

COMMUNICATIONS

FAITH AND DOUBT

TO THE EDITOR OF *TRADITION*:

In the Spring-Summer 1967 issue of *Tradition*, Rabbi Norman Lamm published an article entitled "Faith and Doubt" in which he grants a certain measure of legitimacy to honest, searching, doubting of the cognitive aspects of Judaism, (as long as it does not become denial) and minimizes the importance of belief in the Fundamentals of Judaism to below that which he calls "halakhic norms." He states: "However, the grant of legitimacy to doubt must be limited to cognitive faith and not affect functional faith or halakhic practice. Once we violate a halakhic norm on the basis of cognitive doubt we have in effect ceased to function as believers and begun to act as a denier." (p. 30). At the time this appeared I had assumed that subsequent issues of *Tradition* would carry various rejoinders to the article because of both the importance to contemporary Judaism of the questions raised in the article, and because of the radically new thesis presented by it. I therefore wish to apologize for not responding sooner, and I am

only doing so at this date due to the lack of previous replies.

It has been the position of all our Rishonim and the obvious intent of the massoretic tradition that belief in the fundamentals of Judaism is not only mandatory, but of greater importance than the observance of individual *mitzvot*, as the latter lose their significance without the former (other than the redemptive value of "*she-or she-bah machziran lemutav*"¹ which applies to deniers as well as to doubters).

The Mekhilta² compares the commandments to believe in God to a king who entered a city not formerly under his domain. The people asked him to set up a system of laws and rulings. The king said, "first recognize my authority and then accept my laws."

Rambam,³ Chinuch,⁵ Ravad,⁶ Semag⁷ and Semak,⁸ all count belief in at least some of the fundamentals as part of the 613 commandments. Ramban⁹ explains that even those such as *Baal Halakhot Gedolot* who do not count belief in God as one of the 613 *mitzvot*, consider it as a general commandment which is included in *all* 613

mitzvot as the term "commandment" has no significance without belief in the commander. He cites the above quoted Mekhilta as one of his proofs.

The *mitzvot* pertaining to matters of belief include both positive commandments of enjoining belief, and prohibitions against denial or doubt — וְשָׁלָא נִשְׁכַּח עֵיקַר הָאֲלָקוֹת, וְנִכְפָּוֹר אוֹ נִסְתַּפֵּק בּוֹ.¹¹

The sources cited by Rabbi Lamm on closer, in context, observation, also state this:

1. Even if one were to accept Rabbi Lamm's analysis of Saadia's theory of knowledge, and Rabbi Lamm's subsequent dismissal of it on the grounds that modern philosophy rejects this epistemology, (p. 26-27), it still remains clear that Saadia himself, on religious grounds, required belief and prohibited substantive doubting. Since, if Saadia had been working on philosophical grounds alone, he could have only stated that doubt is not necessary due to his proofs, not that it is enjoined.

2. Rambam (cited in footnote 52) clearly states that the prohibition of philosophical studies (no matter whom it does or does not apply to) leads to the danger of that one may doubt, not just that one may deny.

„כִּיצַד פְּעָמִים יְתוֹר אַחֵר עֲבוּדָת כּוֹכָבִים וּפְעָמִים יַחֲשׁוֹב בִּיחּוּד הַבּוֹרָא שְׁמָא הִיא שְׁמָא אִינוּ . . . וּפְעָמִים בְּנִבּוּאָת שְׁמָא הִיא אִמַּת שְׁמָא הִיא אִינָה וּפְעָמִים בְּתוֹרָה שְׁמָא הִיא מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמָא אִינָה.”

3. Rashi¹² cited on page 28 nowhere mentions or implies that the *Ger* was a doubter. Rashi is simply contrasting the requirement for a

Ger to declare before a court that he will practice the Torah which Rashi holds must precede the *Milah* and *Tevilah*, with the personal requirement of belief in its divine origin, which Rashi holds can come later. Rashi makes it clear though that the *Ger* was acceptable only because Hillel knew that he would later believe. Rashi is contrasting וְקָבַל עָלָיו שְׁלָא הִיָּה מֵאֲמִין שְׁהִיא with I believe that Rabbi Lamm is trying to contrast שְׁלָא הִיָּה מֵאֲמִין כּוֹפֵר with שְׁלָא הִיָּה מֵאֲמִין and concludes that if the *Ger* was neither, he must have been somewhere in between (i.e., in doubt). This interpretation would render the other phrases in the Rashi either redundant, irrelevant, or contradictory.

