offer it in logical terms, and not just dismiss the research on an unfounded charge of bias or fraud.

We don't credit pragmatic responses when there is evidence available which could lead to the truth. Any investigation must begin with the realist attitude. If and when the realist attitude comes up empty - if the investigation leads to the conclusion that there is no truth to be had - then of course we fall back on pragmatism. There is no other alternative. But, the realist approach must be applied at the outset.

The considerations so far have been completely general - they apply to any possibility of finding truth. In the case of religion they apply with special force. Imagine for a moment standing at Sinai and personally hearing from the Creator of the universe: "Do not light fires on Saturdays!" Could you just ignore such an experience? Would it not play a role in your decisions for the weekend? This is an experience which obligates a response. Furthermore, the obligation does not depend upon actually having the experience. Suppose you knew that others had the experience. You would know that the Creator wants no fires on Saturdays - that alone would create the obligation. So religious truth is crucial for living rationally and responsibly.

From the philosopher's point of view, it is especially unfortunate that the vast majority of pragmatists, vis-a-vis religion, are so by default. They have never undertaken any serious investigation. They simply assume that there simply is no truth to be had, and therefore fall back on what is useful for their life projects. What we are going to do is pursue the realist attitude to see how far it can take us.

[The responsibility to seek the truth is of course only one responsibility among many, and it may be overridden when it conflicts with a more pressing responsibility. For example, suppose seeking the truth will cost my life! Also, there is considerable discussion of the foundation of the responsibility to seek the truth. As

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### SUMMARY

*In any investigation upon which a decision will be based we are required to start with realism. To make a decision pragmatically without considering the evidence of truth is irrational and irresponsible.*

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mentioned in the last [ ], it is a crucially important means to our other goals, and it may itself be a goal. This is a theoretical matter which does not touch its validity. In the case of religion, since the utility of having the truth is eternal, the responsibility to seek the truth obviously applies.]

One immediate consequence of approaching religion as a realist and searching for the truth is to be prepared to reject falsehood. One cannot be searching for the truth unless one is prepared to reject inadequate ideas as false. In any area where we believe that there is a truth, we recognize that in the collection of contradictory opinions, if they truly are contradictory, no more than one can be true.



We do not accord equal intellectual status to people who don't believe in the reality of the Holocaust. We are not likely to give their views equal intellectual weight because we are dealing with a matter of fact, and the evidence is against them. Similarly, groups such as The Flat Earth Society believe to this day that the Earth is flat. And whereas we may not throw them in jail or recommend that they be exiled or censored, we certainly do not accord their opinion equal intellectual status. We are not likely to offer them equal time to teach their opinions in the schools, or to write their alternative textbooks, because what they believe is nonsense. ***To be searching for the truth means to be prepared to reject falsehood.***

Now, when it comes to religions, and I am talking now about the major world religions, they contradict each other on some crucial aspect of belief. That is to say, if you take any two of the major world religions, there is some proposition about which they disagree. And that being the case, no more than one can be wholly true. For, if religion A wholly true then, each of the others is wrong at least on the proposition in which it disagrees with religion A.

For example, according to Catholicism, a certain man was G-d. According to Islam, no man ever was G-d and no man ever could be G-d. Islam believes that Mohammed was a true prophet while Catholicism denies this. They cannot both be right. At least one of them has to be wrong. Hinduism, in the mainstream of Hindu thought, believes that the world is infinitely old, that there was not a creation at a finite time in the past.<sup>4</sup> Since Catholicism and Islam share a belief in creation, and Hinduism rejects it, that means that no more than one of the three can be wholly true. Buddhism goes further and denies the existence of a creator altogether. (Hinduism would allow a creator who has always been creating the universe from infinity.) Then, no more than one of the four can be wholly true. Since Judaism believes in creation of finite age, that no man was G-d and that Mohammed was not a prophet, Judaism is opposed to all four. That means that no more than one of these five can be wholly true.

And so it goes. Take any major world religion and it will contradict the others on some fundamental aspect of belief. Therefore no more than one can be wholly true. (Of course, as I'm sure you have picked up, it is possible for none of them to be wholly true.) So if we are looking for the truth, we cannot give equal weight to all religions (unless we find that they are all false). If one is wholly true then the others are not.

Now, a common response to this observation is to say that maybe we

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4. Smith, Huston, *The Religions of Man*, Mentor Books, 1960, pp. 81, 103-4.



could look at religions in terms of what they share. Perhaps there is a certain common core to all religions, a general sense that there is a superior

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### SUMMARY

*The search for truth requires the rejection of falsehood. Religions contradict one another, so not more than one can be wholly true - if one is wholly true, the others must be rejected.*

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power, and an appreciation of the spiritual and the moral aspects of life, a sense that our material world is not self contained and that it really is the surface of something that is much deeper. Perhaps we could take this common core which all religions share, approach it realistically, see it as the truth, and then with regard to

the other matters in which the religions differ, look at them as matters of style. Matters of ethnicity, which really are not crucial, do not have to be regarded as true and could be selected on the basis of pragmatism. We could have a split methodology - realists for the core and pragmatists for the trappings. Does it really matter whether you eat meat on Fridays, smoke cigarettes on Saturdays, or have one month a year in which you fast all day long? Those are surely not matters of truth, only of style.

This suggestion is attractive until you start to pin it down in detail. What exactly should go into the core (the core being beliefs shared by all religions)? Can any of the accounts of our origins go into this core? Obviously not, since, as we just pointed out, different religions have radically different views about the origins of the universe: created by a personal being a finite number of years ago, or going through infinite cycles, or existing independently without the guidance of a personal being, and so on. There will be no scriptures that can go into the core because no scriptures are agreed upon by all religions. There will be no prophets in the core because no prophets are recognized by all religions.

An account of the soul? Sometimes religions share a *word* without sharing a concept because it is difficult to translate from one language to another. It may be said that all religions recognize the "soul," but when you see what they think the soul is, you get so radically different a picture, that there is no common concept underlying the variety.

Is the soul a personal spirit whose personhood, whose uniqueness is essential and infinite - eternal - and never to be destroyed as you have, for example, in Judaism? Or, is personhood an illusion, something which must be stripped away so that one achieves a consciousness that does not distinguish one significantly from a rock, a praying mantis, or a sea gull as you have in some Eastern religions? Is the ultimate relationship with G-d like a drop of water falling into an ocean, which many religions have as their metaphor for mystical union with G-d, where the individuality of



the drop is lost entirely? Or is it the Jewish conception - the attachment of one thing to another, like gluing a pebble onto a wall, where the pebble becomes part of the wall, while at the same time its unique contours are preserved? The mere fact that religions may share a word called “soul” doesn’t mean that they share an underlying concept.

To what can one look forward in the future? Will this physical world continue to exist forever as some have it, or will it be radically transformed and exist in another form as Judaism has it? Or, will it be totally obliterated as some forms of Christianity have it? Since religions differ on this matter, nothing about it can go into the core.

As soon as you pin down religious ideas in detail, you find that the differences are radical, and that nothing can be claimed to be shared by all religions. Even the suggestion that perhaps religions share a commitment to morality turns out to be superficial in this way. All religions might agree that it is wrong to steal. But when you ask for the concept behind the rule, *why* one shouldn’t steal, you get radically different views. For example, mainstream Hinduism sees stealing as an action which reinforces the ego. The ego is the great enemy of achieving nirvana. Every person’s goal in this world is to achieve nirvana which is some sort of experiential state for himself, some sort of bliss. Therefore, stealing for a Hindu ultimately is pragmatically ruled out. It is bad for *you*. You are depriving yourself of achieving the greatest happiness, the greatest bliss, the greatest tranquility of which you are capable. The ultimate justification for not stealing is pragmatic.

Now, when you take that same rule in Jewish terms, you get an entirely different underlying conception. In Jewish terms, stealing is wrong because morality is paramount. Morality is not justified because it contributes to happiness. A pragmatic reason not to steal isn’t moral at all. A person who never steals because he believes that there are policemen watching him all the time, and he believes that if he steals he is going to be put in jail, hasn’t begun to become moral. Any kind of self-serving justification from a Jewish point of view is to misunderstand the fundamental concept of morality altogether. A mere behavioral rule does not give the core any religious content.

So the idea that religions have a common core which could be declared true and that the rest is just trappings is a *mi stake*. The hearts of religions, their most fundamental beliefs contradict one another. Therefore we are thrown back on the radical position that if we are looking for truth, we must be ready to declare falsehood when we discover it.

So then, the question is how should we look for truth? And, if we are looking for the truth and we are to be objective and open-minded,



shouldn't we give equal time to all of the candidates? Shouldn't we take time to familiarize ourselves with not only Judaism, but also Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism (just to mention the major world religions)? But, to become thoroughly familiar with the inner workings of a religion, as I am sure you know, is not a trivial matter. Even with six months for each religion, which is probably too short, you are talking about a four year investigation. Most people just don't have the time. Well, I hope to show you on general grounds that we can be objective and open-minded and yet drastically reduce the scope of the investigation.

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### SUMMARY

*The idea of a common core to all religions fails since the contradictions between religions prevents the proposed core from having any content.*

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The method of searching for truth, in my view, is the scientific method. It is the only method which we have. With all its limitations and all of its weaknesses, it is the only neutral method we have in searching for the truth. The trouble is, the scientific method is very poorly understood. (That includes scientists. The mere fact that you can do something well does not mean that you understand what you are doing and why you are doing it.) So, I will take the remainder of this chapter to describe to you how the scientific method works in detail, and show you how it applies to the study of religion. And we shall see, that when we apply the scientific method, the scope of the investigation can be drastically reduced.

The first element of the scientific method is that for an idea to be taken seriously as true, there must be positive evidence of its truth. Whoever offers an idea and claims that it is true, must present positive evidence of its truth. If that sounds obvious to you, consider the following.

Suppose someone believes something for which he has no positive evidence at all - unicorns, for example. His lack of evidence does not concern him: he chooses to believe. If we protest that to believe without evidence is irrational, he challenges us to prove that unicorns do not exist. Can we meet that challenge? How should we prove that there are no unicorns?! And if we cannot, why is it any more rational to reject unicorns than to accept them? (Try this on your scientist friends and see what answers you get!)

The answer is that the believer in unicorns *is right*: there is no better reason to *reject* unicorns than accept them. But there is another alternative. We can be neutral - we neither accept nor reject unicorns - we don't



take a position one way or the other. Our opposition to the believer is not that we know he is wrong, but rather that one should not commit oneself without positive evidence of truth.

But why not? What is wrong with choosing to believe if there is no evidence against the belief? Two things. First, beliefs often have practical consequences. Suppose that unicorns are thought to eat cabbages in the middle of the night - will our believer put up a fence? That is at least a waste of resources. Since there is no evidence that there are unicorns, there is no evidence that his cabbages are in danger. Far better to give the fence money to charity! Second, we are searching for the truth because we are *responsible* to do so. Belief and action on pragmatic grounds when truth is available is irrational and irresponsible. The believer in unicorns is making a pragmatic choice to believe. This may be OK for unicorns - for now at least there is no evidence either way. But our concern is religious belief. Until we have investigated, we cannot assume that there is no evidence of truth of (some) religion(s). Thus our first goal must be to find positive evidence of truth. We cannot adopt a belief merely because there is no evidence against it.

If I am looking for truth, *if I am trying to fulfill my responsibility to find the truth*, I need a reason for my selection. I need a reason for my choice. That is why we do not pay attention to ideas without positive evidence. It is correct not to credit ideas lacking positive evidence, and *the reason is not because we know that they are false*. I will say it again, I cannot prove that there are no unicorns. That is not the reason for rejection of belief. The reason is that I have no positive evidence to believe in them. So even without refuting them, I disregard them when they do not present positive evidence *because I have no responsibility to accept them*.

[This holds when we investigate each alternative and find it without positive evidence. But if we find that one alternative does have positive evidence, then that gives us reason to reject the rest: they contradict the alternative for which we have positive evidence.]

That is the reason for the first wing of the scientific method, and believe it or not, this observation, as simple as it is, already suffices to rule out some candidates. The Far Eastern religions - Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism - offer no positive evidence of truth.<sup>5</sup> They present themselves as noble, beautiful, uplifting, and inspiring ways of life. They claim to create harmonious attitudes and feelings of oneness with nature



and so on. In other words, they present themselves as pragmatically very successful, and in fact they may be pragmatically superb, but they do not offer any evidence of the truth of their stories about the world. They don't say that if you practice our rules that you will be healthy, you won't have accidents, there won't be famine, or pestilence, or war, or earthquakes in your country, or that you will win the universal respect of mankind. They do not make any predictions at all. They offer no positive evidence of truth.

Therefore, a realist who is looking for the truth need not go to the east and spend six months mastering Shintoism, because there is no positive reason to accept it. Now, I will say it again, I am not claiming that Shintoism is false. I do not know it to be false. I cannot refute it. But, it is on a par with unicorns. If they do not offer any evidence for the truth, then I, who am searching for the truth have no responsibility to take it seriously. So then, the investigation has now been reduced by three-eighths!

The next aspect of the scientific method is that when a religion, a theory, or a hypothesis offers evidence, the evidence must be *unique*. It must be evidence which that religion, theory, or hypothesis can explain and *no*

*one else can explain*. Otherwise, it does not distinguish the opponent from its competitors. In science this is described as a crucial experiment. Suppose I have two theories, A and B, such that both agree that if you heat up this liquid for ten minutes, it will turn red. Heating up the liquid is probably a waste of time, because it will probably turn red and I won't know any more than before I did the experiment. What I really want is a case where A says that it will turn red and B says it will turn blue. Then I have something, because no matter what happens, (at least) one of the

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### SUMMARY

*We search for truth by using the scientific method. The first element in the method is to require positive evidence of truth - not merely the impossibility of refutation. Positive evidence is necessary since in order to fulfill our responsibility to believe the truth, we need a reason for our choice. The Far Eastern religions offer no positive evidence, so we have no need to consider them in our investigation.*

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theories is going to be in trouble. (And I say *in trouble* specifically. It does not mean that it will be false, but it will be in trouble because there will experimental evidence against it.) What you want is a piece of evidence which one of the competitors can explain and the other cannot.

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5. Smith, *op. cit.*, chaps. 4,5.



Then you have a differential between them.

Now, there are religions that offer evidence of their truth, but the evidence is not unique in this way, and therefore, not relevant for a realist who is trying to ascertain which of the alternatives is superior. So, for example, Islam.<sup>6</sup> One of the two main pieces of evidence that Islam offers for the truth of its religion is the military success of Mohammed's followers. Within a century they had conquered all of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, as far east as India, and penetrated into Europe. Their claim is that such a rapid conquest is impossible unless Allah helped.

Now, how do non-Moslems look at that piece of evidence? A non-Moslem will ask: "Well, what about Alexander? Alexander conquered a great deal of the world and he died at age thirty-two. He did it much faster. Must you say that Alexander's gods were helping him? The Romans controlled more of the world and did so for three hundred years. Must we say that the Roman gods are also true and were helping the Roman armies?" We don't have to accept the truth of Islam to explain rapid conquest. It happens too often. There must be some other explanation. Once we know that rapid conquest can be explained without appeal to Islam, rapid conquest ceases to be evidence for Islam. *Unique evidence is something which one theory can explain and other theories cannot explain.*

[The other piece of evidence offered for Islam, in case you are interested, is this. They claim that if you master Arabic and read the Koran you will see that such a book could not have been written by a human being. Only G-d could have written it. The problem with this "evidence" is parallel to the problem with conquest. It is often very difficult to explain human creativity. How did Aristotle produce so many new ideas, theories, whole new disciplines? How did Beethoven compose the late quartets? How did Einstein think of relativity? Our inability to answer these questions is not evidence that they were all supernatural! They just highlight our lack of understanding of how people - especially geniuses - create.]

For another example - now this is a burlesque but it makes the point in a dramatic way - there are certain groups which offer what they call direct evidence of the truth of their religious beliefs. They will tell you: "We do not ask you to take anything on faith, you do not have to trust any scriptures or prophets. Just come and join the ashram, sit cross legged on the floor, eat mushrooms, say "om," get up at two-thirty in the morning for cold showers, and after a month you are going to feel very different. Indeed, we will tell you how you are going to feel, we will predict it for you. Now try it out, we don't even charge rent Follow our rules for a month and see if you do not feel exactly the way we describe you are

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6. *Ibid.*, chap. 6.



going to feel.”

So the searcher for truth thinks to himself: “Wow, this is terrific. No leap of faith. Nothing irrational. I am the test of my own experience, so I will have the direct evidence. I will feel it.” So, he joins the ashram for thirty days and he sits cross legged, eats mushrooms, takes cold showers and so forth, and indeed, after thirty days, he feels quite different. In fact, he feels exactly the way they said he would feel. Then he concludes, “Well here it is, I have the truth in my own experience.”

Is that valid? No, that is not valid *at all*. The fact that they could tell you how you will feel after thirty days of following their regimen means nothing more than they have some practical, psychological knowledge. Maybe they have tried it, and they themselves experienced how it feels. Maybe they had some genuine psychological insight. What does that have to do with the truth of their religious ideas? Do I as a Jew have to deny that if you sit cross legged, say “om,” and take cold showers you are going to feel the way they say? I don’t have to deny that. I can accept that, and so can a Christian, a Moslem, and an atheist. Therefore, it is not unique evidence. It is not evidence that only they can explain. All of us can agree to this sort of evidence, so it doesn’t count for them or against anyone else. It does not help us select them as more likely true than any of the other competitors, and therefore it is irrelevant.

Now, Hinduism and Buddhism both offer evidence of the truth of their religions, but the evidence is all in terms of personal experience. If you meditate long enough on the sound of one hand clapping, something will happen to your mind. Indeed, it will. You will think and feel quite differently. So what? Does that mean that there is a transmigration of soul, or that there is a great god-head in the sky, or that you are in touch with eternal reality, or anything else? What does one thing have to do with the other? They have discovered that certain mental exercises result in certain forms of experience. Since I as a Jew do not have to deny the existence of sartori - I might not feel that it is very valuable, but I do not have to deny its existence - or nirvana, or any other stages of mystical experience, their claiming and proving that it exists has nothing to do with the truth of their religion. *Only true evidence that others cannot explain counts as support for your particular idea.*




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### SUMMARY

*The second element in the scientific method is that the evidence offered must be unique - explained only by the religion (or other proposition) in favor of which it is offered. Evidence of conquest, or evidence in personal experience, is not unique. Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism offer evidence which is not unique and therefore need not be considered in this investigation.*

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And finally, the evidence that is offered must be known to be true. This excludes both “evidence” which turns out to be false, and which cannot be verified as true.

It is fine to make predictions, even unique predictions, but if they do not come true, then, of course, you are in serious trouble. Certain Christian sources assert that the reason the Jews are in exile is because they have not accepted the Christian Messiah. They predict that the Jews will remain in exile until they convert. Now, that is the right sort of prediction, that the Jews will be in exile until they accept the Christian messiah. Here, at least the logic was right because that is a prediction that no

one else would credit. No Hindu would have any reason whatsoever to expect Jews will stay in exile until they accept the Christian Messiah. He would have no reason to believe that. Nor would a Buddhist, a Moslem, a Shintoist, a Taoist, a Confucianist, or an Atheist. Certainly Jews will not credit it. So that is the right sort of prediction to make: a prediction that no one else will credit.

