

LESSON 8

THE CO-EXISTENCE OF CONTRADICTIONARY TRUTHS (I)

IN THIS LESSON

- ▶ The validity and importance of rejected halachic opinions.
- ▶ The confusion presented by Rabbinic disputes.
- ▶ How to tell when a dispute is genuine.

CLASSIC QUESTION | *How can two contradictory opinions both be true—as the Talmud states, they are “both words of the living G-d” (Eruvin 13b)?*

Mishnah | What is the point of mentioning a [rejected] minority opinion, alongside the majority opinion?

To refute it. For if a person will say, “I received a tradition [that this is the law],” you will be able to say to him, “You actually heard the [refuted minority] opinion of Rabbi so-and-so” (*Eduyos* 1:6, according to *Ra'avad*).

לְמַה מְזַכְּרִין דְּבָרֵי הַיְחִיד בֵּין
הַמְרַבִּין?

לְבַטְלָהּ. שְׂאֵם יֹאמֵר הָאָדָם “כִּי
אָנִי מְקַבֵּל”, יֹאמֵר לוֹ “כִּדְבָרֵי
אִישׁ פְּלוֹנִי שְׁמַעְתָּ” (עֲדוּיֹת פ”א, ו’.
ע”פ פִּירוּשׁ הַרֵאב”ד).

Chida | Light is only recognizable when it comes from a context of darkness, and truth can only be discerned from a context of falsehood.

Therefore G-d told Moshe numerous interpretations so that from the

אֵין הָאוֹר נִכָּר אֶלָּא מִתּוֹךְ
הַחֹשֶׁךְ, וְהָאֱמֶת לֹא נִכָּר אֶלָּא
מִתּוֹךְ הַשֶּׁקֶר ...

לְכֵן אָמַר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה דְּבָרֵי
הַמְזַכְּרִין וְהַמְחִיבִין וְכִיּוֹצֵא, כִּי

rejected opinion we would be able to appreciate the correct opinion (*Pesach Aynayim, Bava Metzia 59b*).

*Nesivos
ha-Mishpat*

Though halachic errors are inherently false, they nevertheless serve an important function for the rabbis, as we are taught on the verse “*and this stumbling block under your hand*” (Isaiah 3:6)—“*No person can grasp words of the Torah unless he first stumbles over them*” (*Gittin 43a; Author’s introduction*).

מתוך הסברה דחוייה תבנה
ותבונן האמתית (פתח עינים, בבא
מציעא נ”ט, ב).

אם שהשיגיא והטעות שקר
הוא בעצמותו, מכל מקום
תועלת יש בו לחכמים, ובבאור
אמרו חז”ל “והמכשלה הזאת
תחת ידך—אין אדם עומד על
דברי תורה אלא אם פג נכשל
בו” (הקדמת המחבר).

TORAS MENACHEM

THE EXISTENCE OF CONTRADICTORY TRUTHS

In the previous lessons we have discussed from both a *legal* and a *historical* point of view how different opinions arose among the Sages and why they are all considered to be authentic, even when one contradicts the other.

The Talmud develops this idea a stage further, and suggests that the differing views of the Sages are not merely *authorized* by the law, they are in fact both manifestations of the truth: “*Both views are the words of the living G-d*” (*Eruvin 13b*).

While it is easy to understand why a legal system might leave room for differing opinions and practices, we need to clarify how *truth* could be expressed by two or more contradictory points of view.

This topic has been the subject of much discussion over the centuries and, over the course of the next three lessons, we will cite some of the general approaches that have been taken, and elaborate further upon them.

🌀 PART 1: A SINGLE, “LINEAR” TRUTH

The *Mishnah* itself addresses our concern, clarifying why rejected views, which are apparently incorrect, were recorded by the author of the *Mishnah* (and later the *Talmud*). Simply put, it is worthwhile to record rejected views so as to make clear that they have been rejected and are no longer valid. If a person will arise at a later time and propose such a view, it will be of great benefit to have the opinion already recorded and rejected so as to prove simply and easily that he is incorrect.

If we develop the argument further, there is room to say that noting incorrect opinions is not merely of use in the event that a person will attempt to challenge the accepted norm, but everyone can in fact benefit from consciously rejecting incorrect opinions before arriving at the correct one. Just as light is more powerful when it shines into a place of darkness, likewise, truth is more meaningful and convincing when it dispels false opinions [see *Chida*].

🌀 *The Last Word* 🌀

WHOEVER WISHES TO ERR...

Reading the many disputes in the Torah can be, for many people, quite disheartening. The feeling that there is just one G-d, who is ultimately the Author of the entire Torah, both Written and Oral, can appear to be undermined by the vast array of Rabbinic disputes that we encounter.

But the notion that the Torah could *cause* a person to sin, in any remote fashion, is simply not true. The Torah contains only good, and from good no evil can come. It is only that if the person reading the Torah harbors certain weaknesses in his appreciation of true monotheism, then those weaknesses can sometimes be exacerbated by the apparent image of disharmony in the Torah.

Thus, our Sages taught, “*Whoever wishes to err, let him err!*” (*Bereishis Rabah* 8:8). The fact that the Torah might, on occasion, be misleading did not lead G-d to omit the potentially confusing passages because, ultimately, we are speaking of someone who *wishes* to err. I.e. the person has a vested interest in confirming a polytheistic or atheistic position, and therefore he allows himself, wittingly or unwittingly, to be troubled by the disputes in the Torah. But if a person is sincere, and does not seek a pretense for an easier life (he does not “*wish* to err”) then he will never be misled by the Torah, since something that is one hundred percent truth cannot, by definition, be misled.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 14, pp. 151-2)

Viewed from this perspective, an incorrect opinion is recorded not merely to *protect* the truth (should someone come to challenge it), but furthermore, to *enhance* our appreciation of the truth itself. So we can understand why our Sages referred even to a rejected opinion as “words of the living G-d,” because we are to view even the rejected opinion as supportive of the truth.

In fact this is not only the case for rejected legal opinions, but often, in analyzing a law, the Talmud will pass through various incorrect presumptions, pointing out their flaws, before arriving at the conclusion. While both Talmuds (Jerusalem and Babylonian) follow this approach, the Babylonian Talmud tends to offer more incorrect presumptions before arriving at a conclusion, and it is for this very reason that the Babylonian Talmud is considered to be more authoritative.

So questions and incorrect presumptions, which enhance the clarity of the final conclusion are themselves considered to be an integral part of the Torah. Consequently, the requirement to make a blessing before studying Torah applies even if one studies only an incorrect presumption or opinion, never reaching the final

🌀 The Last Word 🌀

WHEN IS A DISPUTE GENUINE?

Some people like to argue for the sake of arguing. Their opinions are formed primarily as a response to counteract the views of others, rather than from objective reasoning and truth.

How can we tell whether a dispute is a genuine difference of opinion, where both sides speak “the words of the living G-d,” or if it is the product of childishness and falsehood?

The Schools of Shammai and Hillel give us the key:

“Although the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel were in disagreement [over

details of marital law]...the School of Shammai did not, nevertheless, abstain from marrying women of the families of the School of Hillel, nor did the School of Hillel refrain from marrying those of the School of Shammai. This teaches you that they showed love and friendship towards one another, fulfilling scripture’s advice to ‘love truth and peace’” (Zech. 8:19; Yevamos 14b).

If a Torah dispute is a genuine one it will never result in a lack of mutual respect, or degenerate into a situation where one side does not honor the dignity of the other. The Schools of Hillel and Shammai have set the standard that we all must follow.

(Based on *Sichah* of the second day of *Shavuot* 5742, par.38)

conclusion, because even this has the status of “Torah.” Furthermore, even after studying the final answer, one can still go back and learn the questions and incorrect presumptions, since they, too, form part of the sacred Torah text.

This point is graphically illustrated by the following point of Jewish law. On the night of the Fifteenth of Nissan (Pesach) it is a *mitzvah* to recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt in response to a question from one’s son: “*When your son will ask you... ‘What is this?’ you should say to him, ‘With a mighty hand G–d took us out of Egypt’*” (*Shemos 15:14*). But even after the son’s question is fully answered on the first night of Pesach, he nevertheless is required to ask it again on the second night! So we see that questions and initial presumptions, are as much a part of the Torah as the answers themselves, such that they must be repeatedly studied and emphasized.

☞ SANCTIFYING THE MUNDANE

A further significance to the “incorrect” parts of Torah, in addition to the above roles of *protecting* and *enhancing* the final conclusions, is the notion of *sanctifying the mundane*. As we will discuss later (*Ninth Principle, Lesson 1*), our Sages taught that G–d’s purpose in creating this lowly world was that man should sanctify it by studying Torah and observing *mitzvos*, rendering it a “*home for G–d in the lowest realms*” (*Midrash Tanchumah, Naso*). For this to be possible, the *mitzvos* must involve physical objects and the Torah must discuss physical things, for only in this way can one sanctify the objects used for a *mitzvah* and spiritualize the concepts that are studied in the Torah. If the Torah only discussed what was happening in the heavens, it would not provide us with a tool to sanctify mundane objects and ideas.

