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**The Minhag of Decorating Shuls and Homes on Shavuos**



***Rome’s Great Synagogue Decorated with Flowers for Shavuos***

 The Rama (Orach Chaim 494:3) writes that on Shavuos there is a Minhag to put greenery and flowers in the Shuls and houses as a reminder for the joy of receiving the Torah, and the Mishnah Brurah (10) comments that we do this because Har Sinai grew grass and flowers before the Torah was given on it.

 In the town of Ostrow there lived a very pious man by the name of Reb Hersch Shmulkes who learned Torah all day and night while living in abject poverty, in a dilapidated old shack. The Jews of the village had no idea that there was a great Torah scholar living in their midst, except for Reb Pinchas of Koretz— who did not reveal this to anyone.

 One Shavuos, Reb Meir Margolis, Reb Yaakov Yosef, and Reb Pinchas of Koretz were learning the laws and customs that related to Shavuos, and the question arose as to the source of the Minhag of spreading grass on the floor of the Shul on Shavuos. Reb Pinchas suggested that they go visit Reb Hersch to wish him a good Yom Tov, adding that perhaps he knew of a source for this custom.

 Not knowing who Reb Hersch really was, the two could not understand why they would ask him such a question, but they did not want to refuse Reb Pinchas. When they got to the broken-down shack, they saw Reb Hersch sitting on a rickety bed learning Shulchan Aruch, and he invited his guests in to sit on a wobbly wooden bench.

**The Response of Rav Adda bar Masnah**

 Reb Pinchas of Koretz asked Reb Hersch if he knew of a source for spreading grass on the Shul floor on Shavuos, and without hesitation, Reb Hersch replied, "The Gemara (Eiruvin 22a) relates that Rav Adda bar Masnah decided to learn in the Yeshivah of Rav, and his wife, who agreed to let him go, asked him how she will feed the children while he was gone. He answered, ‘Is there no grass left in the field?’

 " Reb Hersch continued, "What did he mean by this response? He surely did not expect his family to eat grass! He was implying that just as Hashem provides grass for the animals to eat without them having to earn a livelihood, He would provide for her as well. Those who put their trust in Hashem and rely on Him to sustain them, will be supported by Him.

**The Lesson of Spreading Grass**

 When the Jews accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, they said that they were willing to learn Torah day and night, but wondered how they would be provided for. Hashem showed them the mountain all covered in grass, and taught them this lesson, that Hashem will provide for those who put their trust in Him, just as He provides for the animals. Spreading grass on the floor in Shul reminds us of this." The three visitors were greatly inspired by the vast Torah knowledge of Reb Hersch, and from then on, the community of Ostrow recognized the Tzadik's greatness. Many offered to support him and help him with better living conditions, but not wanting to take any gifts, he turned down all offers, leaving his reward intact for the World to Come!

*Reprinted from the Shavuos 5780 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**The Humility of Mount Sinai**

**And the Jews Reason for Performing G-d’s Mitzvot**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



 The Midrash relates that the Jewish people slept through the entire night before the Torah was given on Shavuot. Their sleep was so deep and so pleasant, in fact, that we are told that the insects didn't dare to disturb them.

 The next morning, the day on which the Torah was to be given, they overslept! G-d Himself had to awaken them. Unbelievably, the Jewish people arrived late for the revelation at Mount Sinai.

 In commemoration of this event it is customary to remain awake the entire night of Shavuot learning Torah in the synagogue. But how could the Children of Israel have allowed themselves to fall asleep in the first place? If the greatest human king had promised to give us a valuable treasure, wouldn't we be too excited to sleep the night before? How much more so a gift that is expected from the King of kings!

 In truth, having been told that G-d would be giving them the Torah in 50 days, the Jews yearned with such anticipation that they immediately began to count the days. Each day, as they counted, they ascended one spiritual rung after the other by ridding themselves of the negative characteristics they had acquired in Egypt and transforming them into positive ones. The nearer the day came, the greater was their excitement. And yet, when the day finally arrived, they almost slept right through it!