But, since 1948 (the formation of the state of Israel), that prediction has been wearing a bit thin. All right, in 1948 we didn’t have Jerusalem. Since 1967 (Israel conquered Jerusalem in the Six Day War) it has been wearing even thinner. Still, there was always the Soviet Union holding on to its Jews making it impossible for those Jews to come. So there was a last ditch hold-out position. In the last few years even that has disappeared. There has been massive Soviet Jewry immigration into Israel since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Jews in Russia are free to leave. This prediction has simply come out false. The fact that there are Jews who refuse to leave their penthouses in Manhattan in order to come to a smaller dwelling in Tel Aviv could not exactly be regarded as a punishment. That is not what the Christian writings predict. They say that we will be *punished* in exile for not accepting the Christian Messiah, and that has not happened.

In addition, the evidence must be *verified* as true. Otherwise it is open to the competitors to simply deny the “evidence.” For example, if Islam offered Mohammed’s miraculous ascent to heaven as “evidence,” other



religions would simply deny that it happened. (Indeed, “evidence” means *that which is evident!*) For this reason the many stories of levitation, traveling at supernatural speed, personal revelations etc. found in many religions are useless as evidence - they are not *known* to be true.

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### SUMMARY

*The scientific method holds that to be seriously considered for truth, you must present positive evidence, the evidence must be unique, and the evidence must be known to be true. Judaism is the only religion which meets all three conditions. It is the only one which offers positive evidence which is unique and which we know came true. (The evidence is presented in chapters III-VII below.) Therefore, as realists, we are faced with only two possibilities - either the evidence for Judaism will be enough to convince us that it is true, or we will give up the search - give up being realists - and fall back on pragmatism. So the investigation of Judaism is all that is necessary to satisfy the responsibility of realism.*

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## III

## BELIEF AND ACTION: CRITERIA FOR RESPONSIBLE DECISION

**T**he Torah presents itself as a system with a variety of virtues: It is beautiful, inspiring, challenging, moral, profound, sensitizing, et cetera; and it is also true. Here I am going to deal only with truth. All the rest is correct, but I'm not going to deal with that. The responsibility to investigate truth is one by which we are bound. Here I am going to try to fulfill that responsibility.

First of all, when I talk about the Torah being true, I am limiting myself to the descriptive parts of the Torah, that is to say, the portion of the Torah which describes facts: This is how the world came into being; these historical events took place including perhaps miraculous historical events, prophecy, revelation, wars, famines, migrations; this is the nature of the human being; this is the nature of the soul; these are the predictions for the future, e.g. the coming of the Messiah, what happens after death; these are the forces that affect human history; this is the way in which God interacts with man and so on. These are all statements which are presented as descriptions of facts. Our question will be: What reasons are there to accept them as being true?

However, experience has taught me that to start an investigation into the truth of Judaism is fruitless without agreeing first on our standards for evaluating such reasons. If I present considerations, evidence, arguments, and justifications, and we don't agree upon the standards by which those arguments should be evaluated, we end up arguing at cross purposes to one another.

What standards should we have for evaluating the evidence? There is a standard due to Descartes that is subject to much discussion, a standard for knowing anything. Descartes said that to know something means to be able to refute absolutely any conceivable alternative. If I claim that I know A, to substantiate my claim to know A I have to be able to defeat any alternative absolutely. So that if I claim to know A, you can defeat my claim to know A if you can propose another alternative B. B needs only to be possible. If I can't eliminate B, and eliminate it absolutely, then I should withdraw my claim to know A. That is the Cartesian standard.

Now, I am going to reject that standard and I'm going to reject it on two grounds. This will be very important because all of us have to a certain extent absorbed the Cartesian standard almost as a matter of instinct. When someone claims to know something and offers an argument to sup-



port his claim, the natural response is to try to defeat it based on the Cartesian standard. (“But isn’t it still possible that something else is true?”) So, it is important for us to agree at the outset that we are rejecting the Cartesian standard.

The first reason for rejecting the Cartesian standard is that if you really live by that standard, you don’t know anything! Any claim to knowledge can be defeated by using the strict Cartesian standard. Descartes himself worried about this. How do you know that you are not dreaming at the present moment? What could you do to prove to yourself, absolutely, that you are not dreaming right now? Pinch yourself? Couldn’t you pinch yourself in a dream? Could you prove to yourself that in three minutes you won’t wake up and find yourself in the twenty-first century saying to yourself: “Ah, that’s what I get for reading historical books. I dreamt myself back one hundred years to some crazy place with inadequate air conditioning,” and so on. Now according to the Cartesian standard you don’t know that you are awake because here is an alternative, a conceivable alternative, that you are really sleeping. You cannot eliminate it absolutely and therefore you do not know that you are awake.

[Of course, Descartes thought he could prove that (most of the time) we are really not sleeping. But today no one credits his proof - we cannot prove that we are not sleeping.]

Bertrand Russell’s example was to ask whether you know that the Universe is really more than five minutes old. Five *minutes* old. So you say, well of course I remember what happened to me yesterday. But, the suggestion is that you came into existence five minutes ago with those memories programmed into your brain. So you say: “Well look, I have a tape of the concert of the Grateful Dead, and this is a forty-five minute tape, so there must have been at least a forty-five minute concert from which it was taped.” The answer is that the world came into existence five minutes ago with the tape and its magnetic impressions already on it. “But look, there are partially decayed deposits of Uranium, and next to the Uranium itself are the standard decay products in the normal proportions.” Again, the suggestion is that this happened five minutes ago with the decay products placed next to the Uranium with the correct proportions. So, here is a conceivable alternative. You think the universe is millions, or billions of years old. The conceivable alternative that the universe is only five minutes old, having come into existence with all those features which you think are evidence of greater age. You can’t eliminate it absolutely. So, according to Descartes then, you don’t know that the universe is more than five minutes old!

You can go on with just about everything that you believe, and if you



have a good enough imagination, you can think up some alternative which you can't eliminate absolutely, and you can defeat every claim to knowledge. So, the Cartesian standard to knowledge is fruitless. It is hopeless. It deprives us of everything that we think we know. Since Descartes started this game, for the last 350 years people have been trying to think up a different standard, a different criterion for knowledge. There is no accepted answer to Descartes except the judgment that he is surely wrong, and that we will someday find an acceptable standard. That is one reason for rejecting the Cartesian standard of knowledge.

[Some will wonder about Descartes suggestion that "I think, therefore I am" is absolute knowledge. But even this has its critics. Why does Descartes assume the subject-predicate form of the thinking process? When we say "It is raining" we don't have a candidate in mind for the "it"! Just as "It is raining" means "There is raining going on", maybe "I think" means "There is thinking going on". Then the inference to the existence of a thing called "I" is without foundation. Even mathematics and logic have their critics. It seems nothing is absolutely established.]

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### SUMMARY

*We are investigating the truth of the descriptive portions of the Torah. The first step is to agree on the standard by which evidence will be evaluated. The Cartesian standard is: to know anything we must eliminate every alternative possibility absolutely. One reason for rejecting this standard is that it wrongly implies that we know almost nothing.*

There is another reason for rejecting Descartes which applies more specifically to Judaism. Whatever is the case in making up our minds about theoretical knowledge, when we come to making practical choices, we have a quite different standard for making those decisions in a responsible fashion. We don't wait for absolute certainty before we act. The standard we employ in making responsible decisions is high *probability vis-a-vis alternatives*. If I have to decide what to do, and I know that what I do depends on my circumstances - i.e.,

what the facts are - and I don't know the facts for sure, I use the information I have to determine which of the alternatives is most probable and then I act on it. If I do so I have acted responsibly, and if I don't do so I have acted irresponsibly.

[This assumes that other things are equal - in particular, the values of the outcomes on the various possible alternatives must be equal. My point is only that the lack of certainty does not reduce us to arbitrary decisions.]

This is true for all of my decisions: what profession to master, where to live, whom to marry, what to do with my spare cash, how to handle my health and so forth. In all cases, for myself, and especially when I owe



you something, you expect me to act responsibly with respect to the obligation that I have to you. That is the standard up to which I am held. I cannot plead that I didn't have a Cartesian proof and that is why I didn't act.

So, for example, I borrow your car, and you tell me: "Listen, you can use the car, but you should know that the brakes might have a problem. So, if you hear a squeak or something, take it to the garage and have it fixed before you have an accident." Then you go off for a month's trip. You come back and you notice that sitting in front of your house is what once was your car. Now it looks like an accordion - folded. So you ask me what happened, and I say: "Well, I had an accident - the brakes slipped." You say to me: "But, I warned you. I told you that the brakes might be weak. Did they squeak?" I reply: "Yes, they did squeak." You ask me: "Well, did you take them in to be fixed?" I reply: "No, I didn't take them in to be fixed." You ask me: "Why not?" and I tell you: "Well, it was still *possible* that the squeak didn't mean that the brakes were weak. It was *possible* that the squeak was caused by a loose spring or something else. I didn't have any *proof* that it was the brakes."

I don't think that you would be amused! Even if I didn't have any proof, the probability was that it was the brakes. After all, you told me that they were probably weak, and we know that weak brakes squeak. Given the information that I had, the alternative with the greatest probability was that it was the brakes. I certainly should have taken it in to get it fixed! When I have a decision to make, the responsible way to make the decision is on the basis of the highest probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives.

Now, the key point here is that Judaism is both a matter of *theoretics* (Is there a G-d?, Did He reveal himself at Sinai?, Did He create the world in such and such a fashion?, What is the nature of the soul?) and a matter of *decision*. Judaism is in part a matter of how one chooses to live. Soon it will be the Sabbath. You will have to decide whether to light up a cigarette. During the week you will have to decide whether to have a cheeseburger. These are life decisions. The criterion for making a life decision responsibly is to make the decision on the basis of high probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives. A person who waits for the Cartesian standard to be fulfilled, a person who waits for an absolute refutation of all possible alternatives, is a person who is not behaving responsibly.

Imagine a doctor. You go to the doctor with a terrible pain in your lower right abdomen. The doctor says: "Is this appendicitis or isn't it appendicitis? Look, it could be an attack of nerves. It could be an ulcer. It could be psychosomatic. It could be all sorts of things. Do I have any



proof that it's appendicitis? I don't have any proof. It could be all sorts of things." Meanwhile, the person dies of a ruptured appendix. What would you say? You would say that he is irresponsible. You don't wait for any proof if you have high probability of the truth vis-a-vis the alternatives. That is what determines responsible action.

So, whatever is the case with respect to theoretics, we are people living our lives and making decisions. In particular, we have to make decisions about Judaism. If so, those decisions need to be made on the basis of high probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives, and therefore that is going to be our standard. When I argue that Judaism is true, or argue that some particular aspect of Judaism is true, I feel I have fulfilled my responsibility if I have argued that it has the highest probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives.

For example, I will be arguing in favor of a certain proposition A, and I will present my evidence and someone will say: "I see your evidence, but isn't it still *conceivable* that A is still false, even in light of the evidence?" My answer will be: "Yes, it is conceivable. We are not trying to defeat every conceivable alternative. We are only trying to defeat other alternatives which are *more probable* than A. It is not enough to defeat A by thinking up something conceivable. That is too easy and is not to the point. What someone has to think up is a competitor to A *which has more positive evidence in its favor* than A does. That is much more difficult."

Here is another way of seeing this point. Suppose someone takes the position of a skeptic. (Some say that this is what Socrates did.) "I really don't know what the truth is. But you say that you do know. Well I am prepared to listen. Tell me what you think the truth is, and why you think it is the truth. I am prepared to be convinced *if you can prove it*. I am not going to accept what you believe just because you believe it - there are too many different beliefs for that. But if you can prove it, I will agree." So you present your evidence, your proof, and his response is: "That doesn't really prove it because something else still could be true."

Now what is wrong with the skeptic? What is wrong is that *he puts all the burden of proof on you*. What we need to do is be skeptical of his skepticism! If I present some positive evidence that my belief is true, it is not enough for him to merely point out that it might still be false: *he has to present positive evidence that it is false*. The mere fact that it *might be false* is not enough for him to reject it. His absolute skepticism - his demand for absolute proof - is unjustified and unreasonable. The reason that it is unjustified is that we are looking for *evidence which justifies action*. We should ask the skeptic: "All right - we gave positive evidence



of truth. If you had to act, would that evidence suffice? Sure, what we believe could still be false. But the evidence is strong enough to require us to act as if it were true. And if you did not act this way, you would be acting irresponsibly. That is enough for us.”

[If all we have is greater probability than alternatives, does this justify absolute belief? What of the principles of Jewish belief which state: “I believe with a perfect faith that...”? Here we are suffering from a mistranslation: *ma'amin* and *emuna* in Hebrew do not mean *faith* but rather *faithfulness* - *living faithfully* to an idea or principle. Proof texts: Genesis 15:6; Exodus 19:9; Numbers 14:11, 20:12; Deut. 28:66; Psalms 116:10, 119:66; Job 4:18, 15:15, among others. When there is enough evidence to justify the decision to act, then we should act with perfect faithfulness. Once the evidence favors surgery, the operation should be carried out without compromise. Jewish belief demands complete faithfulness to principles for which we have adequate evidence of truth.]

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### SUMMARY

*The second reason for rejecting the Cartesian standard for knowledge is that Judaism is a matter of how we act, and we justify action in terms of the highest probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives. Thus to attack a particular proposition for which we provide evidence, it is not enough just to present a possible alternative. One must present an alternative with greater positive evidence.*

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One natural response to this argument goes as follows: A person says: “Look, if I claimed to believe in G-d you could ask me how I know; namely, what evidence I have, what proof I have, what kind of justifications I have. If I claim to be an Atheist, you could also ask me how I know; namely, how do I know there is no G-d, what kind of proof do I have, what kind of evidence do I have? But, I don’t claim anything. I don’t claim to know that there is a G-d, and I don’t claim to know that there is not a G-d. I am an Agnostic. As an Agnostic, I freely admit my ignorance. Together

with Socrates, I claim that I don’t know. Surely you cannot ask me to justify that! What should I justify, not knowing something? I simply don’t know. I am at least honest enough to admit that I don’t know. How can you ask me to make justifications, proofs and arguments when I’m simply confessing my ignorance?”

That observation is a mistake, or perhaps I should say that it is misleading. It is true that intellectually, in terms of belief, there are three possible positions with respect to any particular assertion. I can either believe A, I can disbelieve A, or I can be in doubt over A and neither believe it nor disbelieve it. But for action there are only two positions. You either act as if A were true or you act as if A were false. There is no middle position.



Maybe you can say with respect to the revelation at Sinai: “I don’t know, maybe G-d did command us to keep the Sabbath and maybe He did not. I really haven’t made up my mind.” But the next Sabbath you will either smoke the cigarette or not. There is no third middle ground that you will neither smoke it nor not smoke it. You either commit yourself to keeping the Sabbath laws or you do not. There is no escape from making a choice. Now, with respect to that choice, you can be asked to justify yourself. Because it is a choice, the justification must be based on the highest probability vis-a-vis alternatives.

This means that the actions of the agnostic will belie his claimed intellectual neutrality. To take a simple example, let’s say there is an unsubstantiated rumor that the water supply of Jerusalem is contaminated with typhus. Now, it is only a rumor, but rumors like that don’t surface every day. You ask someone what he thinks about this rumor, and he says: “Well, I really don’t know, I am an agnostic. I don’t know whether it is true or false. After all, I don’t know who started or spread the rumor. It hasn’t been substantiated.” As he is telling you this he goes over to the sink, draws himself a glass of water out of the tap and drinks it down. Now, he may say that he hasn’t made up his mind, but the truth is that he must have made up his mind or he wouldn’t have drunk the water!

Your actions commit you to one position or the other position vis-a-vis the proposition even if you say that you are intellectually neutral. Most people use agnosticism simply as a dodge. It is very rare to meet an agnostic who takes precautions. The agnostic eats his cheeseburger on Yom Kippur (the Jewish day of judgment in which the Jewish people are required to fast) while at the beach without a thought. His agnosticism is simply a way to protect himself against criticism. “You are asking me to justify myself and I don’t make any claims and therefore I am free to eat the cheeseburger.” It is not quite that simple.

If you really don’t know whether Judaism is true or false, that ought to show itself in some kind of *positive* behavior. Perhaps taking some precautions, or perhaps mounting a serious investigation, and in the meantime, during the investigation, maybe playing it safe by not eating the cheeseburger. It is very rare to find an agnostic who does this, which means that either the agnosticism is just a pose, or it is the result of a real intellectual confusion. The person thinks: “Since I am an Agnostic, therefore I do not have to do anything.” That is not correct as you see from any example where a person would be an agnostic about something that made a difference. If you were an Agnostic about the poisoned water, you would not drink it! For the same reason, it would seem that if one really were a true Agnostic, he would logically have to live his life religiously.

That is, he would have to live as if it were true as a precaution against the enormous loss if it is true and he does not live it.

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### SUMMARY

*The agnostic can be intellectually uncertain and so not need to justify his non-belief. But he will have to choose how to live, and he needs to justify that choice. A genuine agnostic about religion would be expected to investigate and take the precaution of living religiously.*

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One last point. Some people are disturbed by a false distinction. They say: “Look, if it’s a matter of limited importance where to invest my money, which profession to train in, or perhaps even whom to marry, these are all limited decisions. They are decisions that can be reversed. I can invest \$10,000 in AT&T, and if I lose it, it’s not the end of my life. Hopefully I’ll make more money in my lifetime. If I train for a profession and it turns out that there is an oversupply, I can train for another profession or move to a coun-

try where the profession is needed. If I marry someone and it is a mistake, I can get a divorce and marry someone else. If it is a limited decision, a decision of limited importance, then maybe I should make it on the sole basis of high probability vis-a-vis alternatives. But, you are asking me to make a decision about my whole life. This is my whole life, it changes everything that I do, my values, my conduct, and so on. Surely for a decision like that I ought to have more than just high relative probability. For that I ought to have a solid proof, or at least something that is very high in probability. Shouldn’t I have higher standards when it comes to my whole life?”

I think that this is a mistake, for three reasons. First, even the decision to lead a religious life-style is reversible. Some people experiment and then decide it is not for them. So that difference between this decision and others is not true. Second, living a religious life does not entail changing everything else. Religious people have families, professions, vacations, computers, etc. etc. Of course, some activities are changed, and priorities are different. But then every decision in life brings some changes. There may be a quantitative difference here - religious living has comparatively many changes. But it is not enough of a difference to justify a completely different criterion for making the decision.

The third reason is this: Even if the stakes are enormous, *if they are balanced between the two alternatives*, then we still use highest probability to make our decision. The mere size of the stakes does not change how we make the decision. You can see this from the following example. Let’s suppose you go to the doctor and he does a checkup of your physical con-



dition. He says that there are symptoms here of two possible diseases. You definitely have one of the two diseases, but it is not clear which one you have. It might be A or B. If you have either disease you will need surgery. If you don't have any surgery, you will be dead in two months. If you have disease A then you need surgery A'. If you have disease B then you need surgery B'. If you get the wrong surgery (say you have disease A and they do surgery B') then you will also die in two months. So, we have a real dilemma here. Should we do any surgery, and if so, which?

Now let's suppose that given the symptoms, and comparing the symptoms with other people who have had the diseases, it turns out that for people in your circumstance there is a 52% chance that you have disease A and a 48% chance that you have disease B. That is only a four percent difference. That doesn't amount to any proof that the surgery is best, or which surgery to do. Would you say "Ah, well, I don't have any proof that surgery is right for me, so therefore I won't take it." I doubt it! All the evidence tells you that without any surgery you will be dead in two months!

Would you say: "But I don't know which surgery to do - I don't have a proof which is best?" If the statistics show that surgery A' gives you a four percent edge on survival, then the four percent edge, which is all that is available to you under the circumstances, is worth grabbing. Here, the fact that it is survival, that it's my whole life, and that it is not just a question of relative inconveniences does not change the criterion of choice at all. The criterion of choice is: How can I get a higher probability of survival? The relative probability is only four percent and that doesn't matter. I want that extra four percent probability!

