

Who Wrote the Torah – Part One

Delivered on April 27, 2013 by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick

The other night, I was hanging out with some of my Confirmation students, and as usual, they were complaining about their homework. And they really do have reason to complain. I don't remember having that much homework in High School; having to routinely stay up until midnight to get it done. Anyhow, one of my students practically threw down the book she was reading at break saying, "I hate this book!" I picked it up and said to her, "Oh no, this is really one of the most important books about Judaism you'll ever read." The book was not the Bible, or Elie Weisel's "Night" – it was "Inherit the Wind." And she said to me, "You're kidding!" And I explained to her that the question posed by the book is essential to understanding our Torah. You probably remember the basics of the story: Clarence Darrow takes up the cause of evolution and faces off against William Jennings Bryant who believes creation happened the way it says in the Bible. As I explained to my student, because we are a Torah-text based religion, how we as Jews address this issue really, really matters. Sooner or later, every Jew who thinks about it is going to notice that science and the Torah don't always agree. And so, in preparation for Shavuot in three weeks, the holiday that celebrates the giving of the Torah, we are starting a new series this week entitled, "Who Wrote the Torah?"

So back to *Inherit the Wind*: One guy says "Evolution of the Species" is True, and one says the Bible is True. *So who has the right answer?* And my answer is "Both –but not to the same questions." Both Darwin and the Torah make good textbooks, but one is good for "How Did Life Originate?" and the other is better for "How Do We Live Life Right?" If you are asking how long did it take for humans to be created in the form we are now – I'll take Darwin every time. But if you are asking "How did we evolve morally into the people we are today?" – then give me the Torah. Evolution says it is "Survival of the Fittest." Counter intuitively, the Torah says it is "Survival of the Fairest."

The Torah was never intended to teach science, especially when it comes to creation. Many people don't realize it, but the opening chapters of Genesis actually contain two Creation stories. In chapter one of Genesis, Gd makes all of creation, - the stars – the sky – the animals – the plants –and the human beings. As it says, "Male and female He created them." But then in chapter two, Gd creates man from the dust of the earth, forming man "by hand". And then Gd breathes the breath of life into that first man. Soon, realizing it is not good for man to be alone, Gd takes one of Adam's ribs and makes Eve. So which is it? How was man created? The two stories seem to contradict one another! And if this is a science book, or even a history book, it's not really a very good one! But that's not why the stories are there, and that's not what makes them TRUE. What makes them true is that sometimes in life we need to know that the world makes sense, that even if we cannot fully understand it, even if we have a hard time accepting it, there is an architect and a plan, that everything was created in order. When I look at the miracles of nature I think of that story. When I stare at the sky, my head is in chapter one. But when my life is unraveling, when I need to know that I can call on a power greater than myself to pull me through, then I need the Gd who knows me, who shaped me, who breathes life into me, and that's the Gd of chapter two. To me, both

stories are TRUE, and science and even authorship have nothing to do with it. Darwin does not disprove it, and William Jennings Bryant does not have to win his case for me to know that the story is True.

The Torah is not TRUE because it is factually accurate; it is TRUE and HOLY because of what it has inspired countless generations of Jews to do. The truth of the second story of creation is not that Gd literally has “hands” – it is that the breath of Gd is in every single human being. Do you realize what that philosophy of life has done to transform the world? It was that belief, that the breath of Gd is in everyone, that led us to create societies founded on the principle that all people are created equal. It pushes us to always be searching for new ways to nurture that divine spark in others. Torah wasn’t lovingly past on from one generation of Jews to the next to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives and the lives of others. The question isn’t so much, “Did Gd actually speak to our ancestors?”, as it is “Does Gd have any expectations of us?” Not so much, “What does Gd do for us as?” – “What can we do for Gd?” That’s not survival of the fittest! From those Creation stories came a philosophy of life; a vision that has inspired generations.

We read the miraculous stories of creation not as scientific fact, but as a moral challenge. It’s as if Gd says, “OK, I have done all of this for you, now I want you to do something for me. Build a society that honors that image of Gd I placed in every human being. Make it a place of liberty and justice, kindness and compassion, where the rich help the poor and the powerful help the powerless; where business is done honestly, where debts are cancelled every seven years, where the environment is protected, where people love one another as they want to be loved themselves.” It’s a vision that inspired the prophets; it’s a vision that inspires me.

That is the story of our people. It is the story that has bound us together, helped us to look out for one another - to build schools and create charities and support the poor, and it continues to animate us regardless of who wrote the Torah. The question is not whether one believes in the Torah – but rather if one lives it. Our tradition has the power to inspire us again and again to transform the world, making a sanctuary where Gd can dwell. We need to be asking the right questions... Rather than simply speculating as to “Who Wrote the Torah,” Tradition pushes us to ask, “How can I spend my time building my character through the deep wisdom it offers, enabling me, in some small measure, to heal the world?”