

"For inquire now regarding the early days that preceded you ... has there ever been anything like this great thing or has anything like it been heard? Has a people ever heard the voice of G-d ?" (4:32,33)

These *pesukim* are among the most powerful and profound in the *Torah*. They are also among the most demanding. They present to us proof of the Divine essence of our religion. They define the Revelation at *Har Sinai* as an event unparalleled in the history of mankind. A religion consists of a number of components all of which are prerequisites for establishing a personal belief in a particular religion. The first and foremost foundation is the recognition of a Divine Being to be worshipped. Second are instructions from this Divine Being as to the manner in which He is to be worshipped. Third is the system of reward and punishment for carrying out or failing to comply with His instructions.

While a culture or system of social norms may exist in the absence of these rules, it definitely does not comprise a religion. The *Rambam's* Thirteen Principles -- or *Ani Maamin* -- is an elaboration of these components. They focus on the reality of a Creator, the immutability and Divine essence of His *Torah*, and the concept of reward and punishment.

This *pasuk* places emphasis upon the experience of Revelation as evidence for establishing the "credibility" of *Torah* as a Divine document. The aspect of Revelation, the unique experience of *Matan Torah*, the giving of the *Torah*, distinguishes the Jewish religion from all others.

Horav Yaakov Weinberg, Shlita, explains this distinction in the following manner: All religions in the world have in common one demand. They require one to surrender his mind, to literally take a leap of faith in order to demonstrate loyalty and faith. The problem with this form of faith is human critique.

Whenever a religion demands that one ignore his intellectual faculties in order to progress to faith, it is establishing a precarious position. When one thinks with *seichel*, intellectual acumen, or simply with common sense, he might well reject all of contemporary religion. Every religion which man has conceived is delicately based upon the testimony of a few individuals who were supposedly "inspired." This is far from satisfactory proof for the establishment of a religion. A leap of faith is a wonderful way of saying, "Ignore your intellect, be oblivious of your ability to think, pay no heed to whatever critique you may have, just keep the faith!"

The historical experience of the Jewish people speaks for itself. The foundation of Judaism is the unique Revelation at *Har Sinai*, a spectacle that was witnessed by a minimum of six hundred thousand men, fathers who transmitted their inspiration to generations of Jewish children. *Horav Weinberg* recounts a famous story which illustrates the clear distinction between Judaism and all

other systems of religious belief.

A great *Rebbe* died and was survived by two sons. As he did not designate his successor, the congregation was thrown into a quandary as to who should become the next *Rebbe*. As in most congregations, everyone took sides, each lauding the brilliance and qualifications of their respective nominee for *Rebbe*. Since the elders of the congregation could not come to a definite decision, the matter was shelved until a viable solution to the problem could be developed.

One day, one of the *Rebbe's* sons approached the Council of Elders and recounted a remarkable story. He insisted that the night before, his father, the late *Rebbe*, appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to convey his command to the elders that he become his heir for the position of *Rebbe*. The elders were stunned. What should they do now ? Was this the final solution to their conflict ? Was this the answer for which they had waited all these months ? At last they could settle the dispute and continue managing the congregation as before.

As the elders were discussing the ramifications of this new "revelation," a little old man who was sitting in the corner somewhat amused at what he had heard came forward. He told the son who had the dream, "Young man, if your father had wanted you to become the next *Rebbe*, he should have come to us in our dreams, not to you in yours!"

In short, if Hashem desires to appoint a prophet to communicate His will to a people, He will not reveal Himself to the prophet alone with instructions to tell the people that he has been selected as their leader. He will reveal His desire directly to the people that this individual be His prophet.

This is the message of the *pasuk*. Only during *Matan Torah* did Hashem reveal Himself to an entire nation -- men, women and children. Hashem is demanding of *Klal Yisrael*, "Has any other nation experienced such a unique event ?" The Jewish people do not need a leap of faith to believe in Hashem. They have only to rely on the testimony of three million witnesses.

Our belief in Hashem is based upon the awareness of the uniqueness of the Revelation. This awareness translates itself into the fact that the *Torah* is Divine, its authorship unquestionable, and its immutability indisputable. Consequently, just as Hashem does not change, the laws of the *Torah* cannot and will not under any circumstances be altered.