Sometimes I put it this way. Suppose that you're hanging over a cliff, and that you're holding on to a branch of a tree waiting to be rescued, but it is not quite clear that the branch will hold you indefinitely. It is creaking, and there is another branch that you could switch to without risk of falling, but it is not clear to you that the other branch is stronger. Suppose that you know something about trees and you estimate that the probability of the second branch being stronger is maybe three percent greater than the probability of the strength of the branch you are holding onto. Do you say: "Well, it's my life. Since it's my life, I want *proof* that it is stronger. I don't make moves with my life unless I have proof that it is better." Of course not. You have a three percent increase on the probability of surviving on the second branch. **YOU MOVE!** You purchase a three percent increase in your probability of survival. So, the fact that the stakes are large, in this case the largest possible, survival, doesn't change the cri-

terion of choice at all. The criterion of choice is always the same - higher probability of truth vis-a-vis the alternatives.

[Of course, the alternatives and their consequences need to be carefully specified for the analogy to work. I am describing both alternatives - living a religious life and living a secular life - as offering infinite consequences. This will be true if each defines values which are infinitely valuable. Then deciding how to live will be deciding how to fulfill the real values. So the analogy works like this: right surgery/right branch gets life, wrong surgery/wrong branch gets death; living according to the truth gets infinite good, living according to the opposite gets infinite bad. In this case it is correct to go with the alternative with the better evidence even it is only a little better. Sometimes it is objected that the analogy fails because I have left out the relative costs of the two alternatives. Presumably switching branches costs nothing, and the costs of the surgery are not mentioned. What if it costs \$100, or \$10,000, or \$1,000,000 to switch branches, or to have surgery A' in stead of B': surely there is some price at which the added few per cent probability of survival would not be worth the cost? In the case of the Torah, if the evidence for truth is not very strong, then perhaps the cost of a religious life-style should be a factor in the decision. This objection admits two replies. First, the decision to sacrifice the few per cent advantage may reflect a finite value for one's life! People risk their lives for all sorts of trivial reasons! Second, it is not clear that the religious life-style has an extra cost. If we take the statistics of violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, divorce, suicide, illiteracy, etc., it seems that the religious life-style may be a bargain!]

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### SUMMARY

*The fact that the choice of religion affects one's whole life - values, behavior, priorities, etc. - does not change the criterion for the choice. The reason is that the consequences of making the right or wrong decision are equally great. Thus highest probability vis-a-vis alternatives applies to the choice of religion just as it does to all other decisions.*

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So, we will be looking for a sufficiently high probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives. Now, the specific strategy that we are going to use in verifying the Torah has two facets that I want to explain to you. First, some parts of the descriptive portion of the Torah can be investigated directly, e.g. statements about historical events. Some of them are predictions that were made about times which have already past and so can be investigated at present. On the other hand, some of the portions of the descriptive content of the Torah cannot be investigated directly: what happens to the soul after death; all predictions still to be fulfilled in the

future, for example, there will be a Messiah one day, haven't occurred yet. Those that can be investigated directly, we will investigate. What about the ones that cannot be investigated directly?

The answer here is as follows. We have a single coordinated body of information. Whenever you have a coordinated body of information, some of which you can test directly and some of which you cannot test



directly, if the portion that can be tested directly tests true, then that gives credibility to the rest. You do not artificially select, and say: “That which I have tested I believe. The rest of it I haven’t tested, so I have no reason to accept it.” On the contrary, if the portion that can be tested tests true, then it lends credibility to the rest.

This is true in any area of life. So, for example, in science, any theory has an infinity of consequences. You never test any reasonable proportion of that infinity! We don’t say: “Well, Einstein predicted that when light pass the sun, it will be slightly warped. We tested it on fourteen occasions and so we know that on those fourteen occasions the light rays bent. What about the rest of the time when we were not looking? Oh, then I don’t have any reason to believe anything because I didn’t test at any of those times.” What we say is that the portion which we tested is an indication of the reliability of the rest. Similarly with respect to an encyclopedia, or a newspaper, or any other source of information: when they tell you things that you directly test, and they test true, that gives them a certain credibility. You then extend that credibility to the rest.

Suppose someone says: “I don’t believe anything unless I test it myself. I don’t trust anybody else’s opinion, and I don’t trust anybody else’s research. I only believe what I saw myself.” He will believe next to nothing about the world. I usually ask such a person if he knows who his parents are. How do you know? Have you done a DNA test? Probably not. It is pretty expensive and pretty rare. You probably trust them because they told you. But, they could be lying. You didn’t fingerprint of your mother when you came out! So how do you know that it is your mother? It is because she told you so many things and usually she is credible. It is still *conceivable* that you were adopted, but it is *very unlikely*, and that is good enough for you.

What about the past in general? You can’t go back and observe the revolutionary war. You trust it because people wrote books about it. There are maps. There are letters. There are artifacts. That is to say that you trust someone else’s observations, someone else’s reports. Do you know that there is such a place as China? How do you know? You were not ever in China (most of you anyway). Do you know the boiling point of Mercury? How do you know? You read it in a book, that is to say you trust the author of the book, the scientist who performed the experiment.

We are always accepting the statements of other people. We don’t do it blindly. We know that some people lie. We also know that some people are competent in certain areas and incompetent in other areas, and we may accept their statements in one area and reject them in other areas. We are selective with respect to what we believe. But we must extend gen-

eral credibility to a source on the basis of testing some of the assertions of that source. If you don't do that, you will know next to nothing.

That is how we make our decisions in any other area of life. If I have to decide what to eat, what profession to go into, or where to live, that is how I make those decisions. Now a person who makes decisions in every other area of life on this basis, and when it comes to religion says, "Oh no, for religion I have different standards. Here I want a much more strict accounting. I want an independent *proof* of every assertion," such a person is playing fast and loose. Such a person uses one standard with respect to every other decision, but with respect to this decision, he is using a different standard. That is special pleading: he is trying to protect himself against the conclusion. I am only asking that a person use the same standards with respect to religion that he uses with respect to other decisions.

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### SUMMARY

*The descriptive portion of the Torah can be divided into that part which can at present be investigated directly, and that part which cannot. If the investigation of the first yields sufficient evidence to accept it as true, then the second is accepted as credible also on the grounds of belonging to the same body of information as the first.*

The second aspect of this strategy for verifying the Torah is this. Let's suppose that you have an area of life, and that you think that in this area you know how to explain the phenomena that you observe. It could be the behavior of billiard balls on a billiard table, certain types of chemical reactions, pictures of particles scattered in a cloud chamber, the behavior of missiles and so on. You have what looks to you to be a catalog of all the relevant causal agents for that realm. Then you come across a new phenomenon which seems to belong to the same realm, and for which your catalog of agents is insufficient. I don't just mean that you haven't figured out yet how to explain the new phenomenon. I mean that you have an argument which shows that your causal agents cannot explain it. What do you do under those circumstances?

I'll give you an example. In the early 1920's, there was an investigation of the structure of the atom. There was a period when people thought that the nucleus was composed solely of protons. Now protons are positively charged, and the law of electrostatics is that like charges repel. The question was, how come all those protons are sitting buddy-buddy in the nucleus? Why aren't they repelling each other all over creation?

Now, at that time, the only two non-dynamic forces that were in the



catalog of science were electromagnetics and gravity. Electromagnetic forces are pulling them apart. Could gravity be holding them together? That is impossible because gravity is order of magnitudes weaker than electromagnetic forces . The standard example is this. You have a bar magnet, you hold it over an iron nail, and as you get closer and closer to the nail, suddenly the nail will jump up to the bar magnet. Now you can look at this as a tug of war. On the one hand you have the bar magnet pulling it up. On the other hand, you have the *whole earth* pulling it down, and the bar magnet wins very easily. That gives you an idea of how much more powerful electromagnetic forces are than gravity.

So, why are the protons sitting together in the nucleus? The answer is the only thing it could be. There must be another force. The *nuclear force*. We have to expand our catalog of forces because the forces we have in it cannot possibly explain this phenomena. We must have missed some other causal agency which is responsible for this phenomenon. That is how we operate in all of life. It doesn't have to be something as sophisticated as nuclear physics. For example, someone was murdered. I checked the butler, I checked the driver, and I checked the delivery man. They all have air tight alibis. What do I conclude? It must be somebody else. These people couldn't have done it. I'll have to go look for somebody else.

Now, we have a similar structure. We are going to take a look at Jewish history. In particular, we are going to look at unique features of Jewish history, features which separate Jewish history from the history of all the other nations. I mean this in a strong sense. Of course, everybody's history is different from everyone else's; otherwise it wouldn't be theirs, it would be someone else's! I mean that Jewish history has features which are different from the features which all other nations histories share. There are certain characteristics *which all other nations have in common, and Jewish history is distinguished from them in those respects*. Now, if I look at history and that is what I find, I have to ask myself for a causal agency which can explain it.<sup>7</sup>

Let me make this vivid for you. Imagine a Martian visiting Earth and being introduced to all the flora and fauna, and in particular being introduced to mankind, and studying the history of various civilizations and forming certain regularities. Maybe they won't be very profound, deep, or theoretical, but still: this is the way nations react to famine, to war, to

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7. For example, contrast the following two cases. Suppose everyone has a different number of hairs on his head. Then there is no reason why we should have a special explanation why you have exactly 524,719,003 hairs on your head. But suppose that everyone else has exactly 111,111,111 hairs on his head, and you alone have 524,719,003 hairs. That would require a special explanation for you.



peace, to success, to failure, to cultural achievement, to cultural stagnation, to empire, to dissolution of empire and so on. Now, the Martian investigates the Chinese, the Romans, the Nigerians, the Eskimos, the Incas and so on. Imagine that he has done that for every culture and civilization except for the Jews and he has formulated his rules for how human beings respond to various life circumstances.

Then he comes to investigate Jewish history. Now, in broad terms there are two possibilities here. Either he will say, "Oh yes, more of the same. What happened to the Jews in the fifteenth century is similar to what happened to the Incas in the tenth century. What happened to the Jews in the nineteenth century is similar to what happened to the Chinese in the fourth century. You can see parallels. Things are pretty much the same." Then you would expect Jewish history to be explained by the same forces, the same powers, and the same causes that explain everyone else's history. That is one possibility.

The other possibility is that the Martian will say, "This is absolutely unique. It contradicts all my expectations. It doesn't fit into the patterns of other nations and civilizations. It is something brand new." I am going to argue that it is brand new - that an honest Martian's perspective would lead to the conclusion that Jewish history is unlike any other nation's history with respect to the way in which they are all alike.

If so, what must the Martian conclude? The Martian must conclude that there is something unique that is producing this unique historical record. The kinds of causes that led to the rise, development, and fall of other civilizations, all of which have patterns in common, are not responsible for the development of the Jewish civilization because it is unique

in these respects. So that, he will have to add to his catalog agencies, some new agency X. Now by looking carefully at the particular unique aspects of Jewish history, he can infer certain characteristics that X must possess to be capable of producing these unique phenomena.

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### SUMMARY

*If we have method of explaining a type of event and we find an event of that type which our method cannot explain, we must expand the method to include something which will explain the new event. The methods of explaining the history of other nations and cultures will not explain Jewish history. Hence something must be added to explain Jewish history.*

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Let me just illustrate for you how a portion of the argument will go. I am not presenting the argument, I am not defending the argument, I am simply illustrating the methodology. I will take much longer to present the details in a much more comprehensive fashion



later. Look at the survival of the Jewish people over the last 2000 years. I will argue that it is unique. No nation underwent that kind of historical and cultural pressure and survived. There is nothing remotely approximating what they experienced. Since it is unique, then some agency is responsible for it. That is the X that is being added to the catalog of historical agents.

What must this X be like? Well, what did it do? For one thing, it maintained the existence of a civilization under conditions that should have lead to its disappearance. What must such a force be like? It must have some sort of considerable energy or power at its disposal. This is not a small effect. This is maintaining a civilization involving millions of people over thousands of years.

Secondly, this power must have some considerable intelligence at its disposal. It is maintaining a civilization! It is maintaining a complex pattern of human behavior, human belief, certain values, a certain literature, a certain world view and so on. Third, this power must also be interested, in particular, in this specific civilization. After all, it is only this civilization that this power causes to survive.

So, from this unique effect - that is to say, the existence of a civilization in conditions under which other civilizations have disintegrated - you can infer certain that such a force must have a certain amount of power, intelligence, and a commitment to the Jewish way of life. Otherwise it would not explain the existence of this civilization. *Now those are descriptions of G-d.* That is how you can take a unique factor of Jewish history, explain it by postulating a force that is responsible for it, and then infer from the unique phenomena some minimal characteristics of that force and arrive at evidence for G-d's existence.

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#### SUMMARY

*If Jewish history cannot be explained by other methods, then we infer a new causal agency. That agency must have certain characteristics to be able to explain Jewish history - power, intelligence and a particular concern for Jewish survival must be among them. These are descriptions of G-d.*

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IV  
TRUE PREDICTIONS

**W**e have two conclusions from the last two chapters. (1) To act responsibly we must seek the truth and use our best estimate of the truth as our basis for action. Action on the basis of pragmatic considerations without regard to truth are irresponsible. Similarly, waiting for absolute proof before acting is irresponsible. (2) The exact weight of evidence required to mandate action cannot be stated precisely (and is even somewhat controversial). What we need show is that there is enough evidence to meet whatever standard is used in making responsible decisions. The appeal is to consistency: If you stick to your usual standards and act responsibly, then you must live according to the Torah.

Now we will begin a review of the evidence. I will start with two cautionary remarks. First, when I present evidence, the significance of the evidence is that it makes it probable that the Torah being true. To respond that it is still conceivable that the Torah is false is quite correct, but irrelevant. *The goal is not to remove every conceivable alternative, it is to present the Judaism as a more probable alternative.*

Second, we are now gathering evidence. To gather evidence means no one piece of evidence need carry the case by itself. This is similar to a courtroom procedure. If you want to convict a murderer, just finding his fingerprints at the scene of the crime isn't enough, just finding a weapon similar to the one that caused the murder in his house is not enough, just having a motivation is not enough, just his having been seen at the place of the murder at the time of the murder is not enough. But, when you put

them all together, it can be enough. So, again, it will not be relevant to respond that "This piece of evidence is not enough to justify believing that the Torah is true." Of course it isn't. No one piece of evidence is enough. It is all the evidence together which is enough. We won't begin to sum up all the evidence until the last chapter. The point, then, is for each piece of evidence to be seen as relevant, to see that the most likely explanation of the evidence is that the Torah is true.

In Deuteronomy 28-30 there is a

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**SUMMARY**

*The purpose of the evidence is to show that the Torah is more probably true than any alternative. Citing **merely conceivable** alternative is not relevant. This conclusion is based on the **sum of all the evidence**. No one piece of evidence can justify the conclusion by itself.*

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prediction of what will happen to the Jewish people if they don't live up to the standards of the Torah. It predicts conquest accompanied by wanton slaughter of the population: men, woman, children, old, young, and so on. It predicts an exile resulting in world-wide scatter, and that during this period of world-wide scatter, Jews will have no independent government. One result of the exile is that some Jews will be brought back by boat to Egypt to be sold as slaves, and they will not be purchased. Nevertheless, the Jewish people will survive, will never completely be destroyed, and will ultimately return to the land of Israel. It also predicts that the conqueror will speak a language that the Jewish people don't understand.

Now as we said in chapter II, what is crucial about this prediction is that it should be a *unique* prediction, namely, a prediction no one else can explain. Because if it is a prediction that other people can explain, it no longer functions as a crucial experiment. It no longer distinguishes between what you are claiming and what others can claim. So, let's ask ourselves about each of the details in this prediction, whether their coming true could have been explained by a sociological analysis of the times, or by a competing ideology - or whether it is something that someone could explain only from the Jewish point of view.<sup>8</sup>

[Of course, if someone should agree with our prediction *from our sources*, then his making that prediction cannot count for him *against us*! If Christians and Moslems accept Deuteronomy 28-30 and predict that the Jews will be exiled as a result of their failure to live up to the Torah, when that prediction comes true it does not give Christianity and Islam positive evidence against Judaism, since we all agree on that prediction.]

Now, let's see which of the details of this prediction could have been explained by an observer with a point of view other than that of the Torah. The prediction of conquest is not very difficult. Everybody gets conquered sooner or later.

There was a prediction of total destruction: a decimation of the population and exile. That was rare in the ancient world. It happened, but it was rare because the purpose of conquest was economic. Typically it was a question of acquiring colonies and taxing them. You can't tax people if you slaughter the population and exile them. Now, I'm not talking about theft. Of course you want to take all the gold and silver, gems, fine linen and so on. You may take the young, fine, strong men off as slaves. You may want to take the good looking, young woman for sexual purposes. But, you don't wantonly slaughter the rest of the population because

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8. I should mention that this prediction was written at least two thousand years ago. Jewish sources say it was written 3300+ years ago. Others might disagree as to when the Bible was written, as to how many authors it had, how many editors it had and so on, but no one believes that the account of the Roman conquest and exile was written after the Roman conquest.



there is no point in destroying your tax base! During their 300 years of rule, the Romans did this only to Carthage and the Jews. So, the prediction of the wanton slaughter of the population and exile were predictions that could not be anticipated to really occur because they were not the normal procedure in the ancient world.

Now, let's take the prediction that the conqueror will speak a language that you don't understand. Why should I think that? Neighboring countries typically understood one another's languages. There was enough commerce and travel for each to be familiar with the language of the other. Couldn't we have been conquered by a neighbor? Alternatively, couldn't we be conquered by a country that spoke an "international language?" Many Jews understood Greek. Greek was in those days similar to what English is today. Business contracts, trade and diplomacy were conducted in Greek. Had any Greek speaking nation conquered and exiled us, this prediction would have been false. But the Romans conquered us and they spoke Latin. Latin was a language with which Jews were not familiar.

If a nation is going to be exiled, who says that it will end up all over the world? Why should that be an automatic consequence of exile? Not everyone who was exiled from their countries ended up with identifiable communities all over the world. Even when the Babylonians exiled us 500 years earlier, we didn't end up all over the world. The vast majority of the population was taken off to Babylon, a large group went to Alexandria in Egypt, but there were many places in the world without identifiable groups of Jews.

If they were going to end up in exile, how could one predict with confidence that some of them will be taken back to Egypt in boats to be sold, and that there will not be anybody there to buy them? Why should one think that? It is true that there was a slave trade flourishing and that there were known slave routes, but who is to say that it would definitely happen?

If you are going to predict exile scattered all over the world, how can you be sure that at no point will any Jewish society form an independent government in some portion of the earth's surface? Don't forget, we are talking about two thousand years ago. Two thousand years ago the world wasn't organized with maps and boundary lines so that every square millimeter of the earth's surface belongs to one nation or another, and sometimes to two or three. On the contrary, there were vast areas of the earth's surface that were unclaimed, unsettled, and simply wild; for example, parts of Russia, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Central Africa. Who is to say that Jewish exiles would not form an independent society



in one of these places?

Now that means that for each of these predictions, if I don't have a Jewish perspective, and I look at it neutrally, or I look at it as a Buddhist, a Hindu, or a Taoist, a Confucianist, or as an atheist, I would expect them not to occur, and I would not be able to explain them if they did occur.