 To explain: The Jewish people did not fall asleep by accident; they did so deliberately, with good intentions. For they were convinced that going to sleep would constitute the final stage in their preparation for receiving the Torah.

 When a person sleeps, his soul ascends on high. Thus the Jews deliberately went to sleep to allow their souls to comprehend even higher levels of the Torah. Nonetheless, G-d did not approve of their behavior, as it missed the point of the entire revelation.

 In His Torah, G-d commanded us to utilize physical objects in the performance of His mitzvot. Thinking about giving charity is not enough; we have to actually give a poor person the money. By utilizing physical objects (a lulav on Sukkot, for example) we imbue the world with holiness, thereby connecting the spiritual and material realms.

 When a person sleeps, however, his soul is not connected to the physical world, and the spiritual and material realms remain disunited -- the antithesis of G-d's intent in giving us His Torah.

 Accordingly, the proper preparation for receiving the Torah should have involved serving G-d on the highest spiritual levels while still awake, the better to fulfill G-d's ultimate intention in creating the world.

*Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Shavuos edition of L’Chaim Weekly. Adapted from the Likutei Sichot of the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe, Vol.4.*

**Thoughts that Count**

**For Shavuot**

 G-d gave His three-part Torah (the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings) to a three-part nation (the Jewish people, who are divided into Priests, Levites and Israelites) in the third month (Sivan, the third month of the year when counting from Nisan, the "first month" according to the Bible). *(Our Sages)*

 Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev used to say: Shavuot is the only Biblical festival in connection with which the Torah does not command that a "sin offering" be brought. For on Shavuot, the day on which the Torah was received, every Jew is in the category of a convert, who is considered to be "a young child who is just born." Just as a newborn infant is without sin, so too is the Jewish people without sin on Shavuot.

 And Israel camped opposite the mountain [Mount Sinai]

The word the Torah uses for "camped" is in the singular tense, for the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai "like one man, with one heart," with perfect unity and love for one another. This feeling of unity constituted the most appropriate preparation for receiving the Torah, for when Jews are united, they merit G-d's blessing. *(Likutei Sichot, Vol. 2)*

 The Baal Shem Tov taught that we must love every Jew, the simplest person as well as the greatest Torah scholar. Jews are G-d's "tefilin," as it were, the Baal Shem Tov explained.

 Scholarly Jews, those with great intellectual abilities, are the tefilin that are worn on the head. Simple Jews, those who perform G-d's mitzvot with joy and gladness, are the tefilin that are worn on the arm.

 Just as when putting on tefilin the hand precedes the head, so too must we demonstrate love for the simple Jews first. *(Maayan Chai)*

*Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Shavuot edition of L’Chaim Weekly.*

**The Dubno Maggid’s Style of Learning on Shavuos Night**

 Once, the Dubno Maggid was a guest by the Vilna Gaon for Shavuos, and they each sat down to learn on the night of Yom Tov. The Vilna Gaon started saying Tikun Leil Shavuos, which is a compilation of a little of every part of Torah— Tanach, Shas, and other holy Seforim, while the Dubno Maggid involved himself in learning Gemara.

 The Gaon asked him why he was not saying Tikkun Leil Shavuos?

 The Dubno Maggid answered, "I will explain with a Mashal. There once was a person who wanted to open a store to sell merchandise. He went to the market and purchased a few items to resell, and set them all up in the window of his store. A passerby observed and commented that it was not good business to set up his store like this, by putting all his merchandise in the window. Rather, he should only put a sample of what he is selling in the window, and the rest he should leave inside the store.

 The storekeeper responded that it was good advice, but only for businessmen who have a lot of merchandise to sell. However, when one only has a few items for sale, he should place them all where everyone can see them."

