

## *Parashat Yitro*

### How do we Know that the Torah is True?

#### Our Unbroken Links Confirming National Revelation

Pat answers always bothered me. "How do we know that we are not allowed to play the guitar on Shabbat?" "Because Hashem says so!" "But how do we know that Hashem really says that?" "Because it's written in the Torah." "But how do we know that the Torah is really true?" Because Hashem says so!" These are some of the dialogues I engaged in, when I was a newcomer to Torah. As much as I drove my teachers crazy, their answers also really annoyed me. They made me realize that I was on my own in my quest for truth and I had no choice but to investigate for myself. My search for truth actually began in my early teens. I flirted with newborn Christians, orange-clad worshippers of a certain Guru whose name I have luckily forgotten, even Hara Krishna. None of them gave me any satisfactory answers of why their religion would be true. Every single religion in the world except for Judaism is founded on the testimony of one 'enlightened' person who convinced his followers that G-d either spoke to him or fathered him. Yet in recent history we have witnessed how great, charismatic leaders have the ability to sway away masses to believe their story and follow them blindly to carry out even mass-murder. This fact greatly detracts from the credibility of religions that originated in the revelation or vision of a single person. Even if the 'revelation' was seen by more than one person, as long as it is still a small percentage of the population, such a claim can easily be questioned. This is not so regarding a national revelation. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi points out that in the giving of the Torah, G-d revealed himself to the entire nation of Israel consisting of three million people. All the people present at the revelation at Sinai passed their experience down to their children, who in turn passed it down to their children. This tradition has continued from generation to generation until recent history. All Jewry affirmed the unbroken tradition that their direct ancestors had experienced national prophecy at Mount Sinai until the peak of the 'enlightenment period' about two hundred years ago. Virtually every Jew alive today can trace himself back to relatives who believed with all their heart and soul that they were links in an unbroken genealogical chain going all the way back to Sinai.

#### Could Moshe Have Invented the Torah?

People are generally apt to tell their children and grandchildren about momentous occasions in their lives, such as a mass revelation from G-d. As the Kuzari affirms, it is very unlikely that parents would want to lie about important matters, such as the revelation at Sinai, to their children. Why would anyone make up a story that limits his own freedom of action, for example, to play guitar on Shabbat? Judaism is the only religion that claims national revelation. It's interesting that no other religion has ever made such a claim, which would certainly strengthen their credibility to promulgate Divine truth. They do not make such an assertion, as they would be unable to sustain it. How would it be possible for any charlatan to convince an entire people that they experienced a grand divine revelation if it never happened? This is certainly true if this claim was presented to that generation itself, since it's impossible to convince others that they experienced something they didn't. They could easily deny the story any time during the first two or three generations after the alleged mass prophecy took place. Even if the claim was made later, regarding the experience of an earlier generation, if it was not actually true, people would question why didn't

anyone ever hear of it? Especially since the Israelites are a “stiff-necked people” (*Shemot* 32:9). This means that we are stubborn and it is hard to convince us of anything. We don't take other people's words at their face value unless we have checked out the matter carefully by ourselves. Moreover, if Moshe had invented the Torah why would he expose his own and his brother's shortcomings so blatantly? Much has written about 'The Kuzari Principle' see for example the excellent articles by [Rabbi Kelemen](#) and [Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb](#).

## Who Can Negate that We Ourselves Were Prophets?

ספר שמות פרק יט (ט)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנִי בָא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעָבַת עָנָן וְשָׁמַע הָעָם בְּדִבְרֵי עַמְךָ וְגַם בְּךָ יֶאֱמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם...  
 “Hashem said to Moshe: ‘Behold, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever...’” (*Shemot* 19:9).

The Torah itself testifies that the purpose of the revelation at Sinai was to verify the eternal truth of the Torah of Moshe. There were among the Israelites some who doubted Moshe's prophecy, and although it stated at the splitting of the Sea, “They believed in Hashem and in Moshe his servant,” it only stated, “Israel saw” but not “all of Israel saw.” Therefore, Hashem revealed Himself at Sinai, “In order that the people will hear when I speak with you” – the Ten Commandments, “So they may also believe in you” – that you are my prophet. From now on the matter of prophesy will be verified to them (Ibn Ezra, *Shemot* 19:9). Ramban emphasizes the importance that we ourselves were prophets and didn't just receive the Torah through an intermediary. In this way, “They will also believe in you forever” – throughout the generations. If any prophet arises and tries to negate the Torah of Moshe, the Jews will refute him immediately; as they saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears that Moshe reached the highest level of prophesy that no other prophet can ever reach. This is because all the Israelites heard Hashem's words from within the fire, and they knew that Hashem was speaking with Moshe, as it states, “This day we saw that G-d spoke with a person who heard the voice of the living G-d speaking out of the midst of the fire and lived” (*Devarim* 5:21). This verified Moshe's irrefutable prophecy that can never become “old” or outdated.

## How do we Know what the *Tefillin* are?

Some people may accept the Divine origin of the Written Torah but have a much harder time accepting the Oral Torah. When you buy a new washing machine or computer, in addition to the written manual someone explains to you orally how to best use your new device and protect it from damage. When Hashem gave the Jewish people His written manual of how to achieve our purpose, He included a dynamic oral explanation about how to adapt the manual to various times, places and situations. There are endless examples in the Written Torah that cannot be understood without its Oral explanation. For example, have you ever seen anyone wearing round, purple, plastic *tefillin*? The only references in the Written Torah to *tefillin* are, “It shall be for a sign to you upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes... (*Shemot* 13:9), “It shall be a sign on your hand and *totafot* between your eyes (*Shemot* 13:16), “Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a frontlet between your eyes” (*Devarim* 6:5-8). Without the Oral Torah, how would we know that the *tefillin* are supposed to be two, small, square, black, leather boxes with black leather straps attached to them? The Torah makes it clear that it was being transmitted side by

## Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

side with an oral tradition. Many terms and definitions used in the written law – for example, the laws of *shechita* (Kosher slaughtering), divorce and the rights of the firstborn – are all assumed as common knowledge and are not elaborated on within the Biblical text. Rambam explains, “All the mitzvot that were given to Moshe at Sinai were given with their explanation. As it is written, ‘I will give the tablets of stone, and the Torah, and the mitzvah’ (*Shemot* 24:12). ‘The Torah’ – this is the Written Torah. ‘And the mitzvah’ – this is its explanation. He commanded us to fulfill the Torah in accordance with the mitzvah. This ‘mitzvah’ is what is called the Oral Torah” (Rambam, *Introduction to Mishnah Torah*). The Written and the Oral Torah are inseparable, as no text can have any authoritative meaning without an accompanying tradition as to the principles that govern its interpretation. Often I hear claims such as, “The Rabbis made up this and that for their own convenience.” Actually, the Oral law includes many more inconvenient rules- not convenient shortcuts such as those we have seen recently in the Reform movement. If the Rabbis made up the Oral Torah, why did they have to make it so complicated for themselves and the rest of us? Perhaps the author of these intricate laws is no other than the Eternal G-d Who knows exactly why each detail of observance is necessary for us to fulfill our Jewish potential?