From this it follows that by discussing ideas that are *incorrect* in the context of a sacred Torah text, one effectively sanctifies *the concept of falsehood itself*, one of the most debased aspects of this world, helping to make even the lowly aspects of creation “a home for G–d.”* So it is tremendously important that the Torah contain untrue opinions, for in this way we are able to spiritualize

*Of course, this can only occur on the conceptual level (Torah) and not on the practical level (*mitzvos*). One cannot sanctify something which is untrue,

something very low indeed, which is, generally speaking, the purpose of creation.

This also sheds light on *Rambam's* insistence that, “[apparently unimportant] verses such as...“*Timnah was a concubine*” (*Bereishis*. 36:12), are no different from [overtly significant] verses such as, “*I am G-d your G-d*” (*Shemos* 20:2), and “*Hear O Israel*” (*Devarim* 6:4)” (see above. pp. 3-4). For if by discussing extremely mundane (and even profane) concepts in the Torah we accomplish their sanctification and elevation, then clearly verses such as “*Timnah was a concubine*,” which allude to debased human behavior (see *Rashi* *ibid.*), are of paramount importance in G-d's overall plan.

A final important role of clarifying correct opinions by first passing through a series of false presumptions is that it *stimulates the mind* to a much greater extent. One has to understand why the first presumption is, at first glance, acceptable, and then why it is ultimately problematic, before considering a second tentative solution and beginning the process over again. Since concentrated mental effort forces us to draw on higher cognitive faculties, it follows that the presence of false presumptions and incorrect opinions helps us to study Torah on a much higher level.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 25, p. 164; *ibid.* vol. 20, pp. 342-3; *ibid.* vol. 14, p. 25, note 43; *ibid.* vol. 15, p. 233; *ibid.* vol. 19, p. 114; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Toldos* 5713, par. 7; *Sichah* of the night of *Simchas Torah* 5736, par. 25; *Sichah* of eve of 20th of *Cheshvan* 5746, par. 28; *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Melukat* vol. 2, p. 182; *Ma'amar* of *Shabbos Parshas Shelach* 5731, par. 2).

any more than one can sanctify something which is forbidden (a *mitzvah* cannot be caused by a sin). But the *concept* of falsehood (and the concept of the forbidden) can be spiritualized in the theoretical context of a Torah discussion.

For example, when the Torah discusses wicked personalities, they may have indeed been wicked people in real life, but their identity as expressed *in the Torah* must ultimately be a positive one. And by bringing to light their true inner personality as expressed in the Torah, the wicked behavior of these errant individuals can often be redeemed.

Points to Remember...

The presence of incorrect opinions and false presumptions in the Torah plays four significant roles:

- ✓ It *protects* the correct opinions in the event that they are later challenged, since it is clearly documented that the incorrect opinion was carefully considered and rejected.
- ✓ It *enhances* our understanding of the correct opinion, which is clarified through actively rejecting other approaches.
- ✓ It *spiritualizes* incorrect notions by including them in a sacred Torah discussion, thus furthering the purpose of creation to sanctify the lowly and the mundane.
- ✓ It *stimulates* the mind to a greater extent, thus making Torah study a more engaging experience that brings the deepest mental faculties (soul powers) to the surface.

LESSON 9

THE CO-EXISTENCE OF CONTRADICTIONARY TRUTHS (II)

IN THIS LESSON

- ▶ Approaches to understanding how all Torah opinions are true.
- ▶ The difference between a Torah concept in heaven and on earth.
- ▶ Torah study or observance of the commandments: which is greater?
- ▶ Why certain opinions are halachically accepted.

CLASSIC QUESTION | *How can two contradictory opinions both be true—as the Talmud states, they are “both words of the living G-d” (Eruvin 13b)?*

Rashi | When two Sages argue in civil or religious law, each offering his own rationale, then there is no falsehood here. Each one is offering his own [valid] reasoning: one endorses, the other prohibits; one proposes a certain legal precedent, and the other a different precedent. But we can still say, “both are the words of the living G-d,” because under some circumstances the logic of one Sage will be appropriate, whereas under slightly different circumstances the other Sage’s words will be appropriate (Kesubos 57a).

בִּי פְּלִיגֵי תְּרֵי אֲמוּרָאֵי בְּדִין אִוּ
בְּאֶסּוּר וְהִתֵּר, כֹּל חֵד אָמַר הִכִּי
מִסְתַּבֵּר טַעְמָא, אִין כְּאִן שְׁקֵר,
כֹּל חֵד וְחֵד סְבָרָא דִּי־דִּיהָ קְאָמַר,
מִר יְהִיב טַעְמָא לְהִתִּירָא וּמִר
יְהִיב טַעְמָא לְאֶסּוּרָא, מִר
מְדַמֵּי מִלְתָּא לְמִלְתָּא הִכִּי וּמִר
מְדַמֵּי לִיהָ בְּעִנְיָנָא אַחֲרִינָא,
וְאִיבָא לְמִימַר “אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי דְבָרֵי
אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים” הֵם, זִימְנִין דְּשִׁיךְ
הֵאִי טַעְמָא וְזִימְנִין דְּשִׁיךְ הֵאִי
טַעְמָא, שְׁהִטְעַם מִתְּהַפֵּךְ לְפִי
שְׁנוֵי הַדְּבָרִים בְּשְׁנוֵי מוּעָט

(כתובות נ"ז, א. ד"ה הא.)

*Midrash
Shmuel*

“Both are words of the living G-d,” because each view has a spiritual source from which it is derived and sustained, and the implementation of each principle merely depends on the time and place....

Consider for example that Avraham fulfilled the [Rabbinic] precept of *Eruv Tavshilin*, and Ya’akov—the “chosen of the Patriarchs,” married two sisters—which is forbidden by Torah law....

But it is simply the case that every [legal opinion] descends from its heavenly source where appropriate, according to the time and place, and all the opinions thus remain true. Therefore, “every dispute that is for the sake of heaven will ultimately endure” (*Avos* 5:19), because both views are rooted in a supernal source (commentary to *Avos* *ibid*).

Arizal

“Both are words of the living G-d,” because each one speaks the truth as he perceives it from his spiritual vantage point. However, the practical law depends on the time (*Ta’amei ha-Mitzvos, Parshas Ki Seitzei*).

*Amudei
Shaish*

Even though the law does not currently favor the *halachically* rejected view, nevertheless, there must ultimately come a time when even this view will be followed practically, at least as a temporary dispensation, for otherwise what was the point in G-d transmitting the rejected view to Moshe at Sinai? (chapter 20).

אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים
במאמרם ו”ל, וזה כי לכל
הדברים יש להם שרשים יונקים
מלמעלה והכל כפי הזמן וכפי
המקום ...

והלא תראה כי אברהם אבינו
קים אפילו ערובי תבשילין,
ויעקב שהיה בחיר באבות נשא
שתי אחיות אשר התורה אסרה
אותם ...

אלא לאו שכל הדברים הם
משתלשלים משרשם העליון
כפי הצורך וכפי הזמן וכפי
המקום, והכל על קו האמת, בן
”כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים
סופה להתקיים” (אבות פ”ה, י”ט),
כי יש לה שרש וקיום למעלה
לשתי הסברות גם יחד (פירוש
לפרקי אבות שם).

כל אחד דבר כפי בחינה שהוא
נאחז בו ... וזה שנאמר כי אלו
ואלו דברי אלקים חיים, כי כל
אחד ואחד דבר אמת לפי מקומו,
אלא שההלכה הוא לפי הזמן
(טעמי המצות פ’ כי תצא).

סופו להתקיים דעת החולק על
האמת, כי אף על פי שעכשו אין
דבריו מכונים על פי ההלכה,
מכל מקום לסוף יבא איזו זמן
שיהיו צריכין לקיים סברותיו
הוראת שעה לעשות מעשה על
פיהם, דאם לא בן למאי נפקא
מנה מסרם ה’ למשה מסיני
(פרק כ’).

Ritva | “Both are the words of the living G-d.”
The French Rabbis of blessed memory asked: How is it possible that both positions could be the words of the living G-d when one prohibits and the other permits?

They answered: When Moshe ascended on high to receive the Torah they showed him forty-nine arguments in favor of prohibition and forty-nine arguments in favor of sanction for each law.

He questioned G-d about this and G-d answered that the matter will be in the hands of the Sages of Israel in each generation and the ruling will be as they decide (*Chidushei ha-Ritva, Erwin 13b*).

Mabarshal | Do not be surprised by the disputes and the vast differences of opinion among the Sages—one saying “impure” and the other saying “pure”; one saying “forbidden” and the other saying “permitted”; one saying “invalid” and the other saying “valid”; one saying “exempt” and the other saying “liable”; one saying “make distant” and the other saying “draw close”—for all their arguments were for the sake of heaven....

All these views are in the category of “words of the living G-d” as if each was received directly from G-d through Moshe. This is so despite the fact that Moshe never presented opposing perspectives with respect to any one issue....

The kabalists explained that the basis for this is that all the souls were

אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים,
שאלו רבני צרפת ז"ל היאך
אפשר שיהו שניהם דברי
אלקים חיים וזה אוסר וזה
מתיר?