If I were to assign probabilities to each of these detailed predictions from any of those non-Jewish points of view, the probabilities would be very low. Total destruction and exile, let's say that this occurred in 10% of all ancient wars. Then a non-Jewish observer would give it a probability of 1/10. How often did the conqueror speak an unknown language? We don't know. Neighbors did fight, and the languages of great empires were widely known. Let's say generously that it happened a quarter of the time giving us a probability of 1/4. Being scattered all over the world as a result of exile, as far as I know, didn't happen at all. Strictly I suppose the probability should be zero! But let's be generous and give it a probability of 1/10. To take a nation that is scattered all over the world and thus be unable to organize itself into an independent society, again, I don't know what the probability of that would be, so I'll give it a probability of 1/4. To survive under these conditions and return to one's land has never happened in the history of the world - strictly speaking we should give it a probability of zero! But let's be generous and say 1/10.

Now, when you have predictions for a sequence of events, and each event has a probability, and you want to know the probability of them all coming true, you multiply the probabilities. So, we multiply  $1/10 * 1/4 * 1/10 * 1/4 * 1/10$  and we come out with a probability of 1/16000. This is a very small number. That is the confidence that a neutral observer would have in this prediction. What is the likelihood that a prediction like this would come true? One chance in every sixteen thousand tries. Given the evidence the observer had to go on, there is no way for him to explain why it came true.

But, it happened. That being the case, this is what I called earlier a unique prediction. It is a prediction whose truth no one else can explain. Had anyone seen the prediction before it happened, the response should have been that this is fantasy. Therefore, when it comes true, it contributes to the truth of Judaism. It is a relevant piece of evidence.

[ Four technical remarks. (1) Many details from Deuteronomy 28 have been omitted. There are two reasons: either the language in which they are expressed is poetical and cannot be precisely defined (and thus we cannot prove that the text means specifically what in fact happened), or they are predictions which are very likely to happen in the context of destruction and exile, so that they would not significantly lower the probability. (2) Some of the probabilities above are *conditional* - world-wide scatter *given exile*; no independence *given world-wide scatter*; survival and return *given scatter*. Only



if they are understood this way is it appropriate to multiply them to get the probability of all the events occurring. My numbers are meant as (overly generous) estimates of these probabilities. (3) The probabilities are for the predictions *coming true*; they are not for the predictions *having been made*. We can easily think of reasons why someone would want to *make* a frightening prediction, but we would be very surprised if what was predicted occurred. (4) Since there are many nations, perhaps it is not surprising if one of them suffered the predictions of Deut. 28. Why then do we regard it as surprising that it happened to us? Because *we predicted that it would happen to us, and it did*. Consider this parallel. Suppose we set 1000 coins flipping and predict that one of them will show ten heads in a row. That would not be surprising. But if we pick a *particular* coin and predict that it will show ten heads in a row, then the fact that there are other coins flipping is irrelevant - the odds against this coin are still 1024 to one. ]

Now could it have come true by accident? Yes, it could have. I freely grant that because we are not playing Descartes. We are not interested in a mere a possibility. We are interested in a possibility for which there is more evidence. Anything can happen by chance, but the likelihood of this happening by chance is one in sixteen thousand. What this indicates is that whoever wrote this had access to a source of information beyond the natural. What that source was and how to describe it we don't know so far. We are only drawing minimal inference from the events. That seems to me to be what the evidence indicates.

Finally, I will repeat again that I am not trying to prove that Judaism is true based on this one prediction. One true prediction rarely proves that a theory is true. I'm merely pointing out that this is relevant evidence. The full justification will come later when we take all the evidence together. But this is certainly a piece of objective evidence which ought to interest us. It ought to show us that the quest of the realist to find a truth which can be justified is not a quest in vain.

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### SUMMARY

*We are looking for positive unique evidence of the Torah's truth. Each piece of evidence must increase the probability that the Torah is true. To do this, it must not be explained by any other point of view. One such piece of evidence is the prediction in Deuteronomy 28-30 that the Jewish people will be conquered, slaughtered, exiled, scattered world-wide, never achieve independence, survive and return to Israel. No other point of view would give such a prediction a probability of greater than 1/16000. That it came true is positive unique evidence.*

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## V

## ARCHAEOLOGY

The Torah contains a vast amount of historical material. Evidence that the Torah is true must also apply to this material. Since questions have been raised about the factual accuracy of the Bible as an account of ancient history, we ought to discuss that for a bit.

The Bible talks about the lives of the Patriarchs, wars, migrations, famines, marriages, and all kinds of other events in ancient history. How reliable is that record? Here is a popular way to investigate the reliability of the Bible. The Bible is what is in question and therefore we should not assume that it is true. Now, if we can find other ancient records, for example, ancient hieroglyphics, Syrian records, or Babylonian records, then we could check the Bible against them. If the Bible agrees with them, that is indication and evidence that the Bible is correct. If the Bible disagrees with them, then that shows that the Bible is incorrect. That is an objective, neutral way of assessing whether the Bible's account of history is correct or incorrect.

Does that strike you as fair? I should hope not because it isn't fair. The mere fact that the Bible would contradict other ancient records doesn't prove that the Bible is wrong. Maybe the other records are wrong! A mere contradiction only shows that somebody is wrong. Why assume that the Bible is wrong? That would just be a hidden prejudice against the Bible. When there is a contradiction between the Bible and other ancient sources, then the question has to be raised: How can we best understand the nature of the contradiction, and which source do we rely upon?

Now, in making that evaluation you must know one fact - all ancient histories were written as propaganda. This is something upon which historians and archaeologists agree. The function of ancient histories was to glorify contemporary powers, and therefore they would not record their own defeats.<sup>9</sup> After all, the scribes were their employees. You see this, for example, in the following type of historical chain of events. You read in the hieroglyphs that Pharaoh X raised a great army and conquered a number of provinces, and his son Pharaoh X Jr. raised even a larger army and conquered more provinces. Then, there is a hundred year gap in the history. What happened during that 100 years? For that you have to go to the Babylonian records. That is when the Babylonians were kicking the stuffing out of the Egyptians. The Egyptians don't record that because that doesn't glorify their empire. They just leave it out.

9. See *Ebla*, Berment and Weizman, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979: Great Britain), p. 61; *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed., Bright (SCM Press, 1986: London), p. 122.



An example is the question of the Exodus. Why is it that no ancient Egyptian records mention the Exodus? The answer is that the Egyptians *never* recorded their defeats. Therefore, since the Exodus was a massive defeat, you would not expect them to record it. So, its absence from their records is not evidence against the Exodus.

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#### SUMMARY

*If there is a contradiction between Jewish Biblical history on the one hand, and the description you find in other ancient sources on the other hand, we must not assume that the Bible is wrong, but rather look for the best way to resolve the contradiction. Since the other ancient sources were written as propaganda, they are likely to be at fault.*

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Now if we are talking about the accuracy of ancient history, the key question is archaeology. Archaeology is supposed to uncover the actual evidence that these events did or did not occur. I am going to give you a brief review of the situation in archaeology with respect to the Biblical narrative. Most of this is referred to in a book called *Biblical Personalities in Archaeology* by Leah Bronner.

One hundred years ago it was assumed that Biblical history going back roughly to the time of King David and Solomon is more or less accurate. Bertrand Russell wrote in his *History of Western Civilization* that we can *presume* that David and Solomon were real kings. But, beyond David and Solomon, there was no evidence for anything whatsoever, and the prevailing view was that it was myth. It was simply stories invented to glorify mythical, that is to say non-existent, ancestors so as to create a great history for the nation. Many nations did that, such as the Greeks, and it was assumed that the Jews did it as well.

One of the ways that you can tell if this myth-making goes on is that the people writing the myth project into the past their own conditions of existence. They didn't know that 500-1000 years before life was very different. They assumed that life was more or less the same as their conditions of life and projected backwards. Then, what we find from archaeology is that the conditions were quite different from what was described in the myth, and we know therefore that it was a myth. For example, they may have projected back weapons that they didn't have, domesticated animals that they didn't have, trade routes that they didn't have, settlements that they didn't have and so on. That is how you determine if it was myth. So there was the same assumption about the Biblical account of history before David and Solomon.

But in the case of the Bible, archaeology has revealed the exact opposite. Archaeology has uncovered a myriad of details, details that the Bible records about the quality of life and the conditions of life of the Patriarchs



which turn out to be accurate to the last detail. *These details are accurate in ways that are utterly inexplicable if you think that this is a normal process of myth formation.*

So, for example, Abraham in all his wanderings is never associated with the Northern part of Israel, only the Southern part of Israel. Now in the period to which Abraham is assigned by the Bible, the Northern part of Israel wasn't settled. Later, when supposedly the myth was being made up, it was settled. If someone were writing it later, and projecting his conditions of existence on the past, there would be no reason for him to discriminate against the Northern part of Israel.

Another example: the names Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lavan, and Joseph were in common usage in the Patriarchal period and dropped out of usage thereafter. These names appear in archaeological inscriptions from that period and no later period. In the Bible those names are used only in the book of Genesis. Now, somebody five hundred years later is supposed to be making up this myth. How is it that he just happened to get right names for that period of time?

It was custom in that period of time that if a couple was childless, the husband would take a handmaid of the wife as a concubine and have children with her. If the original wife were then to have a child, the child of the handmaid was protected by law against being disinherited. This legal protection did not exist in later centuries. In the Bible, we have Abraham and Sarah doing this. If a handmaid had a child in the manner just described, the law of the time forbade expelling the child of the handmaid. This explains why, when Sarah told Abraham to throw Ishmael out of the house, the Torah says that it was "Very evil in Abraham's eyes." It was very evil because it went against the local prevailing law. It wasn't forbidden in later centuries, but in that century it was forbidden. If this had been made up five hundred years later and projected onto the past, it would be inexplicable how they could have gotten this right.

An argument that they used that the account depicted in the Bible was a myth was the idea of camels being domesticated. The Patriarchs are described as having used camels for transportation. It was assumed that this was an anachronism. Camels were domesticated later, but of course the later people didn't know that their ancestors didn't have camels, and if they had camels they would of course have pictured their ancestors as having camels. Their great ancestors couldn't be less than they were.

But, it turns out that this was just archaeological ignorance. We have the eighteenth century B.C.E. Canophorin tablets in Northern Syria which list the domesticated animals and in which the camel is specifically mentioned. Another archaeological discovery depicts a camel in a kneeling

position. A seal dating back to this period depicts a rider sitting on a camel. So, it turns out to be an accurate report of the details, not a later anachronistic projection into the past.

There are many examples dealing with Joseph. Take for example the price of a slave. Joseph is sold for twenty pieces of silver. That was the accurate price of a slave in Joseph's time, and at no other time. Slaves were cheaper beforehand, and they got increasingly more and more expensive later. Imagine someone five hundred years later putting in that detail. How would he know what the price of slaves were five hundred years earlier? He certainly wouldn't get it right by accident.

You have the same thing regarding sleeping in Egypt on beds. In Palestine at that time they slept on the ground, and in Egypt they slept on beds, and so therefore the Torah mentions explicitly that when Jacob was in Egypt, he died on a bed.

The investiture of Joseph as viceroy in Egypt follows the pattern from that period. He stood before Pharaoh and had to be shaved because the Pharaohs in that period were shaved. He had a collar put around his neck and a ring put on his finger. There are hieroglyphs of that specific procedure, and of riding in a chariot second to the king. All of these details are accurate.

Now, that means that at least the details of life are corroborated by archaeology. So, the normal assumption that this was written later and projected on the past simply doesn't hold up. It is simply not correct.

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### SUMMARY

*Many nations created myths about the lives of their ancestors by projecting later conditions of life onto earlier periods of history. Archeology proves that the Bible did not project anachronisms in this way.*

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Now, I will not say that there are no problems. There are some problems. Some of the problems have to be looked at very carefully to understand what kinds of problems they are. For example, the Exodus. This is a textbook case. If the Exodus took place, what kind of archaeological evidence would you expect to find? You are talking about a large number of people leaving Egypt. You would expect to find implements,

clothing, vessels, weapons, and these sorts of things scattered all over the desert. What about bones? People die, especially if they were in a desert for forty years. The truth is though, we don't find anything. Nothing as of yet has been found as archaeological evidence of the Exodus.

Is this then evidence against the Torah's account? It depends on what is being tested. Are you testing the Biblical story? If you are testing the Biblical story, you have to test *it in its own terms*. You have to accept all



of it. It will do no good to take one element of the Biblical story, and then graft onto it other non-Biblical hypotheses and then test the conglomerate, because that is a conglomerate that no one believes in.

Now in the case of the Exodus the Torah says explicitly that *during the forty year period their clothing didn't wear out* (Deut. 8:4). Now, if you are going to look through the desert for scattered clothing, then you are not testing the Bible. *The Bible would say that you won't find anything!* The Bible says that they are not there. If you are looking for clothes, you are testing the assumption that there was an Exodus as the Bible says *together with your naturalistic account of the evidence which the Bible denies. Nobody believes that!* To test the Biblical story you have to take it in all its own details.

Similarly with the bones. The Bible gives no details of how the people died. But Jewish tradition (Midrash) records the following. Each year on the ninth of Av they dug a mass grave, everybody laid down in the grave, and in the morning those who survived got up, and the rest that were dead were covered up and that was their grave. They didn't die from time to time, everyday more or less scattered all over the desert.

Furthermore, the Sinai desert is a big place and sands shift over time. We are talking about sands shifting over a period of three thousand years. Where exactly would you dig? How deep should you dig? How many holes should you put down to have a chance of finding anything? It is not even thirty-nine burial places because in certain places they stayed for many years. There are maybe twenty burial places in the entire Sinai desert. How many holes do you need to put down to have a reasonable probability of finding twenty burial places, each burial place being something like three square blocks? So, the fact that they haven't found the kind of evidence they are looking for is no proof whatsoever. It is not

even evidence against the idea of an Exodus.

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### SUMMARY

*When testing a Biblical statement against the archeological evidence, one must use the whole Biblical statement with all its details. One cannot take part of the Biblical statement and add non-Biblical naturalistic details and test the combination since no one believes the combination.*

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Kathleen Kenyan excavated Jericho. She says the best date we have for the entry of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is 1400 B.C.E. She says that there is a hundred and fifty year gap between the destruction of Jericho and the entry of the Jewish people into the land. Therefore she concludes that the Jews couldn't have been the ones responsible for destroying Jericho. They just attributed it their ancestors in order to glorify them.

Now how does she arrive at her conclusion that Jericho was destroyed no later than 1550 B.C.E.? [For the details of what follows, see *Biblical Archeological Review*, March/April 1990 pp. 44-56.] She based her argument on the absence of imported Cypriot pottery. A certain style of pottery from Cyprus was imported into the area from 1550 to 1400 B.C.E., and she found none of it at Jericho. Therefore she concluded that Jericho must have been destroyed earlier than 1550 B.C.E.

But this conclusion is very weak. It can be attacked in at least four different ways. (1) Method: conclusions based on what you don't find are always weak (see below). (2) She herself says that Jericho was not on any of the major trade routes - is that where you expect to find imported pottery? (3) She sank two shafts into what she herself describes as the poor section of the city. Is that where you expect to find imported pottery? (4) She totally ignored the dating of local pottery which had been found in earlier excavations which do come from dates later than 1550 B.C.E.

Now bear in mind that she was knighted by the British government for her contributions to archeology! I won't speculate what leads to this kind of sloppy argumentation. But surely we don't have to give up our views in the face of criticism like this!

What has happened in Biblical archaeology in the last one hundred years is that it started with a completely negative mind set: none of the Biblical narrative happened, it was all made up. Little by little, piece by piece, that mind set has been refuted in a myriad of details. That doesn't mean they are giving up entirely, they are still holding on to some of the things which they feel haven't yet been established. But this should give us two consequences. One: the trend is gradual verification. There is gradual archaeological corroboration of the Torah's account of history. Two: it should give us some insight into their mental set. They started off with a complete negative, and they are grudgingly admitting piece by piece that some parts have been verified. That means to say that they are imposing an unreasonable standard of proof for the Bible.

Archaeology can sometimes establish a positive. If you find something such as a city that was burnt, pillaged, or destroyed, you could assume that there was some sort of military action. It is very difficult for archaeology to establish a negative - for archaeology to establish that something didn't happen. In order for that, you need to know that if it happened I ought to find it here in such and such a place. That is a very tricky judgment. Even if it happened, how do you know you ought to have found it here? Maybe you will find it someplace else. Maybe this isn't the place that you thought it was. There are some cities that have gone through three or four identifications. Remember: they assumed that



there were no domesticated camels because they didn't happen to find that cylindrical seal, or that particular hieroglyph. Then they found it and discovered that there were domesticated animals.

So beware of archaeology when it claims to find a negative. To establish that a war didn't take place or that a settlement wasn't there, or that so and so wasn't the king is very difficult. When archaeology claims to establish a positive, then it is more credible. Of course, even then it requires interpretation of what was found, and that is not completely reliable. In any event, I think we are in a position to say that archaeology is no longer the great problem it once was. Archaeology is still in progress. New insights and new deductions are still being drawn and there is a lot yet to be learned from it. New evidence in archaeology is providing gradual (though at present incomplete) verification of the Torah's description of history.<sup>10</sup>

I will end this chapter with one little insight that is due to William Albright which I think is fascinating for a general picture of ancient history. Albright has a proof that there was an influence of the Jews on the Greeks. The names of the Hebrew letters are words in Hebrew. Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Dalet and so on all have meanings in the Hebrew. The names of the letters in Greek are obviously related to the names of the letters in Hebrew: alpha, beta, gamma, delta and so on. But, those sounds in Greek have no meaning in Greek. Alpha and Beta are not a Greek words. Where did they get those names for their letters? Albright says, and this has been accepted by the historical archaeological community, they got them from the Jews. Perhaps indirectly the Philistines took them to Greece and gave the letters to them, but it ultimately comes from the Jews.

Now if the very names of the letters of the Greek alphabet came from us, what else came? We know that there was some influence and that they took something from us. The names of the letters in your alphabet are pretty fundamental. Who knows whatever else they could have taken? Instead of thinking that the Greeks may have influenced Judaism, there a new sector of research investigating ways in which the Jews influenced the Greeks!

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10. G. Ernest Wright, founder of *Biblical Archeologist* and president of the American Schools of Oriental Research wrote in 1962: "The biblical scholar no longer bothers to ask whether archeology proves the Bible...He knows that such a question certainly to be answered in the affirmative." Cf. Davis, "Faith and Archeology," *Biblical Archeological Review*, (1993):57. William Albright, *Archeology and the Religion of Israel*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942-68), 96 writes: "The Mosaic tradition is so consistent, so well attested by different pentateuchal documents, and so congruent with our independent knowledge of the religious development of the Near East in the late second millennium B.C., that only hyper-critical pseudo-rationalism can reject its essential historicity. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1981), 130 writes: "The Biblical narrative, at least in all major points, is rooted in history." John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and the Conquest*, (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), 215-6 writes: "The biblical traditions and the archeological evidence relate with striking accuracy." [Taken from *Permission to Receive* by Lawrence Keleman.]



## VI REVELATION AND MIRACLES THE KUZARI PRINCIPLE

I will now be presenting a key argument concerning the belief in miracles. This argument was originally formulated by the Kuzari, a classical work of Jewish philosophy by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi. The Bible records many miraculous events. Verifying these reports is necessary: first, to verify the Bible as an accurate record of historic events, and second, as evidence for G-d's role in history. Therefore, this argument plays a crucial role in the overall assessment of evidence for the truth of the Torah.

I will present this argument twice because it is not a simple argument. First I will present it incompletely in outline form, and then I will take you through it in detail. We begin by taking a miracle which is described as occurring to a large number of people, in our case the entire generation. Take, for example, the revelation at Sinai. There are people who believe that the revelation at Sinai occurred. I'm not going to assume that because people believed it that it must have occurred. That is called "begging the question." However, it is a fact that there are people who believe it occurred.