Even, if for argument's sake, one were to accept Rabbi Lamm's interpretation of Rashi, this would still be a minority of one opinion, and Rabbi Lamm would still have no justifiable grounds for concluding "This is, I believe, *sufficient halakhic warrant* (italics mine) for the thesis that doubt — the state of questioning suspension between faith and denial — can be acknowledged as legitimate within the confines of cognitive faith" (p. 30).

4. The citation of the *Chovot Halevavot* to distinguish between *Emunah* — cognitive faith and *Bitachon* — functional faith, is a correct one. But the order is reversed. *Emunah* is a prerequisite for, and included in, *bitachon*, not the other way around. *Chovot Halevavot* specifically states this in *Shaar* 1 (where *Emunah* is held prerequisite not only to *Bitachon*, but to everything else in the Torah) and again in *Shaar* 2, Chapter 3

where 7 beliefs are held prerequisite to *Bitachon*. The functional faith which is referred to in the article, therefore, cannot be equated in any sense with Bachya's *Bitachon*. Similarly, *Tefila*, *Kabbalat ol Malkhut Shomayim*, etc., included under the functional faith of the article, are a meaningless psychological sop, rather than the *mitzvot* referred to in the *Chovot Halevavot*.

111

That it is not only a *mitzvah* to believe without doubt, but more fundamental than other *mitzvot*, and more reflective of one's halakhic status as a Jew, can be seen from the Rambam.¹³ After he defines 13 fundamentals of Judaism he states, "When one believes all of these fundamentals, and *his beliefs in them becomes certainties*¹⁴ to him, then he enters *kelall Yisroel* and it is a *mitzvah* to love him and have compassion for him and treat him in all respects with the love and brotherhood that God has commanded us to apply one to another, and this applies even if he committed every sin he could, due to his desires and natural inclinations; he is punished for his sins but has a share in the world to come and is considered a Jewish sinner (*Poshei Yisroel*). But when one's belief in one of these (13) fundamentals becomes spoiled, he has left the *kelall*, is a *Kofer B'Ik-kar* and is considered a *min*, *apikores*, and *kotetz be'netiot*, and it

is a *mitzvah* to hate him and destroy him; of him it is written
הָלָא מִשְׁנֵאִיו ה' אֲשֵׁנָה,"

This idea can also be found in the philosophers who disagreed with the Rambam's list of 13 articles of faith. Albo,¹⁵ for instance, states that the definition of "Fundamental" is that without which *no* observance of the Torah is valid, and concludes that there are three such fundamentals which include at least 7 of those listed by Rambam.

Finally, if for argument's sake, we were to accept *in toto* Rabbi Lamm's thesis despite the above, what would it accomplish? Rabbi Lamm says, "The honest doubter must, therefore, not be looked upon as an enemy who is hostile to Torah. We must neither attack him nor avoid him." However, since at the beginning of the article Rabbi Lamm makes it clear that he is referring to people without a strong traditional education, who are being taught the fundamentals of Judaism (p. 15) and the people living in the "secular city," it is clear that they come under the category of תִּינוּק שְׂנִיגָה and not only the honest doubter, but even the dishonest denier in that category, must be neither attacked nor avoided.¹⁶ His second application "Nor must we be distraught when we are ourselves confronted by intellectual religious problems," if meant as substantive doubt, goes against the whole concept of *Teshuvah*.¹⁷

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Communications

NOTES

1. ירושלמי חגיגה פרק א הלכת ז.
 2. מכילתא יתרו.
- See also בבלי מכות כ"ד which states that all the *Mitzvot* rest on the principle of וצדיק באמונתו יחיה
3. משנה תורה הלכות יסודי התורה הלכה ו, ספר המצות עשה א.
 4. Notes to ספר המצות עשה א. לא תעשה א. השמטות לא תעשה א.
 5. ספר החינוך, מצוה כה.
 6. השגנות על מנין המצות. He does not argue with the Rambam on these *Mitzvot* and thus they are necessary for the amended total of 613.
 7. ספר מצות גדולות עשין א; לאוין א, יד.
 8. ספר מצות קטנות מצות א, יב.
 9. Notes to ספר המצות עשה א, לא תעשה א.
 10. Additions to ספר המצות לא תעשה א.
 11. משנה תורה הלכות עכום פרק ב הלכה ג.
- See also ספר מצות גדולות לאו יד where this passage is cited as the definition of a negative commandment against doubt.
12. שבת לא. רשי ד"ה נזיפה.
 13. פירוש משניות סנהדרין פרק חלק משנה א.
 14. See the הקדמות לפירוש המשנה רמבם לעם edition of the where the text is ונתבררה אמונתו בהם making this translation clearer.
 15. ספר העיקרים מאמר א פרק ג.
 16. משנה תורה הלכות ממרים פרק ג הלכה ג.
 17. See משנה תורה הלכות תשובה פרק ב הלכה ב.

