

# EMUNAH

## *As Total Cognition*

BY RABBI SHELOMOH ELIEZER DANZIGER

The commonly-held view that religious believers have made a leap of faith while nonbelievers are men of reason is an oversimplified and mistaken assessment. *All people, without exception, live their lives, think their thoughts and make their judgments according to some kind of "religion."* "Religion" in this context has the wider definition of "world-view" or "philosophy." Funk and Wagnall defines religion as: "the beliefs, attitudes, emotions, behavior, etc., constituting man's relationship with the powers and principles of the universe, *especially* (emphasis added) with a deity or deities" — but, by implication, *not necessarily* with a deity or deities.

An example of this secular religion is the statement of Nobel Prize-winning chemist, Harold Urey:

*All of us who study the origin of life find, the more we look into it, the more we feel it is too complex to have evolved anywhere. We all believe as an article of faith (emphasis added) that life evolved from dead matter on this planet.*<sup>1</sup>

When Dr. Urey declared his belief in this "article of faith," he was thinking and judging according to the doctrine of his materialist world-view, his "religion" of naturalism.

There are certain segments of reality that are susceptible to direct sense perception, precise measurement and description ("scientific method"). These segments are only a small portion of total

reality. Many aspects of reality that are most important to us as human beings are not the proper province of the aforementioned methodology, because they are beyond its scope. The human mind approaches these aspects of reality by other means.

All men pursue truth from within a certain framework of thinking, which is really the decisive factor in reaching conclusions. The same facts are interpreted differently by persons operating within different frameworks. Framework is formed over a period of many years of repeated observation of facts and situations, of long exposure to perceived reality. The observation and exposure may be *inclusive* or *restricted* — according to the extent of one's phenomenal environment. In any case, framework results from one's *total perception* of things, from the judgment of the total personality — the *total cognition* of the psyche of perceived reality. This is the condition of the human mind, the very nature of human perception of reality. It is the inescapable process of any and all human cognition.

It is akin to the factor of totality in perception as elaborated in Gestalt psychology. It is even more directly related to the psychological concept of "apperception." This has been defined as:

*...a general term for those mental processes in which an experience, sensation or perception is brought into connection with already existent and systematized ideas and is thereby explained, classified or, in a word, understood. The pre-existing knowledge with which the perceived content is articulated is called the apperceptive mass.*<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the process of knowing involves not only analysis and perception, but synthesis and reflection —

in Kantian terms, "apperceptive synthesis."

*Whatever is given in sensation becomes part of a system of unified experience; the occurrence of the system presupposes a 'unity of apperception' transcending sense. Such apperception should not be regarded as the work of memory alone, and it is no mere disposition; it involves the judgment-making (emphasis added) and statement-making function — that is logical function.*<sup>3</sup>

One may believe with Locke that the human mind, before receiving sensory impressions and before being exposed to experience is a *tabula rasa*, devoid of innate ideas. But once engaged in sensory experience, the human mind has an innate way of organizing that experience in an act of apperception that involves the logical function of judgment-making. This process and the product of it are what we have termed Total Cognition. Total Cognition is rooted in the very nature and condition of the human mind — in its perceptive and apperceptive function.

Recent studies of the brain have shed light on its duality. The left hemisphere of the brain is the sphere of straightforward analysis. The right hemisphere is the sphere of creativity and the esthetic sense. Moreover, it processes data supplied by the analytical left side, and, after a period of incubation, produces insight, in which all the input falls into place in a process of mental synthesis. A striking example of the foregoing is one's inability to describe from memory, analytically, a stranger's appearance, but one's total and immediate recognition, synthetically, of the stranger when he reappears. These recent studies of the brain support the concept of Total Cognition as an inher-

Rabbi Danziger was a *maggid shiur* in the mesivta of Yeshivath Samson Raphael Hirsch for many years and served as the Rabbi of Beth Midrash Horeb in Riverdale, NY. He is now "actively" retired and resides in Lakewood, NJ.

### NOTES

1. Christian Science Monitor, January 4, 1962.

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Apperception."

3. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Epistemology."



ent function of the human mind.

As mentioned above, the extent of one's phenomenal environment, whether it be *inclusive* or *restricted*, will affect one's cognition and cognitive framework.