Now they believe it because the previous generation taught it to them. Likewise, that generation believes it because the previous generation taught it to them. So you have a chain of generations of believers going back in time. That is a fact. The question then is, how did the chain get started? Who were the first believers? How did they arrive at their belief?

Again, oversimplifying, (this is only the outline): There are two broad possibilities. One: the event at Sinai took place and people witnessed it, and that caused their belief. Or two: the event did not take place. If the event did not take place, then someone invented the story and convinced the people to believe it.

The Kuzari's argument proceeds by investigating the second alternative, that the event didn't happen, that the story was made up and was sold. The argument shows that the second alternative is not credible. It is not credible to believe that the story was made up and then sold. If you can defeat the second alternative, that leaves only the first alternative, that it happened and was witnessed. That is the structure of the argument.




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### SUMMARY

*In oversimplified terms: the belief in the revelation at Sinai must have started in one of two ways. Either the revelation took place and its memory preserved, or it did not take place and someone invented the story and convinced others to believe it. The Kuzari's argument discredits the second alternative and thus establishes the first.*

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The outline of the refutation of the second alternative proceeds as follows. Imagine someone making up the story and trying to sell it. He is going to come to a group of people and he is going to tell them that sometime in the past their ancestors stood at a mountain and heard G-d speak. He is not talking about people in China or Tibet. He is talking about the ancestors of his audience. He is claiming that G-d revealed Himself to all of their ancestors simultaneously and by so doing founded a new religion.

What is the question with which the audience will confront him? The obvious question is: If this happened to our ancestors, how is it that no one knows about it but you? What happened to the memory of that event? Everybody simply forgot it? They were more interested in the soccer scores? No one told us about it? The whole religion just disappeared? It is simply not credible to tell an entire nation that their collective ancestors witnessed such an earth-shattering event and that it was forgotten. It would be impossible to explain why the memory of the event disappeared. Therefore, says the Kuzari, the person inventing the story and trying to sell it will never succeed.

To give you a simple parallel, suppose someone told you today that five hundred years ago gold grew on trees throughout Romania. Gold grew on trees for twenty years and then there was a blight that killed all the gold trees. Would you believe it? Would you have to go to an encyclopedia and look up Rumanian history? I don't think that you would need to investigate the history of Rumania. If such a thing had happened, you would already know about it. It would have been so spectacular that everyone would know about it. The books would be filled with it; novels would have been written about it; there would be botanical research projects to find out what happened to the gold trees and how to reproduce them. It is not the kind of thing that people forget.

Or, to take an example which does not involve a miracle, imagine being told that in 1690 the European settlers in North America conquered all of Central and South America. You would reject such a statement on the same grounds: if it were true, surely we would already know it.

Similarly, the revelation of G-d to an entire ancestry of a nation is not the kind of event that would be forgotten; and therefore if a person is

inventing the story and trying to sell it, he will not be able to sell it to his audience. The reason is that he will not be able to explain why no one else remembers that incredible event. That means that the alternative of making it up and selling it is not credible. If that alternative is not credible, we are left with only one alternative, and that is that the event really happened and that people witnessed it. That is the general structure of the argument in an incomplete and outlined form.

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### SUMMARY

*The story of a national miracle could not be invented and people persuaded to believe it because whoever tried to invent it would not be able to explain why no one else remembered it. Since he cannot explain that, he would not be believed. Thus the other possibility must be true: the event must have occurred.*

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Now, let me take you through the argument in detail. It will be considerably longer this time. The first point again: we have a chain of generations going backwards in time who believe that these miracles took place: Revelation at Sinai, the crossing of the Red Sea, the plagues in Egypt, the manna and others. Today, this group constitutes hundreds of millions of people. (Some Jews, and some Christians, some Moslems, etc.) The question is: How did that belief originate? It is not of interest now that there are non-believers. There will always be non-believers. There are even non-

believers in the Holocaust. (How there can be people who do not believe in the Holocaust will be discussed below.) What is at issue is that there are believers, a considerably large number of believers, and we want to explain the fact that they believe it. It is a psychological and sociological fact that they believe it. How did this belief first arise?

Now, in modern language the principle that the Kuzari uses is as follows. I beg you to look at it, hear it, and pay close attention to all of its details. ***Let E be a possible event which, had it really occurred, would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. If the evidence does not exist, people will not believe that E occurred.***

Let's consider a possible event, that is to say an event about which we don't know whether or not it occurred. Let's suppose it is an event which if it had occurred, it would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. Well, if we don't have the evidence then we will not believe it occurred.

That's what the principle says. Let's try to put it in simpler terms. Someone is trying to convince me that a fictitious war, or an earthquake, or something like that happened. If he is right that it (the war, earthquake, etc.) really happened, I should know about it already. I shouldn't need him



to tell me. Then the principle tells me that I will not be convinced by him. The problem of the missing evidence will prevent me from believing him.

Of course, when I say that “people will not believe,” I don’t mean that no one will believe. After all, there are people who believe in flying saucers, or that they are Napoleon, or that the earth is flat! What I mean is that you will not be able to get the vast majority of a nation to accept such a view about their own ancestors when no one in fact remembers it.

So, for example, here is a possible event of the right type: a volcanic eruption in the middle of Manhattan in 1975. If that had happened, that would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence to all of us today. If a volcanic eruption had really occurred in 1975, there would be newspaper reports, books, there would be signs in New York of the lava under the concrete and so on. And I could say to myself: “If he is right that the volcanic eruption really happened, I should know about it already. I shouldn’t need him to tell me.” That is why we would not believe someone who tried to convince us that it happened.

Similarly with gold growing on trees throughout Romania five hundred years ago. Even if the event took place five hundred years ago in such a remote spot as Rumania, the social memory of that event would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. And we could make the same observation: If gold really grew on trees we should know about it ourselves without this person having to tell us.

That is the kind of event that we are talking about. An event which, if it had happened would have left behind an enormous amount of easily available evidence of its occurrence. I stress this because the counter-examples that people usually think of are mistakes because they will not respect the definition.

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### SUMMARY

*If people believe that an event occurred, then their belief must be explained. The Kuzari principle says that one kind of event will not be believed unless it occurred. That kind is: an event which, if it had occurred, would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. Thus, for an event of that kind, if people believe that it occurred, then it must have occurred.*

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The application of this principle to public miracles follows directly. A public miracle, especially a miracle which is described as occurring to an entire nation, is the kind of event which *if* it had happened would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. The evidence would be in the form of social memory, just like the evidence we would have had of gold growing on trees throughout Rumania. People don’t forget things like that. Therefore a public miracle, public in the large

sense of a whole nation, is the kind of event which, if it did happen, would leave behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. If the event did not take place, and therefore the evidence was missing, you cannot get people to believe in it. That is how the Kuzari principle applies to public miracles.

Now, let me explain to you how limited this principle is. This principle states a limit on human credulity. People throughout history have believed a wide variety of crazy things. This principle says that there is a limit to how foolish people will be. They will believe a wide variety of crazy things, but not *every* crazy thing. There is a limit. The limit is an event which if it had happened would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence, and which in fact didn't happen and therefore the evidence was missing.

Let me give you some examples. In the Middle Ages, people in Europe believed in dragons. Doesn't that demonstrate that you can sell anybody anything? Think about the kinds of beliefs that they had about dragons. Here is one belief that they never entertained. People did not believe that a dragon marched into downtown London in the middle of the day, burnt hundreds of people to death with its fiery breath, knocked over buildings with its tail, and then drowned in the Thames. Why not? If you can sell people *anything*, if you can make up any story and get credulous people to believe it, how is it no one ever believed that?

What kinds of stories did they believe about the dragons? Sir Galahad comes riding in from the forest, his armor is dented, he's bruised and bleeding. "What happened Sir Galahad?" "I had an encounter with the dragon." Well, maybe he did and maybe he didn't. The listener have no way of checking it out. *Even if it did happen, it would not leave behind enormous, easily available evidence to him of its occurrence.* Since it doesn't meet the condition of leaving behind enormous, easily available evidence, you can sell him anything. As long as the audience would have no access to evidence even if the event occurred, the audience has to decide whether to trust the witness or not. If he is tall, if he is handsome, if he writes sonnets, if he is good at jousting, then maybe he will be believed. Why? Because he describes an event which even if it had happened, would be inaccessible. If you describe it as inaccessible, may be able to sell anything.

Achilles comes down from the mountain and he says, "I just met Athena and she gave me a new strategy for the war." Now, if you are in the Greek camp down below, you have no access to evidence. You don't know what happened on the mountain top. At that point, all bets are off. At that point you may be able to get people to believe without limit. Only



when you have an event which meets the Kuzari's conditions, an event which if it had happened would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence to the audience, are you out of luck and not able to sell it. That is what the Kuzari says.

Take, for example, Christian "miracles." Many people feel that if we had a good reason to believe in miracles, we would be embarrassed by Christian claims to miracles. There are two things wrong with this worry.

Number one, we have no commitment against Christian miracles. As far as we are concerned, maybe the Christian miracles did take place, because in Judaism, miracles alone prove nothing. It says in Deuteronomy, Chapter 13, that there will be *false* prophets who will do miracles! So, if someone tries to prove that he has a message from G-d by strolling on the lake, that proves nothing. It could be that he is one of the false prophets who does miracles. So I have no particular commitment against Christian miracles. If they happen to have occurred then they would qualify for chapter 13 (Deuteronomy)!

Number two, the Christian miracles were by and large semi-private affairs witnessed by no more than a few thousand people. Now a few thousand people, if you are making up the story fifty years later, is by no means the entire ancestry of a nation. The audience will ask themselves: "If it really happened, must I assume that everyone at that time would have believed it and then created a social memory which would have been available to me today? Maybe they just did not believe it? Perhaps it was filed with the many stories of the current Greek mystery cults and just forgotten?" Perhaps so, and then the Kuzari principle does not apply. Only if the audience is convinced that if the event had happened they surely would have known of it does the principle apply. In this case the audience would not necessarily have been convinced.

Perhaps the following analogy will help. Imagine that you spent yesterday in the library. A friend now wants to convince you that you went swimming yesterday. You are not likely to accept his story. Your reason will be this: If I really went swimming yesterday, surely I would remember it! The fact that you *should* remember it if it happened and in fact you *don't remember* it is enough for you to reject it. On the other hand, if your friend tells you that you absentmindedly put your eyeglass case on top of the radio you might well believe him. You will reason: Even if I did that, I would probably not remember doing it. So the fact that you do not remember it is not enough reason to reject it. We have used the same reasoning for national events.

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### SUMMARY

*The Kuzari principle applies to public, especially national, miracles, since they will create social memory of their occurrence. It does not apply to beliefs in dragons, Greek gods, or Christian "miracles" since even if they had occurred, they would not have left sufficient public evidence of their occurrence.*

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Now, some people confuse the Kuzari's principle with its converse in the following way. They say you are trying to claim that enormous, easily available evidence is very powerful, powerful enough to wipe out all opposition, powerful enough to settle all issues. What about people today who do not believe in the Holocaust? The Holocaust took place only fifty years ago. There is enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence. You could talk to

thousands of survivors who are still alive today. There are books, records, photographic materials, death camps that you can visit, and yet there are people today who don't believe in the Holocaust. Doesn't that show that enormous, easily available evidence doesn't settle all questions?

The answer is yes, it does show that, but that is not what the Kuzari's principle says. The Kuzari's principle says that for an event which **if it had occurred would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence, and didn't occur**, you can't get people to believe in it

What would you need to show that this principle is false? You would need an event which did not occur, and yet people believed in it. That would show that the principle is false. You would need an event for which you would expect to find evidence, the evidence is missing because the event did not happen, and yet people managed to believe in it. Now with the Holocaust you have the *opposite*. Here you have an event which *did* occur and yet people *don't believe* it did. That is not a counter-example to the principle. It is the opposite.

Now some will say: "Okay, that is a fine point of logic, it did occur, it didn't occur, you do believe it, you don't believe it, but still, isn't it really the same thing? Doesn't it come down to the same thing that such evidence doesn't settle all questions?"

The answer is no, it does not come down to the same thing. There is a crucial difference between the Kuzari's principle and the case of the Holocaust. The reason is that everyone has to sift and be selective when he considers evidence for a proposition. Sometimes evidence is fabricated, sometimes the evidence is irrelevant, sometimes it is misinterpreted. We are always sifting, rejecting, and accepting, and reinterpreting. Only then do we decide what conclusion to draw from the evidence. When we



come to the Holocaust, these nuts say we know that *sometimes* evidence is fabricated or misleading: in this case *all of it is fabricated or misleading*. In other words, they are taking a normal part of human cognitive life and extending it beyond its appropriate boundaries. They say that *sometimes* you have to reject *some* evidence proposed for a proposition; in the case of the Holocaust they want you to *reject all the evidence as sufficient to believe it*.

Now you can imagine that happening at least on the fringes of society. But the case of the Kuzari is the opposite. To violate the Kuzari principle we have to believe something for which all the expected evidence is missing. If it were true that there ought to be evidence, and there isn't any evidence, we would never accept a belief. That is not part of our normal cognitive life. We are never confronted with a case where if it had happened the evidence ought to be all over in front of me and there is no evidence, and yet I leap over that hurdle and believe. Therefore, the disbelievers in the Holocaust are irrelevant to the Kuzari's principle.

[Some will wonder whether we have avoided the objection only by defining the event positively, i.e. as the occurrence of the Holocaust. There is no reason in principle, they will say, that we could not consider the non-occurrence of the Holocaust as an equally bona fide event. How would we avoid the objection then? Well, let's try to see how the objection would go.

The non-occurrence of the Holocaust (the second World War without the massacre of 6,000,000 Jews) is a possible event. If it had happened - if the second World War had not included the massacre of 6,000,000 Jews - then there would be enormous, easily available evidence of that event. The evidence would be in the form of histories of the second World War making no mention of the Holocaust. The absence of the event from the histories would surely be compelling evidence that the event did not take place. Since the evidence is in fact missing - the histories of the second World War do in fact include the Holocaust - the Kuzari principle says that people should not believe in the event. That is, they should not believe in the non-occurrence of the Holocaust.

I think this argument is correct: the Kuzari principle predicts that you cannot get people to believe that the Holocaust did not occur. But the prediction is in fact correct! More than ninety per cent of contemporary Americans believe in the Holocaust. The Kuzari principle does not say that no one will accept such a belief. For any kind of craziness you can find some believers! It says that a whole society will not accept the occurrence of an event when it lacks the evidence it should have had if the event had occurred. That has not happened in the case of the Holocaust. And even if it were to happen in the future (G-d forbid) that a great number of Americans come to disbelieve the Holocaust, that would still not be directly relevant to our use of the Kuzari principle since the Holocaust did not happen to their ancestors. Since to them it is a foreign event, perhaps they can explain to themselves why they do not possess the expected evidence. This will have no bearing on the ability of the descendants of the witnesses themselves to explain their lack of the relevant evidence.]




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### SUMMARY

*To contradict the Kuzari principle we would need an event which **did not happen**, and would have left behind enormous evidence if it had happened, and yet **people believe it happened**. The holocaust is the opposite: **it did happen**, and **some people do not believe it**. Therefore the holocaust does not contradict the Kuzari principle. Those who reject the Holocaust take normal caution with respect to evidence and irrationally expand that caution to reject all evidence for the Holocaust. Nothing comparable could lead to violating the Kuzari principle.*

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Now let's examine the principle itself. What kind of principle is this? At base it is a principle of empirical psychology. It is a principle describing how people come to believe things. It says that under certain conditions, beliefs won't form. People will not come to believe in events that the Kuzari's principle forbids.

Why should we accept this principle? After all, everything relies on this principle. Could we defeat it? Here is one way *not* to go about it. We should not say: "You are telling me that just because it is an event that if it had happened would have left behind enormous, easily

available evidence, that you can't get people to believe it? I don't think that is right. I can imagine very well that a very influential priesthood, or a very powerful leader, or a person whom you would think has magical powers, convincing people to believe in even things like that. I don't think there is any limit to what the populace can believe. I think I could even write a very convincing novel describing such a case and get it published."

Does your ability to *imagine* such a case defeat the principle? The answer is no. This is a principle about real people in the real world. The principle doesn't say anything about your imagination. People can imagine all sorts of things. They can even imagine impossible things. People have imagined squaring a circle; it just happens to be mathematically impossible. I know people who imagine machines that run without loss of any energy. There are people who design them every year. The Second Law of Thermodynamics says that it is impossible, yet they do it anyway.

The limits on your imagination are of no interest. The question is: *Do real people in the real world accept beliefs like that?* The only way to defeat the Kuzari's principle is *to find real cases*. Real cases of communities that have come to believe events which if they had happened would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence, and didn't happen, and therefore the evidence wasn't present. I have never yet come across such an event, nothing even remotely resembling such an event.



I'll give you some more examples of non-contenders. People say: "Didn't the vast majority of Germans believe that the Jews stabbed Germany in the back during the first World War? Didn't they believe that Jews had control of international business and banking?" Of course they believed those things, but put yourself in the position of the average German shopkeeper or bus driver. You are told thirty years later that the Jews stabbed them in the back in the first World War. (Even the description is important. When someone stabs you in the back, you don't see them.) What kind of back-stabbing are they describing? Do they say for example that during the first World War that Jews lay down in front of German tanks and stopped them from moving? No, they don't say that, because they know that if they say that, no one will believe it. After all, the soldiers in that war were still alive. They know that didn't happen. No, they stabbed us in the back. They covered their tracks and nobody ever caught them. Because if you claim that it happened in public, nobody will believe you.

Again, put yourself in the position of the average German shopkeeper and bus driver. You are told that the Jews control the international business community. Could you get evidence about that? Of course not, there is no way for you to check that claim. *Even if it were true you would not have the evidence.* Then people may believe anything. As long as you make the claim something which, even if it were true, your audience would not have the evidence, then the audience has to decide whether you are credible or not and people can make awful mistakes about that.

That is why the claim of the Nazis that the bigger the lie the more successful it will be is wrong. It is a mistake, because a really big lie would have been to lie about something that everyone experienced. They didn't do that, because you can't lie about that which everyone should have experienced, because if it had happened it would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence.

Some people ask about the massacre in Tiananmen Square. Almost everyone in China believes that the students massed against the soldiers and attacked them and the soldiers fired in self-defense. Correct, but if you live in Shanghai, could you get evidence as to what happened in Tiananmen Square? How would you get it? There is no evidence available to you except what is played out on Chinese television, and that is controlled. So again, the vast majority of people in China would not have evidence even if the massacre occurred. Under those conditions you can sell them anything.

So, the principle asserts that you cannot create beliefs of this kind. The principle rests simply on the experience of mankind that people don't



believe these sorts of things. If they don't believe these sorts of things, then when you have such an event, as for example a public miracle, if people do believe it, the alternate scenario of its having been made up has now been discredited. That being the case, the only thing that is left is to accept the event as having occurred.

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### SUMMARY

*The Kuzari principle concerns the psychology of belief formation. It says that real people in the real world do not believe an event occurred if, had the event occurred, they should possess evidence which they inexplicably do not have. Imagined belief of such events is not relevant to the principle's claim that real people do not accept such beliefs.*

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Now there are two qualifications. First of all, when you have an account of a miracle, part of what you rely upon is the reliability of the description of the miracle. Maybe something happened, but who says that the description of what happened is accurate? Maybe the people who witnessed it misunderstood it. Maybe they misperceived it. What criteria do I need in order to lend credence to the particular description of the event that I get from the witnesses?