 The Dubno Maggid continued, "So it is on the night of Shavuos. When it comes to you, the Vilna Gaon, you have learned a lot of Torah and possess much Torah 'merchandise'. You can therefore put out a 'sample in the window' and say Tikkun Leil Shavuos. I, however, am poor and destitute in Torah learning, and only possess a few 'wares' to display. It is better for me to place all that I have in the 'window', and it is not sufficient for me to merely place out a few samples. Therefore, I am learning Gemara!"

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*Reprinted from the Shavuos 5780 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

**Forever, Hashem, Your Word Stands Firm in Heaven.**

**(Tehillim 119:89)**

**By R’ Shmuel Winzelberg**



 The Nesivos Shalom writes that just as the Torah is eternal, so too is the giving of the Torah eternal. Each and every year we receive the Torah on this day of Shavuos, anew. This is why we say in the Shemonah Esrei and in Kiddush, תורתנו מתן זמן ,the time of the giving of the Torah— in present tense, and not לזכר as a remembrance to the past— as if Hashem only gave the Torah to us once.

 Rather, Hashem gives us the Torah every year, and we observe this on the 6th of Sivan— not on the 7 th of Sivan as it was given on Har Sinai. Our focus is not on the original giving of the Torah but on the renewal of the giving of the Torah every year.

*Reprinted from the Shavuos 5780 email of Torah U’Tefilah as compiled by Rabbi Yehuda Winzelberg.*

Ruth’s Hesed

 The *gematria* for Ruth is 606. If you add 7 for the seven Noahide (universal) laws that all nations must obey, the total is 613. This signifies that Ruth was a true convert, the epitome of someone accepting the Torah. For this reason we have the custom to read *Megilat Ruth* on Shavuot.

 Another great quality of Ruth was her hesed as she refused to abandon her mother-in-law Naomi. She could have easily gone back to her father’s palace, where she would have lived as a princess of Moab. Instead she stuck with Naomi, so that Naomi would not be alone.

 Ruth said to Naomi: “*Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you will lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people, and your G-d is my G-d; where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may Hashem do to me, and more! If anything but death separates me from you*.”

**The True Essence of a Jew**

 This was the ultimate form of *hesed* and the essence of what being a Jew is all about — caring for one another.

 Ruth was a princess, but she offered to go and beg in the fields so as to spare Naomi that embarrassment. Also, as the ultimate *hesed* she married Boaz, a much older man, so that she could have a child through *yibum* and give Naomi happiness after losing her husband and two sons.

 We learn from this that there are two paths that we can choose to follow. Ruth decided to follow the Torah and not abandon her mother in law and in doing this *hesed*, she merited to become the mother of the Davidic dynasty. However, her sister in law Orpa chose a different path. She returned to her pagan Moabite gods, and according to the Talmud (*Sota* 42b), Goliath the Philistine — who was ultimately killed by David — was her descendant.

 We learn from this that in our own lives we must make decisions that will carry us on the right path of Torah. Where we live and where we send our children to be educated all have consequences in terms of whether or not our families stay on the Torah path, and whether or not we grow in that direction. When we make sacrifices for Torah, it will ultimately bring us a great reward, as it says in *Pirke Avot*: “*lefum tzaara agra* *— according to the suffering is the reward!”*

**United We Camp**

 When B’nei Yisrael they left Egypt and journeyed to the Sinai desert, it says: “*vayahanu bamidbar, vayihan sham yisrael neged hahar* — *and they camped in the dessert, and he camped there opposite the mountain.”* First the passuk writes that “*they camped*” in plural. But when it writes that B’nei Yisrael camped at Har Sinai, it switches to singular.

 Rashi comments on the usage of the singular form: “*k’ish ehad, b’lev ehad* — *Like one man, with one heart*.” This is because at Har Sinai, B’nei Yisrael were like one person, with one heart. That unity gave us the merit to receive the Torah!

 There is nothing greater in Hashem’s eyes than seeing B’nei Yisrael unified in harmony as one close nation, just as a father loves seeing his children close to one another, getting along and unified as one.