RABBI LAMM REPLIES:

Mr. Silver has apparently missed the main intention of my paper. I did not maintain that all or most of the sources of our tradition clearly embrace doubt as a religiously valid orientation, and I did not insist that everyone ought to doubt. What I did try to say was that, whether we like it or not, doubt is ubiquitous in our times, and that to attempt to legislate it out of existence by condemning the honest doubter is to misunderstand both the realities of our age and, on a deeper level, the very nature of the inquiring mind, as well as to risk the alienation of large numbers of people presently or potentially within our camp. I therefore set out

to discover some source, however indirect, for at least a limited legitimization of the doubter. It is fairly obvious that special and sufficient consideration has not heretofore been given to doubt and the doubter. Were it otherwise, my task would have been considerably easier, even unnecessary. Mr. Silver's citation of sources to demonstrate the desirability of certainty as against doubt is, therefore, superfluous. It has almost as little relevance to the discussion as his learned compilation of authoritative opinion that it is a good thing to believe in God.

These preliminary remarks will suffice to cover most of the points raised by Mr. Silver — at least,

those that I understand (this is meant to exclude, for instance, his last paragraph). A number of his criticisms, such as that regarding Saadia, require no more from me than a plea that he reread the original essay with a bit more care, or, as in the case of his second point, concerning Maimonides, that he reread n. 52.

Now with regard to my interpretation of Rashi, I concede that it is debatable, but upon further reflection I am convinced that my understanding is correct. Mr. Silver would have the phrase *שלא היה מאמין לקבל עליו* stand in contrast to *וקבל* (not *וקבל* — obviously a typographical error in Mr. Silver's letter). But this is syntactically forced, and the whole context of Rashi goes against this. Other correspondents have written to me personally suggesting other interpretations of Rashi, but none of those competing readings can explain why Rashi switches from the positive *כופר* to the negative *לא היה מאמין*. It should be obvious that it is these two elements that Rashi juxtaposes, and therefore suggests an intermediate stage between faith and denial, namely, doubt. What seems to have caused the resistance to my interpretation is Rashi's addition of the phrase *שהיא מפי הגבורה*, which my critics understood as describing *מאמין*, whilst referring *כופר* to practice of the precepts of the Oral Law. But this I reject. *כופר* and *מאמין* clearly refer to the same object: the belief in the divine origin of the Oral Law. The controversy between Pharisees and Sadducees was not so much over the *practice* of the Oral Law, as over

its authority as *divine* law and in this sense equivalent to the Written Law (cf. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Rabbinic Essays*, p. 115 ff.). Our Rashi should therefore be read as if the phrase *שהיא מפי הגבורה* refers back to *שלא היה כופר* as well as to *לא היה מאמין*, i.e., "for he did not *deny* [the divine origin of] the Oral Torah, but did not *believe* that it came from God, and Hillel felt sure that after he would teach him, he would rely upon him [concerning the divine origin of the Oral Torah]." This is essentially the way I translated this passage in the body of my article. A perusal of the Talmudic text will show that the problem of practice had not been raised at all. Hence, Rashi's *וקבל עליו* means literally "to accept," implying a *belief* rather than a commitment to *practice*. This interpretation is, I submit, the simplest one available, most in accord with the words of Rashi, and, Mr. Silver to the contrary notwithstanding, it renders no phrase "redundant, irrelevant, or contradictory."

Mr. Silver's strictures against my statement that Rashi represents "sufficient halakhic warrant" for my thesis can be answered by referring to the end of n. 25. Furthermore, I must again remind him that I am looking for some authority, no matter how much in the minority, for the exculpation and validation of the honest doubter. A mere recitation of well known sources that do not support this effort is not a creative contribution to solving one of the most critical problems of our times.