*[One's] information would be very slight indeed if it were confined to what he has gained independently of others; for the greater part of it comes from communication with others — through talking, writing, reading...and so on.*<sup>4</sup>

We, the Nation of Israel, have an inclusive phenomenal environment that includes, not only the natural phenomena around us, but also the phenomena of our national history: the Exodus from Egypt (*Yetziat Mitzrayim*) and the subsequent Revelation at Sinai (*Maamad Har Sinai*) on the momentous Day of Assembly (*Yom Hakkahal*) which were experienced nationally (i.e., on a national scale) at the time of their occurrence, and which were transmitted zealously on a national scale, together with the rest of the Torah, to succeeding generations through a kind of dedicated transmission unparalleled among other nations, and unimagined by those who are not practicing members of the Nation of Israel.

The Torah texts that bear on the foregoing are: *Exodus*, chapters 19-20; *Deuteronomy*, chapters 4-5. Let us examine one of these passages: *Deuteronomy* 4:33-36. Moses before his death, forty years after the events, says to the Nation of Israel:

*For make inquiry now concerning the earliest times which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath ever been such a great thing as this, or hath been heard like it? Did ever a nation hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard and remained alive? Or hath God assayed to go and take unto Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, comparable to all that the Lord thy God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Thou hast been brought to know through seeing that the Lord, He is God; there is none beside Him. Out of heaven He made thee hear His voice, that He might instruct thee; and upon earth He made thee see His*

*great fire; and thou didst hear His words out of the midst of the fire.*

In this passage, Moses issues the challenge of "comparative religion" to investigate times, places and peoples to ascertain whether such a great thing as the Public National Revelation that all Israel witnessed at Sinai on the Day of the Assembly, when the *entire* people heard God's voice proclaiming the Ten Commandments out of the midst of the fire of the blazing Mount Sinai, ever occurred amidst any other nation ("whether there hath ever *been* such a great thing"), or whether any other nation or religion has ever *even made such a claim* ("or hath been *heard* like it"). No such claim, involving, as it does, the presence of the entire nation could be made, unless it actually occurred. The same challenge is issued concerning the miraculous Exodus from Egypt amidst the Ten Plagues *experienced on a national scale*. As our *Rishonim* (Early Authorities) have pointed out, revelation on a national scale in Egypt and at Sinai is what distinguishes Torah Judaism from Christianity and Mohammedanism, or any other religion. National events are the stuff of history; "revelations" or "miracles" relating to individuals, "witnessed" on less than a national scale, are the stuff of legends.

*In the entire recorded history of the world we have no example of anything which even remotely approaches the scale or the peculiar nature of the Torah's claim...I was slowly discovering that the neat, pat, academic theories [of the deniers of the Torah] upon which I had relied for my understanding of the Torah, just did not adequately explain a great deal of what the Torah actually contained (from *Waking Up Jewish*, by Uri Zohar, astute observer, secularist and social satirist of modern Israeli society, who returned to Torah commitment).*

All this — and more — comprises our inclusive phenomenal environment as a nation. This *national* history, this "apperceptive mass," informs our Total Cognition, which becomes the framework from within which we apperceive all other phenomena, facts and situations. Whatever segments of reality are susceptible to the direct sense perception, measurement and analysis of the scientific method are indeed analyzed by us in that manner. But for the reality that lies beyond the scope and competence of such analysis, the operative method is

apperceptive synthesis, involving the judgment-making, logical function inherent in the nature of the human mind in its processing of information. This is our *emunah*, our conviction, our Total Cognition. To be convinced means etymologically to be "thoroughly conquered" beyond doubt by one's perception, or apperception, of the truth, i.e., to attain certain knowledge [Latin, *convicere*, to overcome, from *com* — thoroughly + *vincere*, to conquer].