 May we all continue to be special in Hashem’s eyes and in the eyes of the Nations so as to make a Kiddush Hashem, as we celebrate the acceptance of the greatest gift any nation could ever receive, our holy Torah. May we also continue be as one nation, and always be concerned for the welfare of our fellow Jews, and make sacrifices for those close to us, as the passuk says: “*ve’ahavta lere’aha kamoha* — *Love your friend as you love yourself*!”

*Reprinted from the Shavuot 5780 email of Jack E. Rahmey as based on the Torah teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes.*

**How Do We Know**

**The Torah Is Real?**

**The Bedrock of Belief**

By [Shimona Tzukernik](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/1575/jewish/Tzukernik-Shimona.htm)

 Some months back, as I put my twins to sleep, Aronchik popped the question.

 “Mommy . . .” he said hesitantly.

“Yes?”

 “. . . Are *you* my mother?”

 My heart smiled, remembering thinking and asking the same question of *my* mother. “Most definitely!” I said.

 “But . . . how do I *know* that you’re my mother? How do *you* know? Maybe the nurse switched me and brought you the wrong baby . . . ?”

 He nestled closer. And, lying arm in arm, we continued to philosophize, until he fell asleep.

**But how do I *know*?**

 Our discussion reminded me of some moments after recess, back in the fifth grade. I was returning to class from the playground, kids in front and back of me and the bell blasting. Blue poles lined the path. I felt their pull, much like the force of the tide within a wave. It seemed to me I was standing still and the poles pushing past.



 “Am I real?” I thought. “Are the poles? And the people?”

 I pondered this all the way back to class, questioning not only where I came from, but whether I had any way of being able to *verify* my own existence.

 “Take out your biology books.” And within minutes my mind became absorbed in the green grasshopper, following the splices in my textbook—head, thorax, abdomen, legs—absorbing the details of the big picture whose veracity I had questioned just moments before.

 Although I didn’t yet know the word *epistemology*, that’s what my head was trying to wrap itself around: the study of knowledge and how we justify our beliefs. “Belief” traditionally implies that we accept a concept as being true despite the fact that it is beyond our understanding. As a ten-year-old girl, I could *believe* the world was real. But was it possible to *know* it? What had to be added to that belief in order to convert it into knowledge?

**Relevant Concept to the Festival of Shavuot**

 This concept is centrally relevant to the festival of Shavuot, which we read about in the Torah portion of Yitro. The Giving of the [Torah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2126/jewish/What-Is-the-Torah.htm) is *the* event upon which our entire practice hinges. Lighting Shabbat candles, putting on *tefillin*, the laws of inheritance, the prohibition against taking interest on a loan—all the myriad rules governing life for a Jew are based on the fact that on a Shabbat morning, the sixth of Sivan in the spring of 2448, G‑d communicated the purpose of Creation, and His will, to the Jewish people.

Before plunging in to the deeper meaning of all those details, it’s appropriate to ask ourselves, “Is it true?” It’s like checking in, “Are you my mother?” For all we know, the Ten Commandments might be a list of ethical values compiled by a group of people who developed a personal philosophical and legal system by which to live—or by a select few seeking to control the masses. The possibilities are numerous, and logically seem to outweigh the notion that the Creator clearly communicated His infinite Being to us little people.

 *All* religions and spiritual paths lay claim to being True. Christianity claims one thing, Islam another, Buddhism yet another. The list is as long as the religions to which people around the world subscribe. They may overlap on certain issues, but the bottom line is that they all contradict *every* other religion, or brand thereof, in *some* way. There is no way that *both* Christianity and Islam can be *absolutely* true—because they contradict each other.

**How Do We Know that G-d Endorses Judaism**

 The same thing applies to Judaism: it is at odds with every other religion in some way or another. How do we *know* that it is the will of [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm) as transmitted to Moses and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai? And in what way is Judaism’s claim to Truth different?