ותרצו כי בשעלה משה למרום
לקבל תורה הראו לו על כל
דבר ודבר מ"ט פנים לאסור
ומ"ט פנים להתיר.

ושאל להקדוש ברוך הוא על
זה, ואמר שיהא זה מסור לחכמי
ישראל שבכל דור ודור ויהיה
הכרעה כמותם (חידושי הריטב"א
עירובין י"ג, ב).

שלא לתמוה על מחלוקתם
ברחוק הדעות שזה מטמא וזה
מטהר, זה אוסר וזה מתיר, זה
פוסל וזה מכשיר, זה פוטר וזה
מחייב, זה מרחק וזה מקרב, אם
דעתם לשם שמים...

ובכלם דברי אלקים חיים כאלו
קבל כל אחד מפי גבורה ומפי
מושה, האף שלא יצא הדבר מפי
מושה לעולם להיות שני הפכים
בנושא אחד...

המקבילים כתבו טעם לדבר, לפי
שכל הנשמות היו בהר סיני

present at Sinai and received [the Torah] by means of the forty-nine spiritual “channels”....Each one perceived the Torah through his own channel and in accordance with his own intellectual capacity....Therefore, being that all the words of the Sages are true, they are said to be “words of the living G-d,” even when they contradict one another (Author’s introduction to *Yam Shel Shlomo on Bava Kama*).

Tanya | We find and witness disputes between the Tannaim and Amoraim from one extreme to the other, literally, and “both are words of the living G-d.”

[Note that in the Hebrew phrase, “living G-d” (*Elokim Chayim*), both words are] in the plural, because [the diversity of opinions among the Sages stems from plurality in] the source of life of the souls of Israel. [This spiritual source is] split into three paths: right, left and center, representing kindness (*chesed*), severity (*gevurah*), etc. Thus, those souls which are rooted in the attribute of kindness tend to be lenient in their halachic decisions, being inclined toward kindness, etc. (Author’s introduction. See also *Likutei Amarim*, ch. 52, and *Igeres ha-Kodesh*, letter 13).

**Chavos
Ya’ir** | *Ritva* has argued that the expression “Both are the words of the living G-d” means that G-d told Moshe the final legal ruling would be in the hands of the Sages of each generation, but I find this interpretation problematic. For what could be gained by the Sages’ decision that something is pure

וקבלן דרף מ”ט צנורות ... כל אחד ראה דרף צנור שלו לפי השגתו ... ולכן אמר החכם מאחר שדברי החכמים אמתיים בלם דברי אלקים חיים אפלו במחלוקתם (ים של שלמה, הקדמה למס’ בבא קמא).

ראינו מחלוקת תנאים ואמוראים מן הקצה אל הקצה ממש, ואלו דברי אלקים חיים, לשון רבים, על שם מקור החיים לנשמות ישראל הנחלקות דרף בלל לשלשה קוין ימין ושמאל ואמצע שהם חסד וגבורה וכו’, ונשמות ששרשן ממדת חסד הנהגתן גם בן להטות בלפי חסד להקל כו’ (הקדמת המחבר).

פרש הריטב”א דמה שנאמר “אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים” רצונו לומר שהקדוש ברוך הוא אמר למשה רבנו עליו השלום שיהיה ההלכה מסורה לחכמי הדור, מלבד שדבר זה תמוה כי מה יועיל דבר שבאמת טמא

if *in reality* it is impure because it has the power to arouse the forces of evil (*kelipah* and *sitra achra*)?

Ritva's solution attempts to explain how two contradictory truths can coexist, but my mind is not sufficiently endowed to appreciate his words....

How very strange it is to say that G-d did not express His true opinion and will concerning the law and the meaning of scripture. In fact, the opposite makes more sense: that in apprehension of controversy G-d should have clarified each matter and made His will known (*Responsa*, no. 192).

ומבחו תתעורר קלפה וטמאה
וסטרא אחרא מה שייסבימו
חקמים שהוא טהור ...

הריטב"א ... בקש לישוב איך
אפשר לקים שני הפכים בנושא
אחד. ומכל מקום אי אפשר
לחלשת שכלי לקבלו ...

ומה מאד זר לומר שלא אמר
הקדוש ברוך הוא דעת האמת
ורצונו יתברך, הן בהלכה או
בפרוש הכתובים. ואיפכא
מסתברא, מפני חשש המחלוקת
היה לו יתעלה לברר הדברים
ולהודיע רצונו (סימן קצ"ב).

🌀 TORAS MENACHEM

CONTRADICTIONARY TRUTHS (II)

🌀 MULTIPLE “PARALLEL” TRUTHS

Another approach to explaining how contradictory Torah ideas can both be true is the path exemplified by *Rashi*:

“Both are the words of the living G-d, because under some circumstances the logic of one Sage will be appropriate, whereas under slightly different circumstances the other Sage’s words will be appropriate.”

In the previous lesson, our approach was to perceive just one opinion as being decidedly “correct.” The incorrect opinion was nevertheless considered “Torah,” since it provided necessary support to the correct opinion and enhanced our understanding

of it. *Rashi's* approach, however, suggests that *both* opinions are, in some way or another, true in their own right, and we simply have to perceive each one in its appropriate context.

Rashi's notion of “context” is potentially a very broad one. We will first consider two general types of variation in context [mentioned by *Midrash Shmuel*]: *differences in location* and *differences in time*.

🕒 DIFFERENCES IN LOCATION

The Talmud teaches that “in Rav’s locality,” the law follows Rav (*Shabbos* 19b), whereas in “Shmuel’s locality,” the law follows Shmuel (*Bava Basra* 153a). Both opinions are thus correct, and both express the Divine will. Thus, if a person were to travel from Rav’s locality to Shmuel’s, even Rav would agree that the person would need to change his behavior to conform with Shmuel’s opinion, and *vice versa*.

In fact, we find such regional variations not only with the law, but also with Jewish customs (which also have the status of “Torah”—see p. 147), many of which clearly have a regional flavor (see *Mishnah, Pesachim* ch. 4).

A further dimension to locality which the Torah deems significant is the notion of integrating with the surrounding culture. Our Sages taught, “*If you come to a city, practice its etiquette*” (*Shemos Rabah* 47:5). (Obviously this is provided that the

🕒 Sparks of Chasidus 🕒

Moshe’s name spelled in Hebrew, משה, is an acronym for משה שמאי הלל, Moshe, Shammai, Hillel (see *Megaleh Amukos* 74). This point is insightful as it illustrates how all future disputes, starting with Hillel and Shammai, were woven into the revelation given to Moshe at Sinai.

In fact, even the peaceful way that the Sages dealt with their disputes is hinted to here. For in the acronym, Shammai’s name appears before that of Hillel, alluding to the fact that “they mentioned the words of the School of Shammai *before* their own” (*Eruvin* 13b).

(Based on *Sichah* of the fifth night of *Succos* 5750, par. 4.

See also *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Shemini* 5751, par. 8.)

“etiquette” is not in contradiction with any existing area of Jewish law or custom). In fact, local etiquette is sometimes of such great significance that it plays a role in Jewish law. For example, when dealing with issues of trade descriptions: *“It is a primary principle in all matters of business law that one interprets statements as they are understood in the locality”* (Rambam, *Laws of Trading*, 26:8).

Why is there such a pressing need for Jewish law, custom and practice to be influenced by one’s locality? What would be lacking if there were one standard for Jews worldwide in all matters of Jewish observance?

The answer lies in the teaching of our Sages that *“G-d did a favor to the Jewish people in scattering them among the nations”* (*Pesachim* 87b). I.e. despite the fact that the scattering of the Jewish people across different countries seems on the surface to be a great disadvantage, it is actually something positive.

One of the explanations for this teaching is that there is an advantage to be had in the Divine service of Jews coming from a variety of places, following the local and national customs. This is because, *“G-d only exiled the Jewish people amongst the nations in order to add to the number of converts”* (*ibid.*). According to chasidic thought, the term “converts” here refers to the process of winning over (“converting”) sparks of holiness which are scattered globally in all physical entities. Therefore, “G-d exiled the Jewish people” to different places in the world so as to make it possible to elevate (“convert”) the sparks which are to be found in each place, and return them to their spiritual source. Consequently, “G-d did a favor to the Jewish people in scattering them among the nations,” because this made possible this unique aspect of Divine Service: extracting the sparks of holiness which are found in each country, and in every locality. (If people would only live there on a temporary basis, or if one influenced the area from a different locality, the same effect would not be achieved).

So it turns out that regional variations in Jewish practice have a remarkably profound significance, that of making the sanctification of this world—the very purpose of creation—a complete “saturation” that permeates every detail, i.e. that sanctity should become part and parcel of every feature of the world and not something “imposed” upon it from a distance.

DIFFERENCES IN TIME

Scripture states that G-d “made everything beautiful in its time” (Ecc. 3:11). One interpretation of this verse, offered by the Midrash, suggests that even the Torah must be given in its “right time”:

“In principle, the Torah should have been given through the first man, Adam...but G-d said, ‘If he can’t even cope with the six commandments that were given to him, then if I would give him 613 (248 commandments and 365 prohibitions), he would certainly not be able to cope....I shan’t give them to Adam. To whom will I give them? To his descendants” (Koheles Rabah ibid.).

