



SCIENCE AND TORAH

A COMMENT BY THE ANCIENT ZOHAR ON THIS WEEK'S Sedra¹ suggests an intriguing relationship between science and Torah. The Sedra contains the verse: “In the six hundredth year of the life of Noah... all the fountains of the deep were unstopped and the windows of heaven were opened” (7:11). The literal meaning of this is that, in the Flood, water poured both from below and above.

The Zohar comments with a prophetic statement to the effect that after six hundred years of the sixth millennium “the gates of upper wisdom will be opened, and also the fountains of lower wisdom.” This will prepare the world for the time of the Messiah².

“Six hundred years of the sixth millennium” gives the Hebrew date of 5600, corresponding to 1840. Scholars have noted that the age of phenomenal technological advance in which we live can indeed be seen as commencing around 1840. The scientific knowledge revealed constitutes the “fountains of lower wisdom”.

At the same time, in the field of Torah thought, at this time there was also an important step forward in the popularisation of the Chassidic teachings of Torah. Two large books³ were published containing the discourses of Rabbi Shneur Zalman on the weekly Sedra, teaching which communicate the inner dimension of Torah wisdom. This step, making the profundities of Torah accessible to a much wider audience has been seen as the opening of the gates of the “upper wisdom”.

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Thus scientific discovery and the communication of the depths of Torah somehow kept step with each other. Indeed, although some traditionalists fear the clash of science and Torah, sages such as the Lubavitcher Rebbe emphasise the idea that science and Torah are complementary. The advances in science help a person internalise and recognise the truths of the Torah.

The Rebbe presents three broad areas in which science and technology promote spiritual perspectives on life. One is the way technological development provides concrete examples illustrating ancient Torah themes. For instance, the emergence of radio, video and CCTV technology provides a simple illustration of the universal human idea that G-d is aware of all our actions and records them for future reckoning: “know what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that ears, and all your actions are written in a book” (Ethics of the Fathers 2:1).

A second area is that much technological advance directly promotes the study of Torah. Broadcasts and podcasts of Torah study sessions; video conferencing; textual, audio and video teaching by internet are all methods whereby Torah teachings are made more accessible to each individual man and woman, in a language and style which they can understand.

The third area is that scientific advance itself reveals perspectives very close to those emerging from Torah teachings, especially those of the inner, Chassidic dimension. Science today reveals the nature of reality as profound and multidimensional, with a wondrous underlying unity. This perspective complements and makes more tangible Chassidic teachings about the Divine Essence which unifies all existence.

As we discover more about science, and explore more of the depths of Torah, so we discover to an ever greater extent the spiritual unity of all existence. This will most clearly be revealed with the coming of the Messiah, when all aspects of knowledge will reveal the glory of G-d⁴.

1. Genesis 6:9 - 11:32. 2. Zohar I 117a. 3. They are *Torah Or* and *Likkutei Torah*. 4. Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot* vol.15 pp. 42-48.

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SEDRA NOACH

LEAVING THE ARK

Rachel loved Shabbat. She loved Shabbat so much that she was always ready for it about an hour early. This week, as usual, when Rachel got home from school, she helped her mother cook and did the rest of her chores, and then she quickly got herself ready. Shabbat started pretty early in these winter months, so Rachel really had to hurry.

Half an hour before it was officially time to light Shabbat candles, Rachel was sitting serenely in her family's living room flipping through the handout she had from school about the Sedra. She had already lit her own Shabbat candle, and she was bathed in the glow of Shabbat. Around her, her brothers and sisters were dashing about, cleaning up and changing into their Shabbat best. Her mother was still in the kitchen putting the last touches on her famous chocolate soufflé.

Rachel was so happy she had finished her chores early. Now she had time to test herself on the questions in the booklet the teacher gave her about the Sedra. The answers followed the order of the Aleph Bet. She was up to the letter *Yud*, and so far she was doing pretty well. Rachel was just checking her answer in the back of the booklet when there was a knock at the door.

As she went to get the door, her brothers and father rushed by her and ran out to catch a mincha prayer. "Shabbat Shalom, Rachel! See you later!" they called. Rachel's

mother and sisters were lighting Shabbat candles, and peace was finally descending onto the house.

As she approached the door, Rachel saw that it was a few girls from her class. "Shabbat Shalom, Rachel. We were wondering if you want to join our group."

Rachel remembered that they had made announcement about this new program in school where you went as groups to visit people and sing as Shabbat came in. She hadn't paid too much attention because Shabbat was her special time...

Rachel was about to say, "no thank you" when, over the tops of her classmates heads, over the roofs of the houses opposite, she spotted something. It was a rainbow. Now, Rachel had studied her Sedra, and she knew that that was the sign that G-d had made for Noach, the promise that He would never again destroy the entire world by flood. Rachel remembered something else. She remembered that when the flood was over, G-d told Noach to leave the ark. He was telling him that it wasn't enough to stay enclosed in his own world, but he had a responsibility to the world at large.

Rachel turned around to ask her mother if she could go with the girls. Her mother was already smiling and nodding. "I'm with you!" Rachel called to her friends as she grabbed her coat off its hook and ran down the stairs.

As the group walked down the street together, Rachel thought about her day. The picture flashed in her mind of her sitting on the couch in Shabbat-mode, and her family still running around with last minute chores. Even though Rachel had done everything needed, maybe, she thought, this new activity would be a way she could help people just a little more.

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