 There are intellectual and religious traditions that flounder upon the marsh of their own reasoning. In my youthful mind, I relegated Judaism to those same backwaters. But in my bones, my innate belief was rich as marrow. It pushed me to search for rational explanations that would be compelling enough to draw my faith into the realm of knowledge.

 Along the way, I attended a midwinter camp while still in my teens. On Shabbat our counselor sat with us on the dry grass, beneath a sun that glared so potently I could hardly keep my eyes open. The text in my lap was the *Kuzari*. Written by Rabbi Judah HaLevi, it chronicles an imagined conversation between a rabbi and the king of the Khazars, as the latter searches for the truest way to serve his Creator. It changed my life. I sat down that morning replete with questions, and even skepticism. I stood up on a new foundation.

**Arriving at the Truth Only Inductively**

 At one point, the rabbi asserts that “one cannot arrive deductively at the Truth.” That may sound simple, but it was a revelation to me. I was deeply rooted in the notion that I’d begin with myself, search, develop understanding, and then arrive, through that process of deduction, at the Truth. What was being communicated to me was that we can arrive at the Truth only inductively.

 In the words of the *Kuzari*, “The conditions which render a person fit to receive divine influence *do not lie within him* . . . Whosoever strives by speculation and deduction to prepare the conditions so as to receive this inspiration . . . is an unbeliever.”1

**The Theme of Ein Keilokeinu**

 In the morning liturgy, we read the famous song Ein Keilokeinu, which, line after line, praises the Creator. “There is none like our G‑d,” it says. “None like our King, our Master and Redeemer.” The second stanza asks, “*Who* is like our G‑d?” The first time I had read it, I was struck by the apparent flaw in logic. Surely one would first ask, “Who,” and only then, after all the inquiry, arrive at the conclusion that “there is none like our G‑d”?

 I understood from the *Kuzari* that if we approach G‑d in that way, we are, in essence, creating Him in our image. By deduction, I can arrive only at an entity as great as my own mind. But, counterintuitively, when I surrender my notion of what-is—how things are supposed to be and what “G‑d” is—then I am able, through diving into the wisdom of the Torah, to access the infinite which lies beyond me.

This does not imply “blind” faith, though. There is a rational component to Jewish belief. Our tradition marries the supra-conscious and the rational in the most remarkable way. We’ll come to that. For the moment, though, let’s hold on to this notion that if we are the point of departure, we cannot arrive at G‑d.

 Rabbi [Judah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112513/jewish/Judah.htm) HaLevi takes this notion a step further. He states that even if a religion grows in a grassroots fashion and takes hold of a collective consciousness, it has no more validity than the subjective fancies of an individual. Religions of divine origin don’t “grow” and “spread,” because they don’t begin with the people. With religions of divine origin, there is no need to unite differing opinions or lay the foundation of the faith, working and reworking it until it takes on a complete structure. As the rabbi answers the king, “Only rational religions of human origin can arise in this way . . . *a religion of divine origin arises suddenly*. It *is bidden* to arise, and it is there, like the creation of the world.”2

**That One Moment in Time**

 What this means is that just as with the individual one cannot arrive at G‑d following a step-by-step path that begins with the self, so too with regard to humanity at large. If G‑d did indeed communicate His will to the Jewish people, then He did so in one instant. The divine revelation upon which our belief is based must have occurred *at one moment in time*. Either G‑d was communicating to us, or He was not.

 And, if the setting meets certain criteria, then from that moment onward, the revelation holds a validity that carries it forward. In their discussion, the rabbi emphasizes to the king that there were over two million Jews who lived in Egypt and endured slavery, heard the promise of redemption, witnessed the ten plagues and experienced the Exodus and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. He adds that not one of them had separated or lived elsewhere at the time these events occurred. Furthermore, all these people experienced these things together over a period of forty years.