Just as Torah in general was given “in its time,” we could argue that the Torah innovations of each generation were orchestrated by G-d to suit their specific era. Thus, while “Every new insight that a veteran scholar was destined to introduce was already given to Moshe at Sinai” (Megilah 19b), each insight was nevertheless uncovered by the scholar at some later point when it would become of relevance to the Jewish people.

We can also approach the notion of Torah disputes in a similar vein. The reason why “under some circumstances the logic of one Sage will be appropriate, whereas under slightly different circumstances the other Sage’s words will be appropriate,” is because each view is appropriate at a different time. In fact, this distinction is pointed to explicitly by **Arizal** who argued that “Both are words of the living G-d’...but the practical law depends on the time.”

A classic example of such a case is the series of disputes between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, where in the current era the law favors the School of Hillel (*Brachos* 36b), and in the Messianic Era the law will follow the School of Shammai (*Tosfos Chadashim* to beginning of *Avos*; *Mikdash Melech* to *Zohar* 1 17b—cited in *Classic Questions to Principle 9, Lesson 10*).

As we will discuss at length in our treatment of the *Ninth Principle*, the School of Shammai, being “sharper of mind” (*Yevamos* 14a) were capable of studying Torah in such a manner that they could perceive its power to refine even subtle, *potential* evil. But the School of Hillel interpreted the Torah exoterically as a

discussion of *actual* good and bad, and they disregarded the notion of “potential bad.”

For this reason, throughout history—when people have been unable to relate to the sophistication of the School of Shammai, to appreciate their approach which precludes even hidden evil—the law has followed the School of Hillel, and the rulings of Shammai are of no legal significance. However, in the Messianic Era, the law will follow the School of Shammai, for then the task of removing *actual* evil from the world will be complete, and the Jewish Sages will appreciate the timely need for the profundity of Shammai, to discern and refrain from *potential* bad (see p. 287ff.).

So, it follows that both views are absolutely true but their profundity is relevant to different eras.

☞ DIFFERENCES IN SPIRITUAL “LOCATION”

Of course, it is not *always* the case that two opposing views will both take expression at different times or in different geographical locations. But we could suggest that every opinion (and even false presumption or question) in the Torah does take *actual* expression in its appropriate *spiritual* “location.”

The idea of multi-layered spiritual truth in the Torah is expressed beautifully in the following teaching of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*:

“The Torah journeys down from spiritual world to spiritual world, and in each location it takes different expression....Each world yearns to be influenced by its superior, for it lacks some quality which is filled by the higher world....”

“Likewise, the Torah takes on a different expression in each world corresponding to the qualities of that world, and so the idea as it exists in any particular world must possess some inherent weakness or flaw, whereas in the higher world that problem does not exist. But there is nevertheless another problem to be found in that higher world, which is solved in an even higher world, and so on” (Ginzei Nistaros, *Ohr Yisra'el* p. 41; *Ma'marei Admor ha-Zakein, Inyanim* p. 297).

So even opinions which are not accepted as the final legal ruling, as well as false presumptions and questions that arise in the analytical process, are all true in a particular spiritual world. Thus, in the “world” of the School of Hillel, their criticisms of the School of Shammai’s opinion are true and valid; and in the “world” of the School of Shammai, their criticisms of the School of Hillel are also true and valid. And in the yet higher “world” of Shemaya and Avtalyon (who taught Hillel and Shammai), both sets of criticisms are answered.

Many classic texts [see *Ritva*, *Maharshal* and *Tanya*] also take the position that controversy is rooted in the very structure of revelation. There is no one single expression of the truth; each spiritual world expresses Torah ideas on its own “wavelength,” and each soul perceives the Torah ideas through its own lens.

In fact, this scenario is somewhat comparable to the multifaceted nature of textual interpretation which is divided into four general disciplines:

- a.) *peshat*—the literal interpretation which is borne out by a straightforward reading of the text;
- b.) *remez*—observing nuances in the text as a springboard to other ideas;
- c.) *derash*—the approach of “reading in” allegorical and homiletic lessons into the text;
- d.) *sod*—penetrating the “exterior” of the text to reveal its hidden, esoteric meaning.

Each of these approaches cannot *by definition* contradict another, since they are distinct disciplines with different rules governing their exegesis. (For example, an allegory is never meant to be literal, and can have a relatively loose association with the text, whereas a literal interpretation *must* be implicit in the text itself).

Thus, from a Torah perspective, one method of interpretation is no more true than the other: *peshat* is the concept viewed from the most basic perspective, the lowest of all worlds, whereas *derash* opens the door to more profound insights which can be appreciated only in higher states of mind.

☞ “PARALLEL” TRUTHS AND THE HALACHAH

One problem which the notion of multiple, parallel truths presents is that it appears to undermine the notion of halachic consensus, that one final opinion is accepted as binding and the others are rejected. For if all the interpretations of the Sages are equally true, then how can *any* of them be rejected? And why is one preferred over the others? [See the objections raised by *Chavos Yair*.]

We will discuss two approaches to dealing with this issue.

☞ A Living Example ☞

A “NON-KABALISTIC” SOUL

Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593, often referred to as the “Alshich *ha-kadosh*”) lived in Tzefas during the same time as the renowned kabalist Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (1534-1572, the “Arizal”). The Alshich was the official *darshan* of the city, who would expound Torah thoughts in an original and imaginative way that would inspire the crowds. [In fact, to this day his lectures on the Torah and Prophets are preserved and enjoy much popularity].

The Alshich had a strong interest in kabbalah and wished to join the elite ring of disciples of the Arizal, so he would regularly attend the Arizal’s kabbalah classes. But, to his dismay, he would repeatedly fall asleep whenever the Arizal was speaking.

Perturbed by this unusual problem which had never affected him before, the Alshich sought the advice of the Arizal, who was known as a “physician of the soul.”

“Your soul,” the Arizal informed him, “has strong ties to the world of *derash*” (the method

of expounding Torah by reading ideas into the text and allegorizing), “but not to the world of *sod*” (the mystical secrets of the kabbalah). “Therefore, when you hear words of kabbalah, you fall asleep, so your soul can drift to the world of *derash* and study there.”

Of course, we do find numerous kabbalistic concepts cited in the writings of the Alshich, so it was clearly not the case that the Alshich could have no appreciation of kabbalah whatsoever. What Arizal meant is that *pure* kabbalah, the world of *sod* itself, was beyond the grasp of the Alshich, and he was only capable of understanding the kabbalah as it is reflected in the world of *derash*.

In any case, here we see a further illustration that “both are words of the living G-d,” can refer to different ideas as they are expressed in different spiritual worlds, which can be fully appreciated only by those souls which derive from that particular world.

(Sichas Shabbos Parshas Naso 5743, par. 21)

1.) DIVINE WISDOM / DIVINE WILL

One solution lies in the distinction between *Torah* and *commandments*. The unique quality of Torah, which renders it distinct from academic disciplines, is that it represents the wisdom of G-d which has been distilled into a humanly intelligible form. This essential wisdom is “*a secret treasure, which has been hidden by You*” (*Shabbos* 88b), something that in its source is totally one with G-d (“*I was by him*”—*Proverbs* 8:30).

Thus, in any valid discussion of Torah, no idea is more true than another. Even when arguments appear to contradict each other, “*both are the words of the living G-d,*” conveying the same essential wisdom, expressed through the language and medium of different spiritual worlds.

The commandments, on the other hand, express the *will* of G-d. A commandment conveys not an “idea” or a “thought” of G-d, but His will that a certain action be performed here in this world.

In fact, we find a similar distinction in the case of humans. It is not thinking *per se* that leads to action, but rather, a person’s will and desire to achieve something. Even if a person’s actions are guided by intelligent thought, the fact that an action was carried out is due to his will. Thought *alone* will never lead to action.

So halachah expresses G-d’s will that an action take place in this world, which is something quite distinct from the Torah, His wisdom as it is expressed in all the worlds.

The Talmud’s statement that “both are the words of the living G-d” refers specifically to the theoretical discussions of Torah. But once a theoretical argument is crystallized into an actual law dictating how a commandment (action) is to be performed, then only the final accepted opinion can be said to have the quality of expressing the *will* of G-d. With the other opinions, this quality is simply lacking.

But this does not mean to say that Torah harbors any weakness in that it only expresses G-d’s wisdom and not His will, for ultimately we are speaking of two distinct types of connection to the Divine (see *Sparks of Chasidus* opposite). When we study Torah our intention is to internalize His wisdom, and when we observe the

🌀 Sparks of Chasidus 🌀

TORAH OR COMMANDMENTS: WHICH IS HIGHER?

The Torah is seemingly nothing more than an explanation of the commandments. So if it is true to say that a commentary is always subordinate and inferior to the text it explains, then the commandments must be superior to their “commentary,” the Torah. How, then, can we argue (in *Toras Menachem*) that Torah is of equal importance to the commandments (solution ‘1’), or that it is even something superior (solution ‘2’ overleaf)?