An eye witness report is made compelling by the following factors. **Calm:** If they were upset, anxious, afraid, if the event astounded or stupefied them, that may cast some doubt on their ability to describe the event appropriately. **Repetition:** rarely are miracles repeated. If they are repeated, the more times that they are repeated, the more credible and compelling the eye witness account becomes. **Corroboration:** How many people witnessed the event? If it is one or two then it is less compelling. If it is thousands or tens of thousands it becomes more compelling. **Irrelevance of expertise:** You do not want a witness drawing a conclusion which he is not equipped to draw. If I visit an atomic laboratory, and I come out and you ask: "Was the cyclotron on?" And I say "Well, the machine in the corner was blinking its lights red and blue, but I don't know if it was the cyclotron or whether it was a coffee machine. I don't know what it was. I can't tell those things!" You do not want a witness drawing conclusions that he does not have the expertise to substantiate. **Absence of self interest:** If a person has an interest in telling the story one way or another, then you can suspect that he is motivated by self-interest.

Now, I said the presence of all these factors makes the report compelling. What does that mean if one or more of the factors is missing? Does that mean that the report is worthless? No, it just means that it is *less compelling*. But even when the evidence is *less compelling*, it can be



compelling *enough*. The lack of the cited factors leads to doubt *when there is contrary evidence*. If the witnesses report seeing A kill B, and we have evidence that A was elsewhere at the time, we may use the witnesses' fright and shock at seeing a murder to explain the inaccuracy of their report. But if there is no contrary evidence, we will accept their report as good enough (even to convict in court).

Now Rav Yehuda Halevi, who created this argument, applied it most directly to the miracle of the manna. If I were looking at the Bible for outstanding miracles, I don't think that I would choose the manna. It is not so spectacular, they just ate something they found on the ground every morning for thirty-nine years. The reason he chose this is because it fits the conditions that we previously described perfectly.

It is something that happened thousands of times. Maybe the first few times they were astounded or stupefied and in shock, but after the thousandth time or the ten-thousandth time, I cannot imagine that they were still in such shock that they could not calmly investigate what is taking place. You have here repetition galore. Corroboration? It is something that was witnessed by an entire nation. You cannot find much greater corroboration than that. Irrelevance of expertise? You do not have to be an expert to know that every morning you woke up, scooped the stuff off the ground and ate it and it nourished you. That is not drawing conclusions about cyclotrons.

As far as the application of self-interest is concerned, this can be ruled out in the following manner. We are talking now about an event being *misreported*. How could self-interest have created the story of the manna if it didn't happen? It couldn't have been created later than the event even if they had wanted to make it up, because that is a direct application of the Kuzari's Principle. If you make it up later, people will ask you, if it really happened to all of our ancestors, how come no one knows about it but you? It is not the kind of event you can make up because if it had happened, it would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of its occurrence, and if it didn't occur, then there is no evidence of its occurrence. So, you could not make it up later.

Could self-interest have produced a false report while the event was going on? Clearly not. We are talking about an event which repeated thousands of times. It was experienced by an entire nation. Who is going to make a false report of it when everybody experiences it every day and sees that the report is false? So, even if there were self-interest, it could not play a role here in creating a false report of the event. Therefore says the Kuzari, the manna is the strongest candidate for a credible miracle. It is credible because of its public nature, and the reports about what hap-



pened are credible because they meet all the conditions we have discussed.

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### SUMMARY

*The report of a miracle is compelling if the witnesses were calm, there was repetition, the report is corroborated, expertise is not needed to make the report, and there is no self-interest in making the report. Weakness or absence of any of the factors weakens the credibility of the report without destroying it entirely. If there is no contrary evidence, the report is still credible. The manna is a miracle whose report is compelling.*

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The application of the Kuzari principle to other miracles, like the Revelation at Sinai and the crossing of the sea, is somewhat less compelling. They happened only once and they took place at a time when the people were in a very agitated state of mind. Therefore, one would have to scale down the credibility of the *details* in the descriptions of these miracles. They are somewhat less compelling than they would have been if the people had been calm and the miracles had been repeated. But, as noted above, even for the

details the evidence is compelling enough since there is no contrary evidence. Furthermore, if we consider the general descriptions of these miracles - leaving out the fine details - the Kuzari principle applies directly with full strength.

There is also a kind of domino effect here. If you have one miracle which you can strongly substantiate, one miracle for which the argument is perfect, once you breach the natural order, it then becomes possible to accept the account of other miracles more easily. I'll give you an analogy. Suppose you have a person whom you believe to be honest in a business and there is money missing from the business. Someone accuses this honest fellow. You are not likely to accept the accusation even if there is some evidence that he was in the right place at the right time. You say: "I know him to be an honest fellow. Therefore I cannot suspect him."

Now, let's suppose you find one incident in which he is known to have cheated. Just one. That changes the entire picture. Now you know that he isn't completely honest. Then, when you have evidence that he was in the right place at the right time, you take it seriously. Once you broke the consistent picture of honesty, then he becomes suspected of any misdoings that take place.

Similarly here: if you can believe in nature without exception, it is difficult to argue that there was a breach of nature. But once you have argued successfully that there was a single breach of nature, it becomes easier to argue for other breaches of nature in the future. Now the argument for the



manna is extremely powerful and conclusive, even including the details, as is the general description of the other national miracles. Therefore, standards of evidence for the records in Jewish sources of private miracles are reduced. Here we invoke the principle that all of a single body of information receives credibility from the parts that are tested and found true.

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### SUMMARY

*Even if **detailed** reports of certain miracles have less than perfect credibility, the **general** description that something miraculous took place may have strong credibility. If some miracles are credible enough to be accepted, then the standards of evidence for other miracles are reduced. The latter are accepted as parts of a credible body of information.*

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Now let me come finally to the most natural and strongest opposition to this argument. Let's go back to the revelation at Sinai. I said that there are two possibilities: Either the event took place or it was made up. But it cannot be made up since people will not believe in an event whose necessary evidence is missing.

Now the objection will be that this is too simplistic a classification, that there is really a third intermediate possibility. They didn't just make it up. Something happened, and that something was gradually transformed

by telling the story, adding, and embellishing. The gradual transformation of imperfect information went together with wishful thinking, glorifying your ancestors, and all the other motivations. This kind of gradual embellishment is well known by anthropologists. It is called *myth formation* and it definitely takes place in other nations. Why can't stories like the Revelation at Sinai, or the manna, or the crossing of the Red Sea have at their base some event that really did take place, but then was gradually glorified into a miracle?

There are two problems with this sort of "explanation." One general problem is this: when you fill in the details of the scenario it tends to become extremely implausible. Only by ignoring the details does the scenario gain any initial interest. When you ask for the details of the original natural event, how it was understood by the people who experienced it, how they described it to their children, how the reports started to change etc., the story becomes much less consistent with normal human psychology. The second problem is equally fundamental: If you think that an event which was a natural event gradually glorified into this kind of supernatural event, and you think that is normal, and a natural process for a society at that time, then *there ought to be parallels*. The Kuzari's principle is an empirical principle. You can defeat it. You merely need to find



cases. It is not enough to dream up a scenario. You need to *find real* parallels.

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### SUMMARY

*For the "explanation" of myth formation to defeat the Kuzari's principle it must be plausible and there must be real instances of parallel scenarios in history.*

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Let's take the manna as an illustration of both problems. There is a book called *The Bible As History* by Werner Keller who claims that the miracle of the manna "really took place." Here is his story. The Jews left Egypt, and there are bushes in the Sinai desert to this day which are periodically attacked by insects which bore holes in the trunk of the bush. A sap which is sweet and nourishing oozes out, and the

Jews ate this sap as they traveled through the desert. (He claims that this makes the Bible into History. Of course this really makes the Bible false. The Bible doesn't say anything about bushes and sap. The Bible says that they found the manna scattered all over the desert every morning. ) Now here is the suggestion. Every morning they went out and ate the sap of the bushes, and then later it became gradually transformed into the story of a miracle.

Now, as I said, you cannot trust your imagination. The question here is an empirical one. First let's try to face the first problem by filling in the details. The people who left Egypt ate the sap. Did they think it was a miracle? Presumably not. Those bushes have been in existence for over three thousand years. Presumably they were there before the Jews left Egypt. Everyone knew about them. It was a well known desert phenomenon. For them to go out and eat that which everyone knows about, and for them to experience it as a miracle with a quite different description is incredible. They knew they were eating sap!

They went into the land of Israel. What did they teach their children? Did they tell them a completely different story? Of course not. They experienced it. The vast majority of people alive experienced it. They couldn't simply discontinue the old story and make up a brand new story on the spot that everybody tells the same way. No, they must have told their children about the same story.

Well how did the breakdown occur? We can imagine little Reuven sitting and listening to stories from his great-grandfather. And the great-grandfather has become senile, his mind wanders, he gets the details wrong, he makes up a few things and so on. Reuven comes the next morning to play with his friends and says: "Boy, do you know what great-granddad told me yesterday? He told me this great story about all these things..." What will all the other children say? "Gee, my father never



told me about that.” They go home and ask their father, and their father says Reuven’s great-grandfather is 116 years old. People like that make up stories. One of the things needed is a credible scenario of the story developing put into a real social context. Here it is quite difficult to imagine how it could occur.

But more than that. Here you have an event that when it was experienced *was a natural event*, and the event *continues to occur*. The bushes still exist. People are still eating the sap from those bushes year after year. The above scenario says that under these conditions, the story was gradually elevated into the level of a miracle. Now we come to the second problem. I challenge you to *find me a parallel*. It is not enough to make it up in your imagination. Find a parallel. Find a group of people who experienced an event as a natural occurrence, who interpret the event as a natural occurrence, the event continues to occur regularly in their vicinity, and in spite of all that they elevate it into an account of a miracle. If you find such occurrences then that will weaken the argument here. I do not know of any such parallel.

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### SUMMARY

*Werner Keller’s “explanation” of the manna fails both requirements: there is no plausible account of how the story of eating sap is transformed into the story of a miracle, and there are no parallel cases of a continuous natural phenomenon being elevated into a miracle.*

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The same has to be true with respect to every scenario. First of all, the scenario has to be initially plausible. Most scenarios are not even initially plausible, but even if they are, there must also be real parallels. Let’s apply this now to the revelation at Sinai.

Here is the proposed “explanation” of the belief in revelation at Sinai in terms of myth formation. Maybe the Jewish people were in the desert and there was a volcanic eruption or an earthquake. These are very startling events. These are very shocking events. They might even have been regarded as supernatural. Then maybe later people told them that they heard voices, saw visions and so on, and all of that was elevated into the story of Revelation. This is the sort of “explanation” which myth formation offers. Here too the “explanation” suffers from both implausibility and lack of parallels.

First, note that earthquakes occur along the Syrio-African fault approximately every ninety years. The assumption that such an event would produce shock and trigger a unique belief in a public revelation is naive. The many earthquakes which occurred in the same area produced no parallel effects.



Second, in order to see how implausible the “explanation” is, let’s take it in two stages. For the first stage, imagine that the story says of itself that it has been passed down continuously from the time of the event. In other words, the story says: “So-and-so many years ago the entire ancestry of your nation stood at a mountain and heard G-d speaking to them. They were commanded to tell the story of this event to their children, and they to their children, and the nation in fact did this.” (There actually is something like this in the Torah itself - cf. Deut. 4:9-10, 31: 9-13, 19-21. But I will not use this below because it is not clear and prominent enough.) Now we have to imagine a gradual process of taking a natural event and promoting it into a national revelation, ending with the story that this *national revelation was always known by the nation*. But before you arrive at the story of a national revelation no one knows about it! How are we supposed to imagine the story which says that it was always known being accepted gradually?

Now for the second stage, suppose that the story does not say that it was passed down continuously, but that the reader or listener *will automatically assume that it will be passed down continuously*. Then we have precisely the same problem as the last paragraph: how can a story *which the listener assumes must have been continuously known* be promoted gradually? This is the Kuzari’s point: a story of a national revelation will not be forgotten, *and the listener to whom the story is being sold knows this and will use it in evaluating the story and deciding whether to believe it*. The problem of filling in the details of the gradual promotion of such a story is a great obstacle to the hypothesis of myth formation for the Sinai revelation.

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### SUMMARY

*There is no plausible explanation of how a story which clearly implies that it has always been known could be accepted by a people who did not know it.*

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Now for the second problem, the lack of historical parallels. If the belief in the revelation at Sinai is the result of myth formation applied to a natural event, and if that is a normal sort of thing to happen, then it ought to happen more than once. We are not the only people in history that have witnessed earthquakes or who saw volcanic eruptions, or to whom typhoons

took place, or tidal waves or other events that could be regarded as supernatural. If a belief in a public revelation could be produced by a natural event, it should have been produced more than once. It is very suspicious to say that here is a effect of a natural cause, a normal cause, fitting in well with human psychology and the normal human environment, but it only



happened once in the history of the world!

This is especially true with respect to a belief like the revelation at Sinai, for three reasons. First, a belief in a public revelation is the strongest possible foundation for a religion. If somebody goes up on a mountain and says that he heard G-d speak, either you believe him or you don't believe him. It is then open for everyone else to doubt it and to say that he either made it up or had delusions. In fact, the vast majority of such claims have been rejected throughout history. For every founder of a new religion, there are thousands whose claims to divine revelation or inspiration were ignored. It is much more powerful logically to start out with a belief that an entire nation heard G-d speak. Now if that kind of belief *could have* been made up then it *should have* been made up more than once. After all, it is logically the most sound foundation for a religion.

Second, ancient religions borrowed from one another, they were in contact with one another, they had a similar structure; they have the same sort of Pantheon, the same sorts of beliefs. Why wasn't this element ever borrowed? Our belief goes back at least three thousand years. There was a lot of travel through our area of the world. How is it that no one picked it up?

Third, Christianity and Islam desperately need this belief. Christianity and Islam in their early stages made strenuous efforts to convert Jews. Now, if you are a Christian or a Moslem missionary and you come to a Jew and you tell him that your leader is G-d, or that your leader is a Prophet and so forth, the Jew responds: "I don't know about your leader, all I know is that my ancestors stood at Sinai, and you agree. You Christian, you Moslem agree that my ancestors stood at Sinai. How can I now abandon that? How can I contradict that?" What shall the Christian or Moslem answer? That is one of the reasons that they did so poorly in converting Jews. Because the Revelation at Sinai is a foundation that is very difficult to contradict.

Now, according to myth formation there would have been a perfect answer that the Christian or Moslem could have given. He could have said: "You are right, your ancestors stood at Sinai, but *it happened again*. Another public revelation. All of your ancestors, five hundred years ago, stood again at another mountain and heard the second edition, and we have the second edition." Why did they not make up that kind of belief? If this is the kind of belief that you can make up, why didn't they make it up?

So, if you are working on a scenario about how the original belief of the Revelation took place, you have an enormous obstacle to overcome.




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### SUMMARY

*The “explanation” of myth formation implies that there ought to be parallels to our belief in public revelation, especially since this is the strongest foundation for a religion, and Christianity and Islam needed such a belief to offset Sinai. The lack of such parallels discredits the “explanation.” In addition, the two conditions of plausibility and parallels conflict: the more plausible the suggested scenario, the more difficult it is to explain why no one else claims a public revelation.*

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The more plausible your scenario is, the more difficult it is to explain why it didn't happen to anybody else. You are sort of caught between two improbable alternatives. Either you create a very implausible scenario so as to protect yourself from the fact that no one else did it, but then it is implausible as an explanation as to how it happened to us. Or you create a very plausible scenario, in which case the question why no one else ever did it is simply impossible to answer.

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### CHAPTER SUMMARY

*The Kuzari's principle is that people won't believe in events which would have left behind enormous, easily available evidence of their occurrence, and didn't happen, and therefore didn't leave behind enough evidence. Public miracles occurring to a whole nation are such events and therefore if they didn't happen then you cannot get people to believe in them. Detailed eyewitness reports are made compelling by calm, repetition, corroboration, irrelevance of expertise and absence of self-interest. The manna fits those factors perfectly, therefore the manna is a miracle for which the argument works perfectly. The general descriptions of other public miracles are also confirmed directly by the Kuzari argument. The fact that the Jews have believed in these miracles historically can only be explained by acknowledging that they took place. Once public miracles are accepted, the level of evidence required for other miracles is reduced.*

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## VII

### JEWISH SURVIVAL

#### THE FACT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

**T**his chapter will finish the survey of the evidence. So far, we have seen the prediction of Deuteronomy 28-30, a brief survey of the archaeological evidence, and an argument for the Biblical description of miraculous events. We will now see three more pieces of evidence and then draw the conclusion.

Jewish survival has long enjoyed widespread attention. It is clear to all that the Jewish historical experience is unique in ways which cannot easily be explained. This has attracted the ambition of historians of all stripes to try the mettle of their favorite theories on this extraordinarily difficult historical problem. For Jews, this fact has more personal implications. It sets them apart from the common human experience and gives them a point of pride in their connection to an indestructible people. In spite of all this professional and personal interest, the message of Jewish survival has been doubly missed by historians and (non-traditional) laymen, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

First, the nature of the fact itself has not been appreciated. Its extent - over 3000 years admitted even by the most severe critics - and the uniqueness of the enormous historical pressures which should have caused the disappearance of the Jewish people, are not analyzed in detail. The result is that the superficial suggestions offered to explain Jewish survival are taken seriously, when attention to the details would show them to be clearly incompetent. Second, there is a failure to focus specifically on WHAT has survived. In particular, no account is taken of the many experiments of large populations of Jews with other cultural forms which have not survived. The purpose of this chapter is to rectify both of these mistakes. We will start with a survey of the features which make Jewish survival so difficult to explain. Then the most popular theories designed to explain Jewish survival will be tested against those fact(s).

Jewish history can be divided into two major periods: from its inception to the destruction of the second Temple, and from that date to the present. Each period presents its own obstacles to historical explanation. We start with a survey of the unique features of each.

Ancient Jewish history comprises at the very least 1000 years from the time of king David to the destruction of the second Temple.<sup>11</sup> For approx-

11. This much will be admitted by all; the prior 800 years from the time of the patriarchs is controversial in secular sources and will thus be omitted here.



imately ninety percent of this period, i.e. for all but the exile in Babylon, there was a large concentration of Jewish population and an independent Jewish state in the land of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

What is striking about this period is the unparalleled uniqueness of Jewish belief. Principles shared by virtually every ancient culture contrast sharply with Jewish sources. The general agreement among other cultures is due to two factors. First, their beliefs reflect common circumstances (the constants in the human condition in the ancient world - birth, death, war and peace, dependence upon poorly understood natural phenomena, etc.). Second, cultures in contact affect one another: ideas are borrowed and mutually modified. Judaism is assumed to have shared the first factor with all other cultures<sup>13</sup>, and its geographical position ("the crossroads of three continents") made it extraordinarily susceptible to the second. Its uniqueness is thus very difficult to explain. What follows are six examples of distinctive Jewish beliefs<sup>14</sup>.

1. *Monotheism*. Polytheistic idolatry is the rule in ancient religions. The restriction of worship to a single deity is almost unknown<sup>3</sup>. The reason is simple: natural phenomena are so disparate that they are inevitably assigned to different deities, and then each of those deities must be served or else the natural forces under their control will injure the errant community. The uncompromising commitment of Judaism to one G-d only is without parallel in the ancient world.