On the other hand, the phenomenal environment, the "apperceptive mass," of the secularists is restricted. God, Creation, revelation, spiritual reality, etc. are dogmatically rejected out of hand as "unthinkable" or "clearly incredible." This secular "religion" of naturalism is the product of a certain mode of thought, a certain mind-set, a certain mental framework, some of the causes of which can be traced historically. (See Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld's *S.R. Hirsch — The Man and His Mission*, which introduces *Judaism Eternal* Vol. 1). In turn, Secularism has resulted in a cultural mass conditioning, a modern climate of opinion, a powerful Zeitgeist, a socially sanctioned spirit of the age which prevent the devotees of this secular "religion" from giving serious consideration to the claims of the competing religion: the "Jewish" Torah. Conversely, we judge whatever facts are disclosed by the secularists from the framework of *our* Total Cognition, not *theirs*. Just as we are unaffected by the judgments of Christianity and Mohammedanism, so too should we be unaffected by the "religious" judgments of the "religions" of Secularism and Academism.

Through proper training, Total Cognition can lead to a life of happiness that results from an awareness of the nearness of God's Presence. We are always in the house of our Divine Father-King-Master — in *shul*, in the *Beit Hamidrash*, in the business or professional office, in the street, in the park, in the home — in all the experiences of daily, normal living. We study the Word of God (the Torah). We carry out the orders of God (the *mitzvot*). In all the vicissitudes of life, in sorrow and in joy — always in our Father's house, always in His Presence, always aware of His sustaining nearness! This most intimate personal relationship with our Divine Father-King-Master becomes the continual "pursuit of happiness" of the Torah-observing servant of

4. *Ibid.*



God. It requires a spiritual receptivity, which is generated by an incisive Torah insight, by a meditative prayer (*tefillah*), by a *mitzvah* carried out with inner devotion, by a beautiful natural scene, by a sublime piece of music, by a poetic thought, by a quiet moment of meditative solitude — all while thinking of our Divine Master, Who gave us His Torah, Who commanded His *mitzvot*, Who created beauty in His world and the esthetic sense to appreciate it.

The Torah affords us many such opportunities, but there is no assurance of a constant sense of Divine Presence. *In Thy behalf my heart hath said: 'Seek ye My Presence'; Thy Presence, Hashem, do I seek. Conceal not Thy Presence from me, repel not Thy servant in anger (Psalms 27:8-9).* There is a process of seeking and intermittent finding. Each of life's situations is a challenge, a situational setting for the seeking and finding of our Father's house. However, the process must proceed from external, mechanical rote to inner spiritual experience. As in the case of Eliyahu, the nearness of Hashem is not experienced through great wind, quaking or fire. Not frenzied fervor, but a small, still voice of meditative inwardness is the key to this highest good of *kirvat Elokim* (the nearness of God).

By living in his Father's house in this world as a foretaste of his Father's house

in the next mode of existence, the servant of *Hashem* escapes the bleak transitory meaninglessness of life outside that house. □

The following is a poetic expression of this thought, written years ago by a son of the present writer:

### Footsteps

The night is silent, the wind blows soft,  
The snow falls gently from its perch aloft,  
Nature's asleep 'neath its blanket of white,  
Not a sound in the air, not a creature in sight.

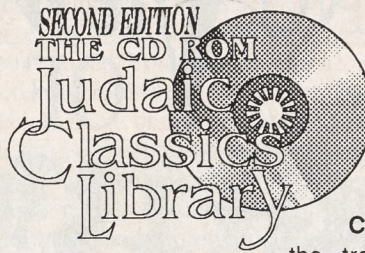
But there in the path, as anyone can see,  
Lie footsteps so clear that no doubt can be  
But that a man has passed not long ago,  
And left his imprint on the virgin snow.

Who is this man, I doubt I'd know,  
Whence did he come, and whither go?  
What purpose had he to come by this way  
On this dark eve of a wintry day?

The snow still falls — so gentle and serene!  
And already his footsteps can hardly be seen,  
Just a minute more, and no one will know  
That a man ever passed through the  
winter night's snow.

One thing alone do I ask, Lord, of Thee,  
All the days of my life in Thy house to be,  
And afterwards, too, as sang Psalmist of yore,  
In Thy house, O dear Father, forevermore.

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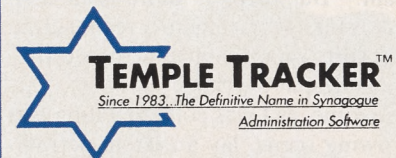
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