

## CHAPTER 3

# The House of Classical Judaism

What is the viewpoint of the House of Classical Judaism on the historical development of the Imperial Quadrant, and how does it see its role in that history? The House of Classical Judaism sees itself as unique among all societies and places itself at the very center of world history as it plays out in the Imperial Quadrant.

The word classical refers to something time-honored yet always fresh and vibrant. Classical Judaism is its ancient form that continues to be full of energy and vitality. It is also called Orthodox, and it comes in many flavors, from extreme Chassidic to Modern Orthodox. The common denominator is the adherence to the fundamental beliefs that have defined Judaism without interruption for three thousand years. There have been schismatic forms throughout history, and while it is not the purpose of this book to debate the legitimacy of those streams, it is clear that only the form of Judaism that embraces these unchanging beliefs can be considered classical.

What are these fundamental beliefs?

One is the belief in the existence of God. Second is the belief in the divine origin of the Torah, that it is the immutable and obligatory word of God conveyed to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. Third is the belief in the election of the Jewish people and that Jewish peoplehood arises from the ancient covenant with God.

The Jewish people are more diverse than any other people. They include people of many different races and colors, people who originate from or live in every corner of the world, who speak numerous different languages, who practice many different forms of Judaism or who practice nothing at all. What binds them together? It is not ethnicity, because converts from all ethnicities are fully Jewish. It is not religion, because many Jews are not religious. It is the everlasting covenant between God and the Jewish people, which will be discussed at length in future chapters.

The covenant with God is essentially the contractual acceptance of the first two fundamental beliefs, the existence of God, the divine origin of the Torah and the obligation to live by the Torah's commandments. That contractual obligation is incumbent on all Jewish people for all generations regardless of whether or not they fulfill their contractual obligations.

The Jewish nation is, therefore, singular among all other nations. All nations are formed originally by shared origins, such as geography, race, ethnicity, language, culture or all of the above. Religion and ideology are cloaks they drape over their shoulders at some point in their history, and from time to time, they may exchange them for other cloaks.

The history textbooks in France, as just one example, begin with "Our ancestors the Gauls ...". The origins of the French nation do not date back to the French Revolution. They do not date back to the seventh century when the French became Christians. They date back a thousand years further to the barbarian tribes who settled in France.

The Jewish nation, however, came into being with Abraham's discovery of monotheism and his covenant with God. The covenant was originally made with Abraham and his family and sealed at Mount Sinai a few hundred years later, but it remains open to all people who undergo conversion and accept its obligations upon them. All of them and their descendants become part of the Jewish nation. No other nation was ever formed this way.

Once people are born into the Jewish nation or join by conversion, they remain Jewish for all generations, regardless of their beliefs or their religious observance, unless they completely assimilate and are no longer identifiable as Jewish. Simple resignation does not release a Jewish person from the covenant. We will discuss this at greater length in future chapters.

Therefore, world history in the view of Classical Judaism begins at the point of creation, and Jewish history begins with the covenant between God and Abraham.

Most followers of Classical Judaism accept the existence of God and the divine origin of the Torah as a matter of tradition and simple faith without definitive proof. Nonetheless, it would be in order to offer a rational basis for these beliefs for those people who need or would appreciate one.

As stated before, the views presented here are consistent with the traditions of Classical Judaism but are not necessarily the only views from this perspective. As the subtitle of the book points out, they are a Jewish view, with an indefinite article, not the Jewish view, with a definite article; no one can lay claim to the definitive view. In general, I follow the opinions of the Rambam, the leading medieval rabbinic scholar and philosopher, known to history as Maimonides, or at least my understanding of those opinions.

The question of the existence of God should be critical for every intelligent person. If God exists, it is possible that there is a higher purpose to human existence. It is possible that a person has a soul that may survive after the death of the body. It is possible that the soul will achieve transcendence and last for all eternity but that its condition will depend on what the person has accomplished during his lifetime on this earth.

If God does not exist, the human being is a glorified animal endowed with superior intelligence and intellect. Having no soul, a person ceases to exist at the point of death. One could say that he lives on in the memory of others, but even if that means anything, the memory dissipates within a

generation or two. Morality has no intrinsic value other than as a social construct to prevent chaos and mayhem. Life has no higher purpose.

How can an intelligent person fail to form an opinion on this question?

The proof most often offered for the existence of God is the argument from design. The intricately complex workings of every element in the universe indicate a high degree of intelligent design. This proof, powerful as it is, has been disputed,<sup>1</sup> so let us go in a different direction and offer a mathematical proof.

We observe that the universe exists.

How do we account for it? How did it get here?

There are two possible explanations. One, it always existed, an idea that dates back to Aristotle in ancient Greece. Two, it came into existence from a state of non-existence, *creatio ex nihilo*, the Hebrew term being *yesh me'ayin*, something from nothing.

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<sup>1</sup> Darwin disputed this argument and suggested that complex organisms evolved from simple organisms by a process of random mutation and natural selection. The survival of the fittest determines the next phase in the development of the organism.

There are several glaring flaws in this theory. First of all, modern microbiology has revealed that the supposedly simple organisms are incredibly complex. Darwin's simple organisms have not yet been discovered.

Furthermore, moving from simplicity to complexity by random mutation requires that each individual step in the process be beneficial in making the organism the most fit for survival. If the fitness is the result of many steps that are not individually beneficial, there is no reason why the preliminary steps survived the process of natural selection. This is called irreducible complexity. Darwin himself wrote, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down. But I can find no such case."<sup>1</sup> The organ most often offered as an example of irreducible complexity is the human eye, which has numerous moving parts that must function all together to provide vision.