In their *Divine source* it is indeed the case that the commandments, as expressions of G–d’s will, are higher than the Torah, G–d’s wisdom (His own “commentary” and explanation of His will, so to speak). But as a *religious experience*, i.e. when that will and wisdom take expression here *in this world*, Torah is a vastly more sublime and mystical “encounter” with G–d than the observance of His commandments.

To understand why this is the case we need to clarify an important distinction between the way in which Divine wisdom and Divine will are affected by their journey down below to this world.

To put it simply, the Divine will is forced to undertake a much longer journey, and therefore it loses more of its heavenly identity in the process. Of course, the fact that it is *able* to journey further shows its strength—namely, that it is rooted in a higher, more powerful source. But, ironically, starting higher with more power means that the Divine will was ultimately able to propel itself further downwards, resulting in it being eclipsed to a greater extent by its final, more mundane destination point. Divine wisdom, on the other hand, was not empowered to

journey so far, but this resulted in it coming to a halt at a higher, and consequently more sublime, destination point.

So in terms of *Divine source*, G–d’s will is indeed higher than his wisdom. But when we speak in terms of our *religious experience* of interacting with that will or wisdom as it is expressed in this world, the tables are turned and studying His wisdom remains more spiritually enlightening than observing His will.

To put it more graphically: through its descent into this world, G–d’s will was downgraded from *spirit*, an abstract Divine whim, into a requirement to deal with *matter* (halachah). And inevitably, even something as sublime as the Divine will is going to become less overtly mystical when it takes expression through physical matter.

But Torah, on the other hand, journeys only from one spiritual “address” to another: from G–dly *wisdom* as expressed in G–dly terms, to G–dly *wisdom* expressed in human terms. Admittedly, this too is a long journey, but it is a voyage within the spiritual, so even the final destination remains translucent and heavenly. The terms have changed and the language has become mundane, but the ideas are nevertheless charged with an intense spirituality that is wholly reminiscent of its Divine source.

And this is true, of course, for all opinions expressed in the Torah, regardless of whether they represent the final halachah. Every part of Torah is, quite literally, “the words of the living G–d” made available in a virtually undiluted form for our minds and souls to delight in.

(Based on *Likutei Torah*, *Acharei* 27b-28a; see also *Sefer ha-Sichos* 5751, p. 312-3; *ibid.* p. 857-8)

commandments our intention is to carry out His will. Neither is more Divine than the other; they are simply different types of connection.

So the fact that halachah rejects an opinion expressed by one of the Sages has no bearing whatsoever on that opinion's status as Torah. Whatever the legal consensus turns out to be, all valid opinions that follow the traditional principles of Torah exegesis remain "words of the living G-d."

2.) THE SUPERIOR QUALITY OF REJECTED OPINIONS

Above (in the section entitled *Differences in Spiritual "Location"*) we argued that if a view of our Sages is rejected from a legal point of view it means that its truth can be fully appreciated only in a particular spiritual world, and not in the physical world. However, this does not mean to say, G-d forbid, that the legally rejected opinions are any less true than the view which merited to become the final halachah; it is simply a question of *where* that truth is most aptly expressed.

In fact, it could be argued that these legally rejected opinions are a *superior* expression of Torah in a more pristine form. By way of illustration, Jewish tradition maintains that in heaven there are also *yeshivos* (Talmudic academies) where Torah matters are studied and debated by the angels (see *Bava Metzia* 86a). But while earthly academies study the literal, physical implication of Torah texts, the angels study their inner spiritual connotations.

This begs the question: Which is the *real* Torah and which is merely its reflection? Is the inner spiritual dimension studied by the angels the actual Torah, and its external, literal meaning understood by man a mere echo of it? Or are the angels merely imitating *our* study in a more sublime, heavenly fashion?

In answer to this question we are taught, "*The Torah essentially speaks about the spiritual worlds and alludes to the physical worlds*" (*Asarah Ma'amaros, ma'amar chikur din* 3:22). I.e. the spiritual interpretation is the "essential" and natural expression of the Torah—which is, after all, a G-dly wisdom—and the literal, physical interpretation is somewhat "out of context" from the

Torah's natural milieu, and is merely "alluded to" by the text (see *A Living Example*, below. See also p. 219).

With this in mind we can appreciate the immense validity and truth of the minority opinions which the final law did not favor. The inner reason why a minority opinion did not merit to become halachah is because it is *too* lofty for the physical world to accommodate. In fact, the Talmud makes a similar point in reference to Rabbi Meir: "*In the generation of Rabbi Meir there was no one comparable to him. Why, then, was the halachah not fixed*

🌀 A Living Example 🌀

THE BIGGER RABBI

Nineteenth century Dvinsk was the home to two remarkably brilliant Torah luminaries: Rabbi Yosef Rosen (1858-1936), the famed "Rogatchover Gaon," considered to be one of the greatest analytical minds in many centuries, and Rabbi Meir Simcha ha-kohen (1846-1926), author of the classic commentaries *Ohr Sameach* and *Meshech Chochmah*.

On one occasion, a heated discussion erupted in the local synagogue concerning the question: Who was the "bigger" Rabbi? As the arguments became more vociferous, a young boy who was listening to the discussion burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" asked one of the men.

"I'm just laughing at how silly you are," the boy replied. "What's there to argue about? If you want to find out who is the bigger rabbi just go and find out how tall they are."

This time, it was the adults' turn to laugh. "You don't understand," they explained. "We're not arguing about their physical size, but their greatness in Torah."

"Ah," dismissed the boy, "now you're making up stories. Just a minute ago, I heard you saying to each other, 'Which rabbi is bigger?'"

In the child's mind, a "bigger" rabbi meant, literally, a man of a greater build. When he was told that the actual argument was about the rabbis' spiritual "size" he dismissed the notion as a "non-literal" interpretation of the argument.

The story offers us some insight into the idea that "*The Torah essentially speaks about the spiritual worlds and alludes to the physical worlds*" (see *Toras Menachem*). Often we are tempted to perceive the physical connotation of Torah ideas as primary, whereas the spiritual connotation of the Torah's words are dismissed as being, at best, secondary.

In fact, the reverse is true. In our story, the adults' *real* discussion was about the spiritual greatness of the two Rabbis, but the child failed to grasp the point due to his limited perspective. Likewise, our natural tendency, as physical beings, is to view the external, physical interpretation of Torah as more important (like the child), but we should know that this represents a weakness on our part, and not a strength.

(See *Machasheves ha-Chasidus* vol. 1, p. 293)

according to his opinion? Because his colleagues could not fathom the depths of his mind” (Erubin 13b).

So we see that the rejected view—“the words of the living G–d”—is highly compatible with the spiritual worlds, but the physical world is simply not capable of embracing such an intense revelation, and the final ruling consequently favors a different opinion. The halachically rejected opinion is thus a superior form of Torah, as it reflects a level of wisdom which is closer to the Torah’s essential, spiritual context and natural “habitat.”

And that is why the School of Hillel, “*mentioned the words of the School of Shammai before their own*” (*Erubin* *ibid.*), not merely out of etiquette, but because they recognized the School of Shammai’s opinion as being superior, from a Torah point of view.

(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 7, p. 207; vol. 15, pp. 233-4; vol. 32, p. 135; *Sichah* of the night of *Simchas Torah* 5736, par. 24-7; *Sichas Chai Elul* 5742, par. 22; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Naso* 5743, par. 18-21; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Devarim* 5746, addendum to par. 1; *Sichah* of the second day of *Shavuos* 5751, par. 13; *Sichas Shabbos Parshas Vayeishev* 5752, par. 2)

Points to Remember...

- ✔ “Both are words of the living G–d” means that all Torah arguments are true, but the truth may be expressed in different times, geographic locations or spiritual “locations.”
- ✔ Geographic variations in Jewish observance help to sanctify every part of the world with a “tailor-made” spirituality.
- ✔ The Torah can be interpreted on numerous different planes, but the more spiritual interpretations are no less true than the literal ones. On the contrary, “The Torah essentially speaks about the spiritual worlds and alludes to the physical worlds.”

LESSON 10

THE CO-EXISTENCE OF CONTRADICTIONARY TRUTHS (III)

IN THIS LESSON

- ▶ The kabalistic view of Torah disputes.
- ▶ G-d's perspective and man's perspective of the Torah.
- ▶ Why G-d said all Ten Commandments in one utterance.

CLASSIC QUESTION | *How can two contradictory opinions both be true—as the Talmud states, they are “both words of the living G-d” (Eruvin 13b)?*

Talmud | *“The words of the wise are like goads*...[the words of] the masters of assemblies, which were given by one shepherd” (Ecc. 12:11)....*

“The masters of assemblies”—this refers to the Sages who gather in groups and study Torah. Some rule “impure” others “pure,”; some rule “forbidden,” others “permitted”; some rule “invalid,” others rule “valid.”

A person might think, “How could I ever learn Torah [when everything is disputed]”?

דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים כְּדֶרֶבֶנּוֹת ... בְּעֲלֵי
אֲסֻפּוֹת נִתְּנוּ מִרְעָה אֶחָד ...

בְּעֲלֵי אֲסֻפּוֹת אֵלּוּ תִּלְמִידֵי
חֲכָמִים שִׁישׁוּבֵין אֲסֻפּוֹת אֲסֻפּוֹת
וְעוֹסְקִין בְּתוֹרָה, הֵלְלוּ מִטְּמֵאִין
וְהֵלְלוּ מִטְּהוֹרִין, הֵלְלוּ אוֹסְרִין
וְהֵלְלוּ מִתְּרִין, הֵלְלוּ פּוֹסְלִין
וְהֵלְלוּ מִכְּשִׁירִין.

שָׁמָּא יֵאמֵר אָדָם: הֵיאֵךְ אֲנִי
לוֹמֵד תּוֹרָה מֵעַתָּה?

*Spiked sticks used to prod cattle.

In response, the verse states, “*They were all given by one shepherd.*” One G-d gave them. One leader proclaimed them from the mouth of the Master of all deeds, blessed be He, as the verse states, “And G-d said *all these words*” (*Shemos 20:1; Chagigah 3b*).

Maharsha

G-d is referred to here as “the master of all *deeds*,” since even in practical halachah, there are always arguments one way and the other...and yet they are all from the mouth of G-d, since the voice at Sinai split into seventy voices, as the Talmud teaches (*Shabbos 88b; Chidushei Agados to Chagigah ibid.*).

Avodas ha-Kodesh

In Tractate *Chagigah*, the Talmud states in reference to all differences of opinion and contradictory arguments: “*One G-d gave them. One leader proclaimed them.*” For the limited human intellect, such a notion is extremely difficult to digest without the assistance of Jewish mystical teachings...

The *Zohar* states, “*Come and see! There is no instance in the Torah where differences of opinion are expressed and they do not all run to one place and gather in one well. They run, as the verse states, ‘All the rivers run into the sea’ (Ecc. 1:7), and, ‘All go to one place’ (ibid. 3:20)*” (*Zohar III 6b*).

This means to say that all Torah ideas originate in supernal thought, from where they come forth, which is a single point where everything is united in perfect oneness....And that

תלמוד לומר: בלם נתנו מרועה אחד, א-ל אחד נתנו, פרנס אחד אמרו, מפי אדון כל המעשים ברוך הוא, דכתיב “וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה” (שמות כ, א. חגיגה ג, ב).

ואמר שאמרו מפי אדון כל המעשים כו', דגם להלכה למעשה איבא לצדד לטמא ולטהר ... בלן מפי הגבורה נאמרו, שהיה הדבור מתחלק לכמה קולות בדאמרין פרק רבי עקיבא (שבת פ"ח, ב. חדשי אגדות, חגיגה שם).

בחגיגה פרק קמא ... כי כל חלוקי הדעות והסברות הסותרות זו את זו, א-ל אחד נתנו ופרנס אחד אמרו, וזה דבר רחוק מאד מן השכל האנושי נמנע בחקו להלמו, אם לא ילנה אליו דרך ה' סלולה, דרך ישפן אור האמת ...

ובמדרשו של רשב"י עליו השלום: תא חזי, לית לך מלה דאמרין בלהו חבריא דא הכי ודא הכי בדאוריתא, דלא אזיל כללא לאתה חד ולמבוטא חד אתפנש. הולך, כמה דאת אמר “כל הנחלים הולכים אל הים”, וכתיב “הכל הולך אל מקום אחד”.

והפונה כי כל הדברים יצאו מן המקור ראש המחשבה העליונה ... והוא מקום אחד שהכל מתיחד שם ובו נשלם

is why, “they were all given by one shepherd,” and “One G-d gave them all,” meaning to say that the differences and contradictions do not arise from different realms, but out of the one place in which no difference or contradiction is possible....

All these things appear contradictory and different to us, but only as seen from our own perspective, because we are unable to fathom [the point where the contradictions are resolved]. And it is only because we are unable to maintain two contradictory teachings at the same time that the law is established according to one of these two teachings. Yet, “*both are the words of the living G-d,*” because from the Giver’s perspective, all is one. But from our side it appears as differing opinions, and the halachah follows the School of Hillel alone (Part 3, chapter 23).

הַיְחוד, וְלֹא נֶאֱמַר “נִתְּנוּ מִרוּעָה אֶחָד,” וְאָמְרוּ “כִּלְכֵן אֱ-ל אֶחָד נִתְּנָן,” לֹאמַר שֶׁלֹּא בָּאוּ הַהֶפְיוּכִים וְהַשְׁנוּיִים מִרְשִׁיּוֹת שׁוֹנִים, כִּי אִם מִמְּקוֹם אֶחָד מִיְחָד בָּא הַכֹּל עִם שְׂאֵין בּוֹ שׁוּם שְׁנוּי וְתַמוּדָה ...

וְכֹל אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים נִרְאִין כְּסוֹתְרִין זֶה אֶת זֶה וּמִשְׁתַּנִּים זֶה מִזֶּה, וְכֹל זֶה מִצְדָּנוּ שְׂאֵין בְּרִשְׁוֹתֵנוּ וְכַחֲנוּ דֵי לְעַמֵּד עֲלֵיהֶם, וְלֹא אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְקַיֵּם שְׁנֵי חֻלְקֵי הַסּוֹתֵר וְנִקְבְּעָה הַהֶלְכָה כְּאַחַת מִשְׁתֵּי הַדְּעוֹת, וְלֹא אָמְרוּ “אֱלוֹ וְאֱלוֹ דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹקִים חַיִּים” וְהַכֹּל אֶחָד מִצְדָּנוּ הַנּוֹתֵן בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֲבָל מִצְדָּנוּ הֵם דְּבָרִים שׁוֹנִים וְהֶלְכָה כְּבֵית הַלֵּל בְּלִבְד (חֻלְקֵי ג' פֶּרֶק כ"ג).

🌀 TORAS MENACHEM

CONTRADICTIONARY TRUTHS (III)

🌀 WHEN OPINIONS CONVERGE— “TWO-DIMENSIONAL TRUTH”

In the previous lesson, our approach to understanding the notion of multiple, contradictory truths was to perceive each as speaking from a slightly different perspective, or spiritual world. This resulted in a conception of “parallel” truths, all existing on different spiritual “wavelengths,” and each being “the words of the living G-d.”

If we look deeper, however, a convergence of these multiple, parallel truths can be discerned, as the *Talmud* states: “*They were all given by one shepherd. One G-d gave them. One leader proclaimed them from the mouth of the Master of all deeds.*” [*Avodas ha-Kodesh* explains] that these two conceptions, that of multiple, parallel truths and a single, unified truth, are simply a matter of perspective. G-d is absolutely one, and therefore His wisdom is essentially devoid of different “layers” or “wavelengths.” But we perceive the Divine wisdom as it is refracted by the various spiritual and physical worlds, so it appears to us as multifaceted and sometimes incorporates contrasting or even conflicting views.

Both perspectives are valid and true. The Torah confirms that our existence is not an illusion—G-d *did* create the heavens and the earth (*Bereishis* 1:1)—which means that our view of different parts of the Torah as “parallel” truths is genuine.

But G-d is clearly not plagued by this shortcoming. From His perspective, the Torah—Divine wisdom—is totally unified, just as He Himself is devoid of any multiplicity. Of course, He is not blind to our perspective; but He is able to see through the different “layers” of Torah truths to perceive an underlying unity, how they are emanations from a single source.

What does all this have to do with us? Surely we are speaking here of a Divine vantage point that no human mind can fathom?

The Talmud nevertheless makes it clear that we *do* need to be aware of G–d’s perspective, that “*they were all given by one shepherd.*”^{*} Yes, our existence is real, and the Torah, which “is not in heaven” must be compatible with the different intellectual and spiritual dispositions of the Sages in whose hands Jewish law is entrusted. But while this is most definitely the truth, it is not the *whole* truth. The Talmud wishes us to appreciate, as much as possible, that there is a deeper perspective where it can be discerned that even contradictory opinions “*were all given by one shepherd.*” From this vantage point one sees, not different views generated by the independent thought of human beings, but only the words of G–d which are being uttered in harmony.

While our perspective is true, G–d’s is *more* true. So in order to come to a full appreciation of the Torah and its commandments, we need to observe the situation from both sides of the coin, from two divergent poles.

By way of illustration, consider the case of a rich person fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* by giving a poor person some money. We might ask the question: Who is actually enriching the poor man: His wealthy friend, or G–d? While nobody would deny

^{*}Likewise, our Sages taught that at the giving of the Torah, “*G–d first said all the Ten Commandments simultaneously in a single utterance, in a way that no human being could speak...and then He repeated them individually*” (*Mechilta* to *Shemos* 20:1, cited by *Rashi* *ibid.*). At first glance this seems to have been a rather pointless exercise: Why say the Ten Commandments in a superhuman fashion, rendering it necessary to repeat them in a way that man can appreciate?