2. *Exclusivity*. Each ancient nation had its own pantheon of gods. But each recognized the appropriateness of other nations worshipping its own pantheon. The universalism, and consequent exclusivity of Judaism are absent from ancient religions<sup>15</sup>. Thus, aside from Antiochus' attempt to eliminate Judaism, there are no religious wars in the ancient world<sup>16</sup>! When one country conquered another the second was usually required to acknowledge the chief god of the conqueror, and the conquered were usually happy to comply: the very fact that they lost the war proved that the others' chief god was very powerful. The rest of the religion of the conquered nation was left intact. Only the Jews proclaimed a universal and exclusive concept of deity: our G-d is the only one, all others are fantasy.

12. Of course, "independence" allows for significant pressure from empires like Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, etc.

13. This is the assumption of the neutral historian, which we accept here in order to show even him the uniqueness of Jewish survival. We know that miracles and prophecy made Jewish historical experience utterly unlike that of other nations.

14. See Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), chaps. II-IV.

3. The "solar monotheism" of Akhenaton in ancient Egypt is not parallel - see Kaufmann, pp. 2, 226-7.

15. See Genesis 43:32 where Jews visiting Egypt eat separately from the Egyptians because the Jews' food is a religious abomination to the Egyptians!

16. See Bickerman, "The Historical Foundations of Postbiblical Judaism," in L. Finkelstein ed., *The Jews - History, Culture, Religion*, v.1, pp. 106-7.



3. *Spirituality*. Ancient religions associated gods very closely with physical objects and/or phenomena. They abound in nature deities: gods of the sun, moon, sea, fertility, death etc. Often the gods are given human form. The only ancient religion to declare that G-d has no physical embodiment, form or likeness is Judaism.

4. *G-d as absolute*. Ancient religions picture the gods as limited in power. Many start with a genealogy of the gods. That means that certain powers predate them and are out of their control. Only Judaism understands G-d as the creator of all that exists and completely unlimited in His power over creation.

5. *Morality*. The gods of the ancient world are pictured as petty tyrants acting out their all-too-human desires in conflict with men and with one another. No condition of absolute moral perfection applies to those gods. Only the Jewish G-d is defined as meeting that description.

6. *Anti-homosexuality*. All ancient cultures permitted some forms of homosexuality, and for many it had religious application. The only exception is Judaism which opposed all forms of homosexuality, whether religious or merely hedonistic<sup>17</sup>.

To ancient cultures, these Jewish beliefs appeared absurd. They contradicted the common experience and convictions of all mankind. Maintaining them branded Jews as quixotic outcasts. The historical problem is to explain how a people originated and preserved so extreme a set of beliefs without being overwhelmed by the unanimous consensus of all other nations.

This problem cannot be solved by appeal to the general success of Jewish cultural achievement. The Jewish nation did not enjoy any outstanding secular success which could have served as the means of preserving Judaism. There was no far-flung Jewish empire, no revolutionary innovations in mathematics, medicine, economics, architecture, the arts, philosophy etc. Had there been such, we might have explained the survival of Judaism as a mere accompaniment of an otherwise successful society.

One final characteristic of ancient Judaism must be noted. Throughout the ancient period Jews experimented with other forms of religious belief and practice. The prophets testify to Jewish idol worship. (This must be understood as syncretism: not an abandonment of Judaism in toto but an amalgamation to local conditions. "The Jewish G-d took us out of Egypt, so He is very powerful, so of course we celebrate Passover. However, if you want your garden to prosper, a sacrifice to the local baal will help!")

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17. See Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).



During the Babylonian exile a significant percentage of Jews intermarried and adapted their beliefs to the Babylonian milieu. When Greek culture became dominant in the Middle East many Jews became Hellenized. During the end of the second Temple, the Sadducees rejected the traditional Oral Law and substituted their own adaptations of Jewish practice. Needless to say, all these efforts eventually failed. Thus the survival of Judaism stands in contrast with those competing Jewish cultural forms which expired.

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### SUMMARY

*Jewish belief was unique in the ancient world in its commitment to monotheism, the exclusive, spiritual, absolute and moral concept of G-d, and opposition to homosexuality. This unique belief survived in spite of continuous contact with powerful foreign cultures, and was not the result of other Jewish cultural successes. Jewish experiments with modifications of the traditional formula disappeared.*

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Now we turn to the second period of Jewish history: from the destruction of the second Temple to the present. During this period, Jewish communities were widely spread among a variety of antagonistic majority cultures, without any central authority or control. What ought to be expected of Judaism under such conditions? From the experience of other cultures, we should expect large-scale cultural borrowing and influence. Yemenite Jews should show the influence of Arab-Moslem culture and religion, French Jews the

influence of Catholicism, Russian Jews the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy, etc. Each community should show the the influences of the geography of its physical environment. How critical should these influences be?

Let us take as a comparison the development of Christianity during the same period. At present there are hundreds of different Christian sects, each with its own version of the original doctrines and events of early Christianity. The Trinity is understood in widely different ways by Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans and Unitarians. The Eucharist is the real consumption of the blood and flesh of the founder of Christianity for some, a symbolic representation for others, and dispensed with entirely by others. This wide variation means that the original information cannot be reliably recovered.<sup>18</sup>

Now this occurred to a religion which was in a majority position from

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18. The same is true for the other major world religions - there are many different sects of Hindus, Buddhist, Moslems, etc. each of which claims to be faithful to the original doctrines of the faith.



the time of Constantine, with both central authority and control. Whatever the details of the historical forces which lead to the loss of their origins, those forces should have applied to Judaism with infinitely more power. In fact, what happened is the opposite: there is no disagreement concerning the fundamentals of Jewish belief, practice and experience of 1900 years ago. Thus the survival of Judaism during this period is utterly unexpected, violating the normal process of cultural transformation.

(Here we must be careful not to misunderstand the contemporary division among the “branches of Judaism”. They do not differ concerning what Jews of 1900 years ago believed and practiced: there is no doubt that Shabbos was celebrated on Saturday, that pork was forbidden, that the coming of the messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple were the goals of Jewish history, and that they believed every letter of the five books of Moses to have been dictated by G-d at Sinai. They differ only concerning how much of the Judaism of 1900 years ago should be practiced today. This is not at all parallel to Christianity in which matters of equal centrality are very much in debate.)

In addition, as in the ancient period, this second period saw Jews experimenting with modifications of Judaism. The Karaites repeated the Sadducees denial of the traditional Oral Law. The Marranos tried to deal with the Inquisition by feigning Christian practice in public while living as Jews privately. Both of these experiments were historical failures: the Marranos have disappeared from the Jewish people, and the Karaites are

a scattered and dying sect. (The more modern experiments at modifying traditional Judaism still exist and thus strictly speaking we cannot yet judge their historical fate. But if past experiments are any guide....) The survival of Judaism as we know it was not without competition from other Jewish allegiances.

Now let us use these aspects of the historical record to test the adequacy of the popular explanations of Jewish survival. The most common theory of Jewish survival is persecution: the will to spite the oppressor’s

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### SUMMARY

*The following are the features of Jewish survival which we have surveyed: (1) 1000 years of national independence (excepting Babylon), during which (2) Jewish belief is of unparalleled uniqueness, (3) unaccompanied by any outstanding secular success, and (4) succeeding in competition with various experiments at modifying the content of traditional Judaism. This is followed by (5) 1900 years of minority status among varied antithetical majority cultures which, (6) by comparison to Christianity during the same period ought to have caused the disappearance of Judaism, and (7) again saw the failure of experimental modifications of Judaism.*

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goal to annihilate one's people and culture.<sup>19</sup> The idea is that Jews' resolve to maintain their unique identity is a response to their being defined as alien by the non-Jewish world. If Jews would only be accepted as equals and given access to non-Jewish society, Judaism would disappear.

This theory fails on three counts. First, it does not even apply to the period of national independence. Persecution does not preserve the culture of an independent nation. Second, we are not the only culture which has been conquered and persecuted. Christianity and Islam both became world religions by the sword. When the Roman empire became Christian, the scores of local cultures under their control were given the choice: Christianity or death. Islam gave the same choice to the cultures of the Arabian peninsula, North Africa and the East: Islam or death. Hundreds of local cultures disappeared under that pressure. Why did persecution not produce their survival? (Or is the theory that only the Jews spiteful enough to want their culture to survive.?)

Third, the last 1900 years has not been a period of uniformly severe persecution. Judaism survived the "golden age" of Spain, and traditional Judaism is enjoying a renaissance in contemporary America. According to the theory, we should have expected the group with the strongest Jewish identity disappear the fastest in the absence of persecution as the prop for its existence; this is precisely what is not happening.

A second theory to explain Jewish survival asserts that Jews simply have a special ability to preserve their culture. Each culture has its own special gifts. Americans consistently invent new technology, Russians produce great novels, Italy invented the opera, etc. Perhaps it is just a Jewish cultural gift to produce long-lasting cultural products. (Whether this ability is genetic or acquired - a gene or a genius - the theory does not say.) Even so vague a suggestion can be refuted by the historical record: if there were such an ability, why did it not enable all the Jewish experiments at modifying traditional Judaism to survive also? Where are the Jewish polytheists of the first Temple, the Babylonian and Hellenistic Jews, the Sadducees, Karaites and Marranos? If it is a cultural gift of the Jewish people, it ought to work more than once.

A third type of theory holds that certain aspects of Judaism - beliefs, values, laws, customs, social forms, etc. - have enabled it to survive. For example, it is asserted that dietary restrictions serve to separate Jews from non-Jews and help the former to preserve their identity. The same holds for unique styles of dress, religious practices, language, etc. The commitment to literacy and scholarship creates a cultural barrier isolating Jews

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19. See for example J.P. Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*.



from foreign influence. In short, the content of Jewish culture gives a natural explanation for Jewish survival.

This type of theory fails for three reasons. First, other cultures had their own unique styles, some including dietary restrictions, costumes, religious practices, etc. We would need a survey of extinct cultures in order to check that the features of Jewish practice and values are really unique to Judaism. If they are not unique, then they cannot be used to explain survival, since cultures which had them did not survive.

Second,<sup>20</sup> no reason is given to think that the cited aspects of Judaism should contribute to survival, rather than being irrelevant or even harmful. That only Judaism has survived and only Judaism has a particular feature A, does not imply that A contributes to Judaism's survival. (Compare: Why was Roger Bannister the first person to run the mile in less than four minutes? Because his name was Roger Bannister!) *We would need independent evidence which shows that A contributes to survival.*

In the case of dietary restrictions, a small group of immigrants could find them an embarrassment. Imagine an immigrant to the lower East side of New York, living side by side with Irish, Greek, Polish, Italian and other immigrants. Some are friendly, many are not. A local Italian invites the Jewish immigrant for dinner as a gesture of friendship. Can the Jew afford to turn him down? He needs local allies. And if he goes and eats their non-kosher meal, he has violated a religious practice and this weakened his connection to the religion as a whole. However, if Judaism did not have kosher restrictions, then the Jew could eat the meal and have the rest of his religious practice unaffected. The tension of being socially isolated could thus lead to abandoning kashrus, which would then weaken observance generally and thus hasten assimilation. Thus we cannot simply assume that dietary restrictions will promote survival.

The same applies to all the other features of Judaism which are suggested as naturally promoting survival. Dress, language and customs create social pressure on immigrants, and every Jewish community in the world started as immigrants. Scholarship can be a positive agent of assimilation in host cultures where scholarship is valued and the schools are open to Jews. In all cases we need independent evidence that the feature of Judaism which is supposed to explain survival will in fact do that. This independent evidence is never provided.

Third, this theory begs the question at issue in a subtle way. The point of the theory is to provide a naturalistic explanation of Jewish survival.

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20. This is a generalization of the first point.



Even if the aspects of Judaism cited by the theory do contribute to survival, we have to ask how they themselves came to be, and why they are unique to Judaism. If we have no naturalistic answer to these questions, then the theory is ultimately a failure. (Compare explaining why George is the only human to run the mile in three minutes by citing his extraordinary leg muscles. If we cannot explain why his legs are so uniquely strong, we still do not understand his achievement.)

Let us suppose that a list of features unique to Judaism can be found which can be seen to contribute to Jewish survival. How is it that only Judaism has such features? Surely other cultures had brilliant men capable of innovating such features for themselves? If not, surely others could have taken them from us? It will not do to argue, as does Yehezkel Kaufmann<sup>21</sup>, that the unique aspects of Judaism are due to Moses' genius, and that genius has no rules by which its products could be expected. In order to be appreciated as such, genius must produce recognizable solutions to recognized problems. Einsein's genius was recognized because physicists knew that physics was in trouble and Einstein showed them how to resolve the problem. If no one else can see the point of an innovation, it will not be labeled genius, but insanity. If the explanation of Judaism's unique aspects is Moses' genius, then others would definitely have learned his techniques from us.

Finally, there are those who would give up the hope to find a single explanation for Jewish survival. They argue that each of the cited explanations contribute some portion of the overall effect. Persecution does produce some will to resist; Jews are gifted at cultural longevity; some features of Judaism naturally contribute to survival and may have originated randomly. No one element by itself produces survival - that is the reason it was so easy to find counter-examples to the theories based on one explanation alone.

This approach also fails, on three counts. First, no evidence has been supplied that persecution, genius, and features of Jewish practice contribute to survival at all. Indeed, the evidence indicates that these factors *do not* promote survival. If persecution promotes survival then at least some of the other persecuted cultures should have survived. If there is a Jewish genius for survival then at least one of the cultural experiments should have succeeded. (Compare testing a drug to stop headaches. If the headaches of three out of a thousand tested do stop, we will not credit the drug with success.) And the naturalistic explanation of Judaism's unique possession of survival characteristics has not yet been provided. Thus in

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21. Kaufmann *op. cit.*, p. 225.



the light of the evidence we have three times zero.

Second, it is not clear that other cultures which disappeared did not share all three features. To assert without proof that none of the cultures which disappeared through persecution possessed people gifted at preserving traditions and features fostering survival, would be mere cultural parochialism. Third, without specifying the details of the combination of the elements of explanation, this approach is too vague to be taken as a serious attempt at explanation. What kinds and what extent of persecution contribute to survival? What gifts in particular enable people to preserve a culture? What features of a tradition contribute help it survive? ( This approach reminds me of the remark of one historian: "It is true that we cannot explain Jewish survival. But we will!" Translation: "I believe with perfect faith that everything can be explained naturalistically and therefore there is no need to believe in G-d!")

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### SUMMARY

*Persecution and unique abilities do not explain the facts of Jewish survival. The appeal to unique qualities of Judaism fails because there is no independent reason to think they contribute to survival, and there is no account of their origin and uniqueness. Since the evidence indicates that none of the theories provides any explanation at all, the combination of the theories is no better.*

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The moral of this review of failed theories is clear: there is no serious candidate for a naturalistic explanation of Jewish survival. And let it not be suggested that our survival is not surprising since there are other ancient cultures which have also survived. The existence of Hinduism, Confucianism and other long-lasting cultures has no relevance to Jewish survival. The reason is that they existed under conditions in which survival is *expected* whereas we existed under conditions which should have caused us to disappear. Consider an analogy: at the beach one hundred people are

sunbathing and twenty are in the water. A sudden undertow drags the twenty under the water for thirty minutes. Of the twenty, eighteen drown and two survive. Now it is no surprise that the one hundred on the beach survive, nor is it a surprise that the eighteen drown. Only the survival of the two who are under water for thirty minutes requires some special explanation. Other ancient cultures which survived did so in their own countries, as a large majority population with its own nation-state(s): Why should they not survive? They are the people on the beach. The Jews are the people under water. They survived conditions which destroyed all others which experienced them. Only Jewish survival needs a special explanation.



If Jewish history cannot be understood naturalistically, then the blind application of naturalistic methodology to the details of Jewish experience is a mistake. Imagine a botanist studying the flora of a garden. After he examines and classifies the flowers, shrubs, grasses and trees, he comes across a butterfly. "What sort of plant is this?" he thinks. "It has no roots, it flies..." As long as he tries to apply the methods of botany to a butterfly, he will not understand! Similarly, an attempt to understand facets of Jewish history by comparison to those nations whose history is naturalistic cannot produce understanding. For example, to explain similarity of certain Jewish and non-Jewish ideas by asserting that we must have taken our ideas from others just as all other nations do, will be a totally unjustified comparison. If we were subject to cultural influence like all other nations then we would not be here!

Thus the supernatural element of Jewish survival must be squarely faced. Since there is no reasonable naturalistic explanation, the unbiased investigator must at least seriously entertain the possibility of a supernatural explanation and examine it with as much objectivity as he can muster. We must reject the attitude of the philosopher who said that, had he personally heard G-d speak at Sinai, he would have sought out the nearest psychiatrist, since there cannot be a G-d, so his experience would prove that he is crazy. When a consistent phenomenon defies all recognized explanations, other avenues must be courageously explored. In this way a Jew will finally discover the ultimate Source of Jewish survival.

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### SUMMARY

*Since Jewish survival currently defies naturalistic explanation, the naturalistic model of explanation which works for other cultures cannot be confidently applied to Jewish history. The only available explanation is Divine Providence.*

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At this point we need to remember the evidence presented in chapter I showing the superior quality of life enjoyed by Jewish communities. After all, it is not enough to merely survive; the conditions of life must be good enough to make it worthwhile to survive! In the case of Jewish survival, the evidence shows that this requirement is amply fulfilled. Indeed, the quality of life is *superior* to that of our neighbors.

(Of course, this must be measured in terms of areas of common concern. It would be absurd to claim superior quality of life on the grounds that Jews keep kosher - no one else wants to keep kosher!) Success in dealing with family life, addictions, crime, literacy and education sets the Jewish community apart from its neighbors - even those living in the same physical, economic and political environments.



[Comparison with the Amish and other similar communities is not to the point here. They may enjoy a high quality of life, but they achieve it at the price of isolation. Only under their strictly controlled, isolated conditions do they achieve their success. It may be true that any culture can achieve high quality of life under strictly controlled and isolated conditions. This does not reveal *the contribution of the culture* to the quality of life. The point about Traditional Judaism is that it enjoys its superior quality of life under the same conditions in which the host culture does not achieve a similar quality of life.]

Now, these two features of Jewish history that I have mentioned - survival and quality of life - constitute an unparalleled pragmatic success of high quality survival. We have been able to survive and we have been able to produce consistently higher quality of life under conditions in which no other civilization, no other culture, no other religion has been able to function.

How is it that a civilization survives and flourishes? I am not going to say anything profound now. I only wish I had a profound answer to this question! Rather, I am just going to give you a way of describing the phenomena.

A civilization is a *modus operandi*; it is a set of rules for living. (Many of those rules are not taught formally, but are implicit in the way people behave.) Those rules need to be adapted to the conditions of life. If they are well adapted, society will flourish. If not, there are two possibilities. Either the society modifies its practice, or the civilization disintegrates. If a civilization is too rigid, and the conditions under which it lives change radically, then it will simply fall apart. If it is more flexible, then it can perhaps change its character to meet the new conditions.

Now here you have a civilization, Traditional Judaism, which has lived under the most widely separated conditions that mankind has ever experienced. There was Traditional Judaism during periods of success when we had our own kingdom. There was Traditional Judaism under conditions when we were conquered by outside powers and were under the sphere of influence by those outside powers. There was Traditional Judaism under conditions of exile; centralized exile as it was in the Babylonian period and enormously scattered exile under the conditions of the last two thousand years.

How can a civilization survive under such widely differing conditions? If it were rigid and unable to change to meet the new conditions, then it would simply fall apart. If it were flexible and able to meet the new conditions, then there ought to be dozens of different "Traditional" Judasims today. Why? Because, we were living under such widely differing conditions, that if we adapted to meet those new conditions, then we ought to have widely different forms of "Traditional" Judaism. Neither of these



scenarios occurred. How can this be explained?