Dawkins contends that the eye does not present an obstacle to Darwin's theory by pointing to organisms that have simple light-sensitive eyespots that differentiate between light and its absence. It is disingenuous, however, to compare simple light-sensitive eye spots to the human eye, which needs the combination of sclera, cornea, iris, pupil, lens, vitreous humor, aqueous humor, retina and optic nerve, each of which is complex in itself, to deliver intelligible images to the brain.

Many books have been written on this topic, and it is not my purpose here to take on this controversial topic on a single page. Nevertheless, I do want to point out that the opposition among many scientists to the idea of creation is philosophical rather than scientific. According to the philosophy of naturalism, only things detected by the mind and the five senses can be accepted as fact. Naturalist science cannot prove that God doesn't exist, but it cannot accept that He does.

Aristotle's idea of the universe having no beginning is, of course, mind-boggling. How can it be that as we go back in time endlessly we always encounter the universe in some form of existence? Where did it come from? Why is it there?

In light of the discovery in modern times that the universe is expanding, and that, therefore, the universe must have had a beginning, Aristotle's idea became even more problematic. Clearly, there was a big bang from which the universe emerged through a massive conversion of energy to matter.<sup>2</sup> Those who continue to adhere to the idea that the world always existed suggest that the expanding universe eventually ceases to expand and starts to contract until it results in the big crunch. This is followed by another big bang, which leads to another big crunch, which leads to another big bang and so forth in a continuous process without beginning and without end.<sup>3</sup> This is beyond mind-boggling.

On the other hand, the idea of a supernatural God, completely beyond human experience and conception, having brought the universe into existence from nothing, is also mind-boggling.

We are presented with a dilemma. Either the world was created, or it was always there. There is no other option. So, which of these two is true? Mathematics provides the answer.

Everyone is familiar with the term infinity, but what exactly does it mean? It is obviously not the highest number, because then we could just create a higher number by saying infinity plus one. When we say that one divided by zero is infinity, it does not mean that the number one is chock full of zeroes. It means that there is no end to how many zeros you can keep adding without ever reaching one. Infinite literally means without end.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Big Bang Theory the tiny point of origin from which the universe was formed was actually pure energy at an astronomically high temperature, trillions and trillions of degrees. When that tiny point containing such an enormous amount of energy exploded, most of it was converted to mass. All the matter in the universe can be traced back to that explosion. This idea already appeared in rabbinic literature nearly one thousand years ago. See Ramban's Commentary to Genesis 1:1.

<sup>3</sup> *A Brief History of Time*, Steven Hawking

Infinity is not a number. It is an abstract concept. Therefore, you cannot have an infinite number of finite objects. According to Aristotle's Second Proposition, quoted by the Rambam in the Introduction to Part II of *A Guide for the Perplexed*, "The existence of an infinite number of finite entities is impossible. There cannot be an infinite number of things." If a person had the time, the patience, the inclination and the means, he could count every single star in the universe. He would come up with a ridiculously high number, but it would not be infinity.

Space is also composed of finite things. Each empty cubic meter of space is a finite material object. Therefore, there cannot be an infinite number of cubic meters of space, occupied or empty. What happens when space comes to an end? According to the Talmud, this is a question we do not ask, because it is completely beyond human comprehension.<sup>4</sup>

What about time? Can there be infinite time? It would seem that just as there cannot be infinite space there cannot be infinite time. An infinite number of finite entities is impossible. Time is also composed of finite units, whether minutes, hours or years. If time were infinite that would require an infinite number of finite time-units, and that is impossible.

Consequently, we arrive at the conclusion that time going forward can be infinite, because new time can be created continuously and without end. Time going back, however, would be impossible, because there is no new time being created in the past.

Time can go forward without limit, but elapsed time is limited by the time elapsed. It is possible that the world will exist forever, but it is impossible that it has always existed. The world had a beginning. It was created, and there was a Creator.

Why didn't Aristotle discern that his own Second Proposition contradicted his assertion that the world always existed? And why didn't the Rambam make this argument in his defense of the idea of creation? I think it is because they lived before Einstein demonstrated that time is a

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<sup>4</sup> Chagigah 11b

dimension of matter. According to Einstein, time is an aspect of matter and is therefore as finite as the matter of which it is a dimension.

This idea seems to be supported by the Midrash, which presents a parable about a man walking from one town to another who saw a palace ablaze with light. “Is it possible,” he said, “that this palace has no master?” The owner of the palace called out to him, “I am the owner.” In the same way, Abraham considered the world and said, “Is it possible that this palace has no master?” And God spoke to him and said, “I am the Master.” And thus was monotheism born.<sup>5</sup>

Two questions immediately come to mind. The man is going from town to town, obviously walking down a dark country road. It is obviously night, because the palace is ablaze with light. So, he is walking down a dark road. No streetlights in ancient Mesopotamia. In the inky gloom, across a dark field, he sees the glowing palace and realizes that someone must have made it. It didn’t get there by itself. Someone built it.

But why, in the analogy, did he have to come across this palace in the dark countryside? What couldn’t he draw the same conclusion from the numerous palaces in the city gleaming in the sunlight during the day and brightly lit at night? They didn’t get there by themselves either.

Furthermore, what was so original about Abraham’s observation? Everyone in pagan times believed that the world didn’t appear by itself. They believed in different gods, and they all had their own creation myths. What new insight did Abraham discover?

It would seem that Abraham arrived at the conclusion that the finite world had a beginning and that it arose from the infinite. The Midrash expresses this profound discovery in a parable about a glowing palace in the vast darkness, which is a metaphor for the existence of the finite world amidst the infinite. The finite did not arise on its own, Abraham realized, but rather from the infinite. Abraham had discovered the infinite, incorporeal, transcendent God.

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<sup>5</sup> Bereishis Rabbah 39:1