However, based on the above we can understand that G–d first spoke the commandments from His perspective, as they exist as a single, unified entity, and then He repeated them from our perspective, as they appear as ten distinct commandments. By saying the commandments in both ways, He was teaching us that it is not sufficient merely to appreciate them from our perspective, but we must also try to relate to the Torah as it exists from His point of view too.

the fact that the wealthy man actually gave the money and deserves to be lauded for his generosity, a true monotheist will nevertheless believe that the money came *directly* from G-d. For a belief in the unity of G-d dictates that nothing happens in this world unless G-d wills it and personally orchestrates it, and that no intermediate force is granted any power at all (see our discussion of the *Fifth Principle*). Of course, the wealthy man possesses free choice, and he is credited with performing a *mitzvah*; but the poor man believes that “G-d has many agents” and if this wealthy man had not obliged, G-d would have found another willing soul to carry out His will.

So we have two perspectives, both of which are true. From the world's perspective the wealthy man gave the donation of his own free will; but from G-d's perspective, the whole affair was orchestrated from above, and it was thus G-d's doing. And, ultimately, G-d's perspective represents a more powerful and deeper truth.

Likewise, from the world's perspective it is the Sages that formulated the Oral Law, using their own ingenuity and individuality (which sometimes resulted in clashes and differences of opinion). But from G-d's perspective,

“what the School of Hillel says and what the School of Shammai says, and likewise what Abaye and Rava say are not really their own words, but the word of G-d in their mouths”
(*Likutei Torah, Acharei* 27b).

“And there is no doubt whatsoever that everything which is stated in the Written Law and the Oral Law, both in the legal passages and homiletic passages, and in all the works composed by the saints and scholars who studied Torah for its own sake, and even those rulings which the Talmud states specifically were an error—all of them were literally said by G-d in the very same words which are recorded today. G-d himself said the law, and G-d himself said it was an error”
(*Likutei Levi Yitzchak, Igros* p. 266).

🌀 IN THE WORDS OF RAMBAM

While the above idea is somewhat esoteric, it is nevertheless so fundamental that we find it expressed in a vast range of Jewish concepts and texts. For example, a close reading of *Rambam's* introduction to the *Mishneh Torah* bears out our above distinction between G-d's perspective of the Torah and the world's perspective.

“The whole of the Law was written by Moshe, our teacher, before his death, in his own hand and he gave a scroll to each tribe.”

“He did not write down the [Oral] interpretation of the Law...Elazar, Pinchas and Yehoshua received it from Moshe....Many elders received the Oral Law from Yehoshua. Eli received it from the elders and from Pinchas, etc.”

Of course, the most obvious point here is the distinction between the *methods* by which the two types of law were preserved, either via written text or oral tradition. But there is another more subtle point conveyed by *Rambam* here, that the method of transmission from one generation to the next reflects the *character* of the law, whether it is primarily a reflection of G-d's perspective or the world's perspective.

The Written Law, whose every letter is sacrosanct (such that reading the text is a *mitzvah* regardless of whether we understand it or not), stresses primarily G-d's perspective of the law, i.e. the *Giver* of the Torah. The Oral Law, on the other hand, which is nurtured and cultivated by the Sages (and must be understood in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of Torah study), brings to light the world's perspective of the law, i.e. it stresses the significance of the human *recipients* of the Torah (see above, *Lesson 5*).

So when *Rambam* discusses the Written Law, he is careful to note that Moshe “gave a scroll to each tribe,” because this type of law focuses on the role of the Giver. But when describing the Oral Law, he notes, “Elazar, Pinchas and Yehoshua, *received* it from Moshe....Many elders *received* the Oral Law from Yehoshua. Eli *received* it from the elders and from Pinchas, etc.” because, with the Oral Law, the recipient's role in cultivating the law and contributing to it stands out more.

However, as we explained above, the human involvement in cultivating the Oral Law is only significant from our worldly perspective; but in G-d's eyes, "what Abaye and Rava say are not really their own words, but the word of G-d in their mouths."

Consequently, in the initial introductory passage where *Rambam* speaks of G-d's involvement in the Oral Law "at Sinai," he stresses that when the commandments were given to Moshe, "their [oral] interpretation was *given* too." I.e. from the Divine vantage point of Sinai there is no real difference between the Written and Oral Law: both bring to light the sacred and Divine authorship of the law, and so both were equally *given* by G-d.

☞ FURTHER EXPRESSIONS OF THE TWO DIMENSIONS

This "two-dimensional" view of Judaism, which sees every element of the Torah as possessing two "faces"—one biased to the Giver, and the other to the recipients—is a rather subtle one, [as *Avodas ha-Kodesh* stresses, "*For the limited human intellect, such a notion is extremely difficult to digest without the assistance of Jewish mystical teachings.*"]

However, even mystical teachings can often leave ideas vague and undefined to our minds which are naturally attuned to appreciate physical phenomena. One way around this problem is to uncover ties between mystical, kabalistic ideas and their

☞ *The Last Word* ☞

"OPEN MY EYES, SO THAT I MAY BEHOLD WONDROUS THINGS IN YOUR TORAH" (Ps. 119:8)

"Wondrous things" alludes to mystical teachings. David's prayer to "see wondrous things in *Your Torah*" was thus a request to perceive mystical truths as they are implicit within the "normative" texts of scripture, Talmud and Midrash.

The study of mysticism is, of course, a valuable pursuit in its own right, but the

esoteric nature of this pursuit can leave the ideas vague and impractical in a person's mind. However, when one endeavors to see how mystical truths are evident even in classic texts, the ideas come much more "down to earth," in a way that they are more likely to affect a person in day-to-day life.

(Based on *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Melukat* vol. 5, p. 274)

corresponding concepts in the normative texts of scripture Talmud and Midrash, which helps to crystallize and concretize the ideas in a less abstract form (see *The Last Word*).

Such an exercise is by no means “forced” or artificial, because the esoteric and exoteric texts do not represent two Torahs, G–d forbid, but two different expressions of the same Divine wisdom.

In the table overleaf we explore a number of Torah concepts, demonstrating in each case how there is a dimension or “face” which brings to light the Giver’s perspective, and another element which brings to light the recipient’s perspective. Being that this is a fundamental principle of the Torah, we find these two faces expressed at *every* level.

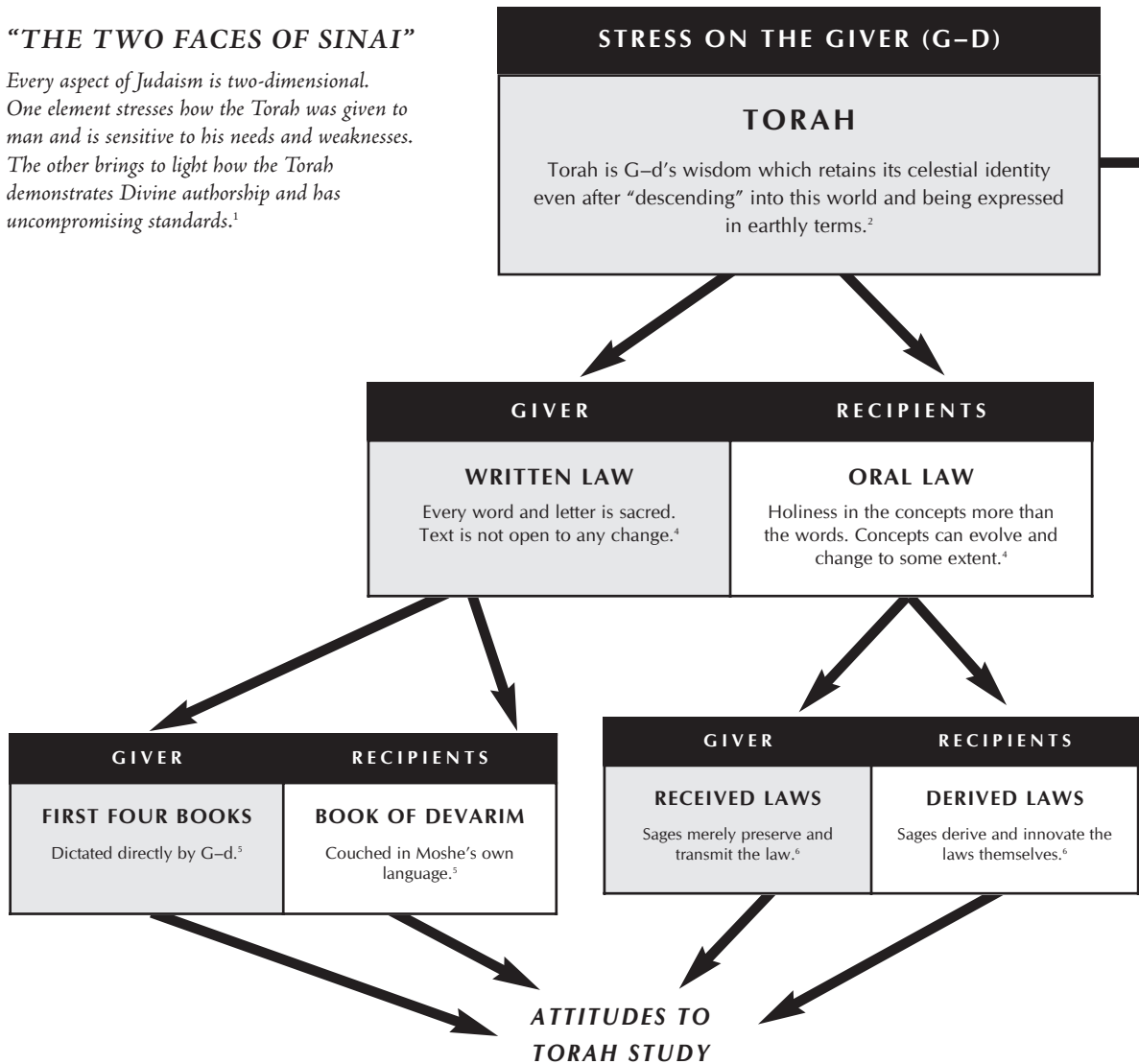
(Based on *Likutei Sichos* vol. 6, p. 156; vol. 30, p. 11ff.; *Hadran al ha-Rambam* 5748, par. 8; *Hadran al ha-Shas (Mishnah)* 5748, par. 26; *Sefer ha-Ma’amarim Melukat* vol. 5, p. 274)

Points to Remember...

