



Why should I believe that the Torah was given to the Jewish people at Sinai?

Your children are thinking about this question. I regularly asked my students to write their questions about Judaism and nearly all asked this. We cannot be afraid to engage them in discussion about this critical question and Shavuot is the perfect time to do so.

And then, of course, the war began. My Rabbi, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, zt"l, asked the question this way: "Can a reasonable person believe that G-d gave the Torah at Sinai?" He answered that there have been hundreds of religions in world history that claim to have had a Divine revelation and that the only religion with a reasonable story even worth considering as truth is Judaism.

Every religion other than Judaism relates that a god appeared to one individual. That person then related the story to others. Judaism is the only religion that claims that G-d revealed Himself to the entire nation: "Behold I will come to you [Moshe] in the thick of the cloud so that the nation will hear when I speak to you, and in you, they will trust forever" (Exodus 19:9).

This uniqueness makes the Jewish story one that a reasonable person can consider embracing. Why would any thinking person accept someone else's claim that G-d appeared to him alone? In fact, this is why many faiths resorted to violence to spread their doctrines. People just didn't believe it!

But a story like ours, in which G-d appeared to all the people, must be taken seriously, because if a story like this can be made up, why didn't

anyone else in the history of the world create a similar one? If you were creating your own religion, wouldn't it be advantageous – and more realistic and believable – to claim the Divine Power appeared to more than one person?

So why is Judaism the only religion to even attempt to make the claim that the Divine Power spoke to more than one person? Is it reasonable to suggest that the Jews were the only ones clever enough to recognize the benefits of such a claim? The only reasonable conclusion is that it is impossible to make such a claim unless it is true. If one attempts to falsely claim a revelation occurred in front of many people, it can easily be disproved or contradicted.

Judaism not only claims that G-d spoke to more than one person, but that He spoke to a few million people! All it would have taken was one of those millions of "eyewitnesses" to come forward with the truth or to relate different details about the supposed revelation, and the foundation of the religion would collapse. This is one strong reason to accept and celebrate the story of the Divine Revelation at Sinai.

There are many other differences between Judaism and all other religions. For example, most religious texts include prophecies. However, all of these predictions relate to events which could likely occur through the natural and normal course of history. Despite this, none of those prophecies have come true.

The Torah outlines a seemingly ridiculous prophecy – which has come true in our time! It relates that the Jews will forsake G-d and will be dispersed to the four corners of the Earth where they will experience terrible persecution. While they are gone from Israel, nothing will grow in the Land. But then they will return to their Land from all around the world and they will regrow and rebuild it. It's an absurd prophecy. A small and powerless nation will be dispersed throughout the world without a common spoken language, land or culture, and will survive and return to its homeland thousands of years later? Yet, we have seen this "ridiculous" prophecy come true.

We sinned, were dispersed, were persecuted terribly, the Land remained desolate, and we have now returned to Israel from all four corners of the Earth and have built it into a flourishing, fully modernized and technologically advanced country.

Is it conceivable that a human being wrote this thousands of years ago and happened to get it right? This should strengthen our belief in the Divine origin of the Torah and the Revelation at Sinai.

These two points provide a strong and reasonable basis for us to accept and embrace the story of G-d giving the Jewish people the Torah at Sinai and so Shavuot is the perfect time to discuss them with our children.

Rabbi Dov Lipman is a former MK and the author of seven books about Judaism and Israel