**The Jewish Claim to Divine Revelation and Truth**

 The king of Khazaria readily accepts the rabbi’s claims to divine revelation and Truth. He accepts that religion does not evolve, but that rather there is a spontaneous eruption, a revolutionary moment that arises out of this revelation. And he accepts what the people themselves came to through witnessing the revelation, namely that [Moses](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/73398/jewish/Moses.htm) held direct communication with G‑d.

 What is it about what the rabbi said that persuaded the king so readily? Here’s where logic comes in to play. Let’s assume that this notion of the Giving of the Torah is just a claim. Can we authenticate it? Yes. *Because the nature of the claim lays itself open to being proven true or false.*. The philosopher of science Karl Popper asserts that a theory must expose itself to being disproved—otherwise it’s pseudoscience. And the same applies to history. If an event can’t stand up to being proven true or false, it cannot be classified as a historical fact.

 Let’s contrast, for example, the attack on the World Trade Center and the story of the flight of Icarus to the sun. Why do we term the former a historical fact and the latter a myth? Because the former exposes itself to being disproved, whilst the Greek tale doesn’t. A claim is made that two airplanes flew into the towers on September 11, 2001.

**The Desperate Search for Evidence**

 Imagine that I’d never heard of such an event, and challenged you to prove it. You could. You’re making a claim that you can prove, and that I could *dis*prove. I could search for evidence and find none, and thereby refute what you’re telling me. You could show me footage of what happened, written testimonies, eyewitnesses—and prove that it happened. But with the story of Icarus, we can’t do that. The claim is that there were no witnesses to corroborate the event. Either I believe you or I don’t. I can’t logically challenge it.

 Where do religious claims fall in to the mix? History or myth? Fact or fiction? Remarkably, all religions base themselves on a revelation or event that happens in private—such as that Jesus rose from the dead before a handful of people, or that Muhammad ascended to the heavens alone. And it’s not just the New Testament or the Koran.

 Most religions don’t lay claim to any more than one individual or a small group as being privy to divine revelation. Why? Because *that way, no one can refute it*! There is simply no way to verify—or falsify!—the claim. Either you believe them or you don’t. “Muhammad said.” So he said. You believe him and I don’t. In essence, the foundation of all religions is, from a philosophical perspective, no different from a made-up myth.

**Judaism is the Only Exception**

 Judaism is the only exception. The Bible states that G‑d revealed Himself to the entire nation at the same time! No other nation ever made such a claim, *because it would be immediately exposed*.

 Think about it for a moment. The Bible *repeatedly* states that every member of our tribe stood at the base of Mount Sinai and experienced G‑d’s communication. According to the claim, there were 600,000 males. Plus their wives and children (and supposedly, there were many of them, because all the women, we are told, had multiple births each pregnancy). Then there were the Egyptian converts who had joined them. The account of the Giving of the Torah clearly states that every individual was there. And then it repeats that claim over and over.

 When Moses communicates his parting message to the people forty years later, he reiterates the claim again and again. Why the necessity to emphasize it? Because such a claim most certainly stands up to the test of being proven false.

Let’s look at it from this angle: imagine that the assertion was that “many” or “most” people were there.

**The Challenge of a Child’s Question**

 Now, one generation down, along comes a kid and asks of Mom and Dad, “Were you there?” and they answer, “No.” That child with that question would not necessarily thereby have disproven the event, but she’d certainly have room to doubt it. But if the claim is that *every* member of the people was present, and the child says, “Folks, did you witness it?” and they say, “No, not us”—well, then, the claim’s been invalidated in that instant! “The claim is that it was experienced by *everyone* without exception, and here you are telling me that *you weren’t there*!?”

 So, just one generation later, this audacious assertion would have fallen apart. If even one child born after the claimed occurrence had been told, “I didn’t witness what happened,” then the whole story would be up in smoke. And so on to the next generation. All the way to us. If we generously assume there are five generations per century, we’re looking at roughly one hundred and seventy links in the chain. And, in some way, our acceptance of the veracity of the event requires no more than what was necessary for the children of those who personally witnessed it. It has been an unbroken chain.