- ✓ The Torah exists on two planes: G–d’s perspective and man’s perspective, both of which are true and valid.
- ✓ G–d’s perspective is one of absolute unity, transcending the world. Man’s view of the Torah is influenced by the diversity and multiplicity of the world.
- ✓ Thus, differences of opinion exist only from man’s perspective. But we too are able to have some appreciation of G–d’s perspective where the Torah is totally unified.

“THE TWO FACES OF SINAI”

Every aspect of Judaism is two-dimensional. One element stresses how the Torah was given to man and is sensitive to his needs and weaknesses. The other brings to light how the Torah demonstrates Divine authorship and has uncompromising standards.¹

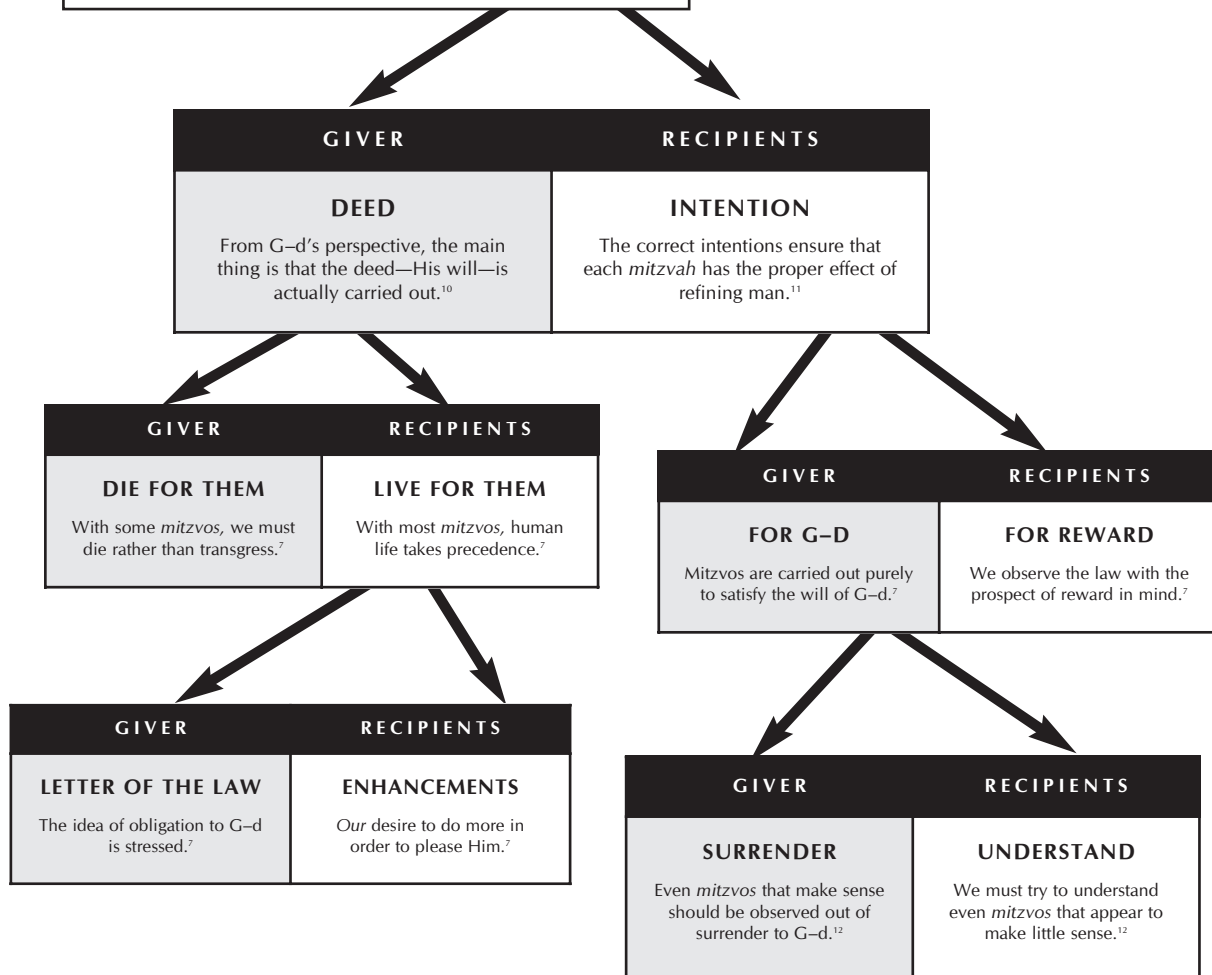


	STRESS ON THE GIVER	STRESS ON THE RECIPIENTS
	STUDY FOR THE SAKE OF STUDY i.e. we study purely because Torah is a Divine document. ⁸	STUDY IN ORDER TO PRACTICE We study for a goal which will be useful to the recipients. ⁸
	STUDY OUT OF DEDICATION⁹	STUDY OUT OF PLEASURE⁹
	ALL PARTS OF THE TORAH ARE CONNECTED¹³	EACH PART OF THE TORAH IS DISTINCT¹⁴
	TORAH IMPERVIOUS TO HUMANS Even a ritually impure person may study Torah, because "The words of Torah cannot become contaminated" (Brachos 22a). ⁷	TORAH CAN BE "OWNED" BY MAN "If a Rabbi renounces his honor, it is renounced" (Kidushin 32b), because he has the rights over his Torah knowledge. ⁷

STRESS ON THE RECIPIENTS (PEOPLE)

MITZVOS

Mitzvos are G-d's commands addressed directly to man, how to carry out G-d's will in this world.³



1 בכל הבא לקמן ראה מהר"ל תפארת ישראל פמ"ג. הדרן על מס' פסחים תשל"ב (נדפס בהוספת להגש"פ עם לקוטי טעמים וכו') ס"ט ואילך. הדרן על מס' אבות (נדפס בהוספות לס' ביאורים לפרק"א) ס"ח ואילך. הדרן על מסכתות ברכות נויר יבמות ובריתות ס"ט ואילך (תורת מנחם, הורנים על הרמב"ם וש"ס ע' שלא). הדרן על הרמב"ם תשמ"ח ס"ז (שם ע' קמו). הדרן על ששה סדרי משנה תשמ"ח סכ"ו (שם ע' תו). לקוטי שיחות ח"ל ע' 10 ואילך. קוני' גדרן של מצות במשנתו של הרבי (קה"ת תשנ"ד) ע' כ-כא. ושם ע' כו ואילך. 2 ראה לקו"ש חל"ה ע' 42 ואילך. ובכ"מ. 3 לקו"ת אחרי כו, ב ואילך. הדרן על הרמב"ם תשמ"ח הערה 80. הדרן על מסכתות בני"ך ס' כב. 4 לקו"ש ח"ל שם. 5 ראה לקו"ש חי"ט ע' 9 ואילך והנסמן שם. 6 הדרן על הרמב"ם תשמ"ח שם. 7 הדרן על מס' אבות שם. 8 ד"ה וקבל היהודים תשי"א ס' ו-ח (ספר המאמרים מלוקט ח"ג ע' עב ואילך). 9 שיחת ליל כ"ף מרחשון תשמ"ו ס' כז (התוועדות ע' 575). 10 תניא פל"ח. סה"מ מלוקט ח"ד ע' ריד. 11 לקו"ש ח"ג ע' 955. 12 קוני' גדרן של מצות שם. 13 "והשואל כענין והשואל שלא כענין משיבין את השואל כענין והשואל שלא כענין צריך שיאמר שלא כענין שאלתי דברי ר"מ וחכ"א א"צ **שכל התורה ענין אחד**" (תוספתא סנהדרין פ"ז ה"ה). שיחת וא"ו תשרי תשמ"ה, ס"יא. הדרן על ששה סדרי משנה שם. 14 ולכן "איסורא ממונא לא ילפינן" (ברכות יט, ב).