The only way to explain it is as follows. Traditional Judaism is not adapted to the *variables* in human existence. Traditional Judaism is adapted to the *constants* in human existence. It is not adapted to the conditions of life that change, it is adapted only to the conditions of life that do not change. Because, if Traditional Judaism adapted itself to living in the mountains, then you would have a radically different Traditional Judaism in the mountains than you have in the plains or in the deserts. If Traditional Judaism adapted itself to a successful economic period, then you would have radically different Traditional Judaism in poorer economic periods. If Traditional Judaism adapted itself to peaceful conditions, then when Jews lived under war, you would have to have another type of Traditional Judaism. If Traditional Judaism adapted itself to living under Moslems, then you would have to have a radically different Traditional Judaism living under Christians.

If Traditional Judaism had adapted itself to the local conditions, then history ought to have caused the development of many forms of Traditional Judaism today because historically the local conditions varied widely. Traditional Judaism would then look something like contemporary Christianity. If you have one basic form of Traditional Judaism throughout the world believing in the same basic principles, able to marry one another's children, eat in one another's homes, praying in one another's synagogues, then Traditional Judaism cannot be adapted to local conditions. *Traditional Judaism is adapted only to the universal conditions of human existence.*

The existence of many non-Traditional forms of Judaism does not affect this point. If we had followed the norms of human experience there would be no single, recognizable, world-wide Judaism which defines itself as representing the historically continuous principles of Judaism. That other groups have decided to change the historical tradition is true but irrelevant. The surprise is not unanimous agreement on Jewish practice, but that the diverse conditions of Jewish existence have allowed any continuity in representing the historical foundations of Judaism.

But that in itself is a puzzle. Why is it? What would lead a civilization to forgo the advantages of local adaptation? No one else did it. Everyone else adapted to the local conditions in order to get more fruitful interaction with local conditions. How is it that Traditional Judaism should be the only civilization that resists adaptation to local conditions and maintains its pristine purity of adaptation only to the constants of human existence? I have no naturalistic answer to this question. It is another unique feature of Jewish history.




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### SUMMARY

*A civilization is a set of rules for living. These rules will survive only if they are not in conflict with the life environment. If they are adapted to the variables in human life then, when those variable change the rules must change or disappear. The survival of Traditional Judaism in radically different environments means that Traditional Judaism, unlike other cultures, is adapted only to the constants in the human condition.*

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Finally, I think it can be argued that Traditional Judaism has had a bigger impact on world civilization than any other culture. This tiny, numerically insignificant group of people has transformed world beliefs, world values, the world's basic view of existence more so than any other group.

Think of what the world was like three thousand years ago and imagine a rough progress of development to the present day. The world has been getting more and more Jewish as time goes on. Three thousand years ago everyone was polytheistic. Today, there are many less polytheists. Perhaps Hinduism qualifies as real bona fide polytheism. Perhaps some strains of Christianity qualify as polytheism, perhaps not. But, from a time when the whole world was polytheistic, the world has become largely rid of that particular distortion. The ancient world in which the gods were simply super humans with all the frailties and the problems of mankind - fighting with one another and so forth - has largely been overcome. If you take the Christians and the Moslems together, you have considerably more than one and a half billion people who regard our Bible as divine in some sense (even though in many cases they misinterpret and misapply it).

The concept of justice is essentially a Biblical concept. In fact, it could be argued that morality itself is a Biblical invention. In the ancient world there was no concept of morality. And in so far as morality has become a modern idea to which the vast majority of mankind attaches itself, at least as an idea (practice is another matter!) is also the Judaizing of world civilization.

Now all this is an enormous surprise. Even the Greeks' contributions to world civilization are outgrown. Greek science has now been replaced by modern science. In fact much of what had to be done in the Renaissance was to outgrow Greek science. Greek philosophy? There are still some who study the ancient Greek thinkers. But as an impact or as a contribution to the living ideology of mankind, the Greeks have largely been passed, as the Romans have been passed, and as the medieval period and the Renaissance and all the rest have passed. Only Traditional Judaism is still making contributions to the present day quality or conditions of life of world civilization as a whole.



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### SUMMARY

*Traditional Judaism has made, and continues to make the largest single contribution to the development of civilization. This includes the gradual passing of polytheism, recognition of the Bible, and acceptance of the Biblical concepts of justice and morality.*

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## VIII SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Chapters IV-VII presented a summary of the evidence. Now, let's take examine the total evidence in the light of what this evidence was supposed to show. The first thing that the evidence was supposed to show was the uniqueness of Jewish history. Remember the Martian perspective that we spoke about in chapter III. We imagined a Martian surveying all of human history except for the Jews. He would come to recognize various categories of expected events: what happens to peoples under conditions of success or conditions of failure, war and peace, famine and exile, health and disease, economic collapse and economic prosperity and so on. He would have certain expected conditions of development and disintegration of civilizations. We then asked: "Would the Martian regard the Jew as more of the same, fitting in with the normal regularities that he has come to expect, living under the same conditions and types of rise and fall and development and disintegration of civilization? Or, would he regard the Jew as utterly unique in human history?"

The survey of the features of Jewish history that I have presented would lead the Martian to conclude that the Jew is utterly unique. First, the Jew possesses predictions of events that could not have been expected to happen and on which a neutral bystander would have put a very low probability. The estimate that we came up with in chapter IV was a probability of 1/16000 that the prediction in Deuteronomy 28-30 would be expected to come true. And, against all expectations, this prediction came true.

Second, Jews have witnessed miraculous events, including unique public miracles that other nations don't even claim. Very surprising unique events have happened in Jewish history, events which served to support Judaism, to enable Judaism to survive, and to rescue Judaism from dangerous circumstances. Third, Judaism survived and developed under historical conditions which were unique, conditions which would have lead to the disintegration of Judaism, especially when compared to other world religions. Fourth, you have a unique quality of life, and fifth, a unique impact on world civilization. All of this would have to lead the Martian to conclude that Jewish history is unique.

Well then, what shall the Martian do with this unique history? Again we said in chapter III, when you have an area of phenomena which you think you can explain and then you come across a new phenomenon in the

area which all of your tools of explanation cannot handle, you need to add something to your tools in order to explain the new phenomenon. The example we gave was the case of the nucleus in the atom, when it was inexplicable that all the protons should sit there without repelling one another, and physics added the nuclear force which holds them together against the force of electrostatics.

Similarly, if you have a unique historical phenomenon, and it cannot be explained by the normal features which produce other historical phenomena, then you have to infer the existence of some other force which is responsible for this phenomenon. Then from the description of the phenomenon you can infer directly at least a minimal description of the force that produces it. It has to be the kind of force that is capable of producing the unique features of that phenomenon.

The features in question are: an unaccountably true prediction against all odds, miraculous events which help to found and support the Jewish religion, the survival of Judaism against all historical probability, a unique quality of life enjoyed uniquely by Jewish communities, and the impact of Judaism on all of world civilization. What kind of force could be responsible for those kinds of effects?

First, the force must be powerful. It has maintained the existence of a civilization, it has produced the crossing of the Red Sea, the revelation at Sinai, the manna that people ate and so on: it must have considerable power at its disposal. Second, it must be intelligent. A blind or uninformed force cannot maintain the existence of a civilization. Third, it must be some interested in Judaism in particular. These things didn't happen to the Hindus or the Eskimos or the Chinese. They happened only to the Jews and therefore this force must be interested in the Jews in particular.

But fourth, it cannot be exclusively interested in the Jews. If it were exclusively interested in the Jews, it could have transported the Jews to some isolated area and maintained them over there and had its particular interaction with them there. Instead, the Jews were brought to the crossroads of three continents, and they had an impact on the development of world civilization. Apparently, then, that force is interested also in the rest of mankind. It is not exclusively interested in the Jews. It is interested that Judaism should have an effect on the development of world civilization as a whole.

*Now those are all descriptions of G-d, that is, the Jewish conception of G-d. Those descriptions of G-d are directly confirmed by a survey of the historical record.*




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### SUMMARY

*Judaism is unique in its verified improbable prediction, public miracles, survival, quality of life, and world impact. A power capable of these effects must be powerful, intelligent, interested in Judaism's survival and impact on the world. This can be directly confirmed from the historical record.*

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That much we can directly confirm. The rest - other descriptions of G-d, G-d being infinite, or G-d being creator of the universe and so on - are not directly confirmed by the survey of history. One also finds in Judaism descriptions of events that cannot be directly assessed, like the descriptions of the future, that there will be a Messiah, or what happens to the soul after death - there are no ways to directly confirm these. But, as I said in chapter III, since this is all part of a single coordinated body of information, and since those

aspects of the information that can be directly assessed are all directly supported by the evidence, the rest of the body of information gains credibility by being a part of that same body of information, just as it is with respect to any other source of information that you evaluate. If everything that source of information tells you which you can verify checks out true, then the other things it tells you are credible.

This, it seems to me, puts Judaism in the position of having greater probability of truth than any alternative. It surely has greater probability of truth than any other religion because as we saw in chapter II, other religions don't have any relevant evidence at all. Judaism is the only religion that puts itself on the line and offers evidence, and the evidence is quite powerful. A secular view of the world is inferior because all of these events cannot be explained from a secular perspective. You cannot explain the survival of the Jewish people, you cannot explain the verified accounts of miracles, you cannot explain the correct prediction, you cannot explain the unique quality of life, you cannot explain the impact that Judaism has had on world civilization, and you certainly cannot explain the sum of all of these taken together.

Now, have I absolutely refuted the skeptic? Couldn't the skeptic still admit that he hasn't explained them, but hold that maybe they will be explained in the future? Yes, it is still *conceivable* that there is no G-d and that these things happen for naturalistic reasons that we simply don't have access to at this time. But, I remind you that that wasn't the name of the game. That appeal only satisfies Descartes. It is still conceivable that the favored hypothesis is not true - but that is true for everything you believe, everything you know, everything you rely upon. Everything has some conceivable alternative which has not been ruled out absolutely.



That wasn't the criterion that we agreed upon. The criterion that we agreed upon was *high probability of truth vis-a-vis the alternatives*. The reason that we agreed upon that criterion was because Judaism is a *practice*. Judaism involves decisions. The criterion to which we hold responsible decisions is the criterion of high probability of truth. Whatever is the case with respect to theoretical beliefs (and philosophy is riddled with disagreement about that, and most philosophers disagree with Descartes' criterion) that is not relevant to us - we have to decide how to live. Decisions on how to live are made on the basis of high probability of truth vis-a-vis alternatives, that is to say, *if those decisions are going to be made responsibly*. That is the criterion to which we hold other people. If that is the criterion that we use for responsibility in all other areas of practical life, then we have to use it in this area as well. Therefore, Judaism is the only responsible way to live.

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### SUMMARY

*The part of the Torah not directly confirmed by the historical evidence is made credible by being part of the same body of information as that which is confirmed. Thus Judaism has the highest probability of truth among the alternatives (other religions and a secular view). Since Judaism is a practice, we must conclude that it is the only responsible way to live.*

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Once the power of the evidence that the Torah is true is appreciated, two questions naturally arise. One: if the evidence is so compelling, why is the number of people who believe in the truth of the Torah so small? Two: if the Torah is the only truth, don't we have an obligation to preach it to others? But this contradicts Judaism's consistent refusal to proselytize. We will answer the questions in turn.

The first question expresses a common assumption. The assumption is this: Whatever can be seen to be true by available evidence and simple logic should be recognized as true by a great majority of mankind. But this assumption is clearly false.

Consider anti-semitism as an example. There are (at least) hundreds of millions of anti-semites. They believe that Jews are evil, dirty, subhuman, etc. etc.. And yet many of them live among Jews. They have no evidence whatsoever for their beliefs. If they took the time, they could gather enormous evidence against what they believe. Still they persist in their folly.

Consider the shape of the earth. More than two thousand years ago considerable evidence existed that the earth is round. (Indeed, a few in the intelligentsia believed it.) The sightings of stars by sailors, the difference in shadows at noon in different locations, the disappearance of the bottom of the ship before the sails - this evidence was available to many. Yet



almost no one questioned the “obvious truth” that the earth is flat.

Consider any human study or activity - e.g., cooking, economics, sailing, mining, stamp collecting - does the majority of people have the truth about these matters? Usually only those people who take the time to study them know the truth, and they are the tiny minority.

The moral is this: **Often what can be discovered from available evidence via common logic is known only by a tiny minority of people.**

Now the explanations of this failure to find the truth will vary from case to case. For the truth of the Torah, it not to hard to provide. First, very few have direct access to the evidence presented here. Second, very few can make an unbiased examination of religion since their family and social life depends largely on their religious affiliation. Third, the argument presented here is not exactly simple. [I wish I could make it more so!] It takes considerable intellectual effort to follow it to its conclusion. These three factors are enough to explain why acceptance of the Torah’s truth is so limited.

The second question is this: If the Torah is the truth, don’t we have an obligation to share it with the rest of the world? But Judaism does not believe in actively seeking converts. That seems to imply that we do not really believe that it is true!

Many people share this misconception. They start with the truth that Judaism does not seek converts. They then draw the *false* conclusion that Judaism accepts other religions for other people. They then infer that Judaism does not regard itself as true.

Let’s sort out the facts. Judaism is the truth as revealed by the Creator of the entire universe. The “Jewish G-d” is the *only* G-d. He is as much the G-d of the Hindus and the Taoists as He is of the Jews. If the Hindus and Taoists do not recognize this, then their religious beliefs are not true. (See chap. II.)

It is a tragedy when people live their lives based on false beliefs. This holds for medicine, economics, nutrition and (all the more so) for religion. Since we possess the truth, it is definitely a responsibility to share it with others. This means *teaching them that it is true - no more*.

Now suppose we are successful in doing this. Non-Jews will come to see that the Torah is true. What then? Well, since the Torah has a place for believing non-Jews, we will explain to them how to serve G-d *as believing non-Jews*. Since the Torah does not require them to convert to Judaism in order to serve G-d faithfully, we have no interest in seeking their conversion.

We do not proselytize because the Torah - which is the only religious truth, and which we have an obligation to teach to all - does not require others to be Jews.



## APPENDIX

For those readers who are concerned that I have tried to reach substantial conclusions concerning truth and responsible action without giving philosophically sound definitions of those concepts, I offer the following.

## THE PARADOX OF ANALYSIS

Much of philosophy is an attempt to define concepts: evidence, truth, knowledge, justice, the good, causation, etc. There is a problem in understanding this project of finding definitions. The problem is called “The Paradox of Analysis.” The “paradox” is this:

*Either we understand the concept we are trying to define, or we do not. If we do understand it, why do we need the definition? If we do not understand it, how can we evaluate proposed definitions? How can we decide whether or not a proposed definition is correct?*

It seems that either the project of finding the right definition is either unnecessary or impossible. Now the solution to the “paradox” is this: *we have partial understanding.* Some aspects of the concept are understood and some are not. We use the part we understand to evaluate proposed definitions. Then we use the definition to clarify that part we do not as yet understand.

In a little more detail: A concept has many uses and applications. Take the concept “life” for example. “Life” applies to certain items in the world and not to others: trees, spiders, birds, beavers and people are alive; stones, pure water, the sun and dead animals are not alive. Living things are physical objects, they move, they use energy from the environment, etc. These aspects of “life” are understood.

But there are uses and applications of “life” which are not well-understood. Are viruses alive? (They reproduce only by using the machinery of a cell.) Are self-copying molecules alive? (They reproduce, but that is all they do.) Could a man-made computer or robot be alive?

These questions show that the concept “life” is not completely understood. The project of finding a definition proceeds as follows. A proposed definition is tested against what we do understand. It must apply to trees, spiders, etc., and not to stones, pure water, etc. And it must imply being physical, motion, using energy, etc. If it passes these tests [and is “integrated,” “simple,” “explanatory,” and possesses a host of other ill-defined but crucial theoretical virtues] then we may rely upon it to answer the questions of the previous paragraph (if it can).

At present we do not possess a definition of “life” which passes these tests. Therefore we cannot answer the outstanding questions.

Now consider the following proposition: *It is wrong to conduct a discussion using a concept for which we do not have a definition.*

This is the philosopher’s battle cry: DEFINE YOUR TERMS! Is this demand legitimate? Is there some intellectual fault in conducting a discussion using terms which are not defined?

It depends. If you are using the term in one of the areas in which it is not well-understood, then there is a real risk of being misunderstood. You risk failing to really resolve the issue, since the concept may be used differently in the future when a definition is provided. But if you are using the concept in one of the areas in which it is well-understood, these risks are minimal [but not zero - see below]. In this case the response to the philosopher should be: “Explain WHY I should define my terms! Show me the risk I am running. Show me how the argument I am making is compromised by my use of



this concept.” If he cannot do this, then we may proceed with the discussion without the definition.

For example, suppose we say that dogs are alive, or that smoke is not alive. We should not be stopped by the fact that we have no definition of “life.” These are clear cases of the concept. Any proposed definition will be tested by agreeing with these statements. They are not risky even in the absence of a definition of “life.”

On the other hand, if we say that viruses are alive (e.g. in a campaign for “the rights of all living things”), we are taking a risk. Whether or not viruses are alive is controversial. Without a definition it is impossible to be confident that the statement is correct. In this case we should wait for a definition.

Consider “truth” as another example. Many uses and applications are clear: “ $3+2=5$ ,” “yellow is lighter than purple,” “The United States is bigger than Puerto Rico,” are known to be true; “ $7+5=11$ ,” “the south pole has a tropical climate,” and “Rwanda is a first-world country” are known to be false. Others are not clear: “there is an infinity of twin primes [prime numbers differing by 2],” “the Japanese could have been defeated without the use of the atomic bomb,” “the universe will end in cosmic heat death,” are at present not known to be true and not known to be false.

Statements, beliefs, theories, guesses, propositions etc. can be true; numbers, rivers, stars, football teams etc. cannot. But it is unclear whether propositions of ethics or esthetics, propositions about the future, or propositions beyond the capacity of all mankind to ever know, can be true.

Use of the concept “truth” follows the same patterns as the use of “life.” If we remain within the well-understood areas there is no reason to worry about using the concept even though we do not possess a definition.

Suppose that during a trial a witness is accused of lying under oath. Suppose he tries to defend himself by saying: “Lies are untrue statements. Since there is no accepted definition of “truth” you cannot sensibly discuss whether my statement is untrue.” The success of his defense will depend upon the statement he made. If he said that taxation without representation is wrong, or that Berlioz was a greater composer than Brahms, or that it will rain tomorrow, or that the first cell evolved in the northern hemisphere, then his defense is sound. These are all controversial cases for the application of “truth.” It will be difficult to establish that what he said is false.

But if he said that the United States spends 5% of its budget on foreign aid, or that it rained yesterday, or that there is a greatest prime number, then his defense is worthless. In these cases the concept of “truth” is well-understood. Any proposed definition will have to respect these cases. Therefore we can conduct the discussion even without the definition.

[Even when using a concept within its well-understood areas the risk is not zero. Sometimes a definition will agree with almost all of the well-understood applications and connections, and will possess the virtues of integration, simplicity, explanatory power etc. to such a degree that it will be used to *override* a few of the well-understood uses. For example, 300 years ago whales were unhesitatingly classified as fish. With the discovery that whales are mammals and that the vast majority of fish are not mammals, whales were reclassified as non-fish.

But this cannot happen too often. For example, if it were discovered that sharks, barracudas, goldfish, tuna, swordfish and flounder were all mammals, then we would simply admit that some fish are mammals, and retain whales as fish. (Or we might stop using the concept “fish” altogether in favor of some better concept(s).)]

Our conclusion is this: *Using a concept without a definition is appropriate if it is used within the areas in which it is well-understood. When so used, there is only minimal risk of having to revise the conclusion of the argument due to the discovery of a definition.*