 Certainly, there were Jews who challenged the oral tradition. But even the Sadducees didn’t deny the Giving of the Torah! How could they? We have no tradition of anyone who said, “Sshhh. Let’s keep this to ourselves, but . . . it’s all bogus. So-and-so made it up.”

**Trying to Make Such a Claim Today**

 Could you imagine someone making such a claim today? “Yesterday, at midday, the entire Jewish nation stood on the shores of Jamaica and, amidst lightning, thunder and booming waves, heard G‑d communicate a new version of the Bible.” It’s preposterous! We’d laugh at the person, or cry for him and call for psychiatric intervention.

 Or, let’s say someone said, “Yesterday, the Twin Towers rose from Ground Zero.” Come on! It’s an impossible con. You can’t make something like that up, because no one would accept it—it lays itself too open to falsification. No one in our history, from the Jewish people’s stride up the Fertile Crescent and into the Holy Land and down through the ages, could have made up the story of Sinai. It would instantaneously have been crushed with disdain and laughter. So, while the oral tradition may have been challenged, no one ever denied the Giving of the Torah.

 I hear you thinking, “My folks did. And their folks too!” But . . . with all due respect to your folks, those statements defy logic. Where are they drawing that tradition from? Where are the people going all the way back—3324 years—who corroborate that? Prove to me that it didn’t happen. Where are your sources?

**Blinded from Our Heritage**

 The painful facts are that a history of pain and persecution has blinded us to our heritage, has covered our faith with soot and darkened our minds. Our ancestors were observant Jews. That’s how we know we’re Jewish today. And, for those who lost their faith to the sufferings of exile even earlier, their offspring most likely don’t even carry the knowledge of their own Jewish identity. It’s the same scenario as what happened to the descendants of the lost tribes, or the Sadducees.

 From a purely logical point of view, the claim of mass revelation compels us to an acceptance of the biblical account of the Giving of the Torah. So why the resistance to its acceptance as a *fait accompli*? Many of us are still likely to be more ready to recognize that Napoleon battled at Waterloo, or that Van Gogh cut off his ear (though apparently, current theory denies that—seems it was Gauguin who done it!) than to accept that G‑d brought a plague of frogs on Egypt and spoke to the people from a cloud. Why? According to the principles of logic, it makes so much more sense that those things did happen than that they didn’t.

 I’d venture to say that our minds are bribed by our bodies. To accept that Napoleon lived makes no demands on my life. Van Gogh cut off his ear; I might find it psychologically compelling, but it doesn’t ask of me to do anything different.

**What if Our Ancestors Really Heard G-d Give Us the Torah?**

 But if our ancestors really heard G‑d communicate the Torah, well, that’s another story entirely! If I bought in to that . . . then I’d have to forego the cheeseburger, or the mini-dress. I’d not be able to tour the world in the way I do now. I’d have to give up Saturday’s income. But that’s embarrassing, isn’t it? To casually say no to the absolute Truth and purpose of my existence because my stomach is rumbling and my heart greedy?

 Just doesn’t fit with our image of ourselves as sophisticated, people of integrity. So we dress our desire up in roundabout logic, and say, “Preposterous. It makes no sense. Seas don’t split, and G‑d’s voice is not heard by *bubbies* and babies on Shabbat mornings anywhere! Anytime! Now . . . how ’bout prawns for dinner?”

 If we want to understand the world—the grasshoppers and where we come from—if we want to live in accordance with Truth, we must be willing to follow the answers to their end point. They may be uncomfortable. But then, where in that big book did G‑d say it would be easy?

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/904370/jewish/How-Do-We-Know-the-Torah-Is-Real.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a904370) Kuzari 1:79.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/904370/jewish/How-Do-We-Know-the-Torah-Is-Real.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a904370) Ibid. 1:81.

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