

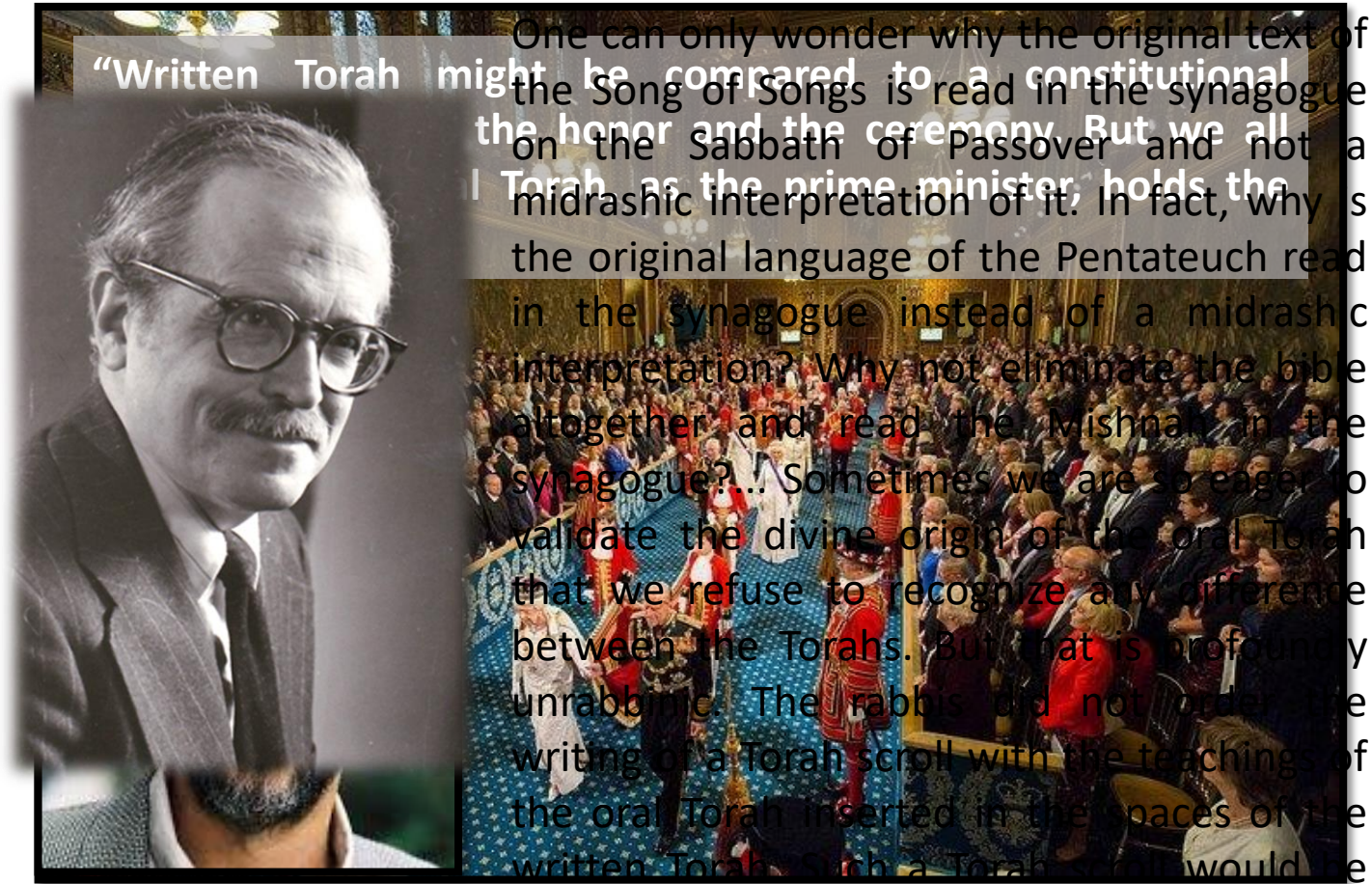
# Revelation Revealed

Part 2

Samuel Lebens

|                                 |                    | Problems |                    |                          |                            |                                  | Virtues            |                       |          |                 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------|
|                                 |                    | Fatalism | Divine<br>Morality | Stability of<br>the Text | Science<br>in the<br>Torah | Integrity<br>of the<br>Tradition | Halakhic<br>heresy | Theological<br>heresy | Exegesis | Talmud<br>Torah |
| Pentateuchal Theory             |                    | ✓        | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓                          |                                  |                    | ✓                     |          |                 |
| Pentateuchal+ Theory            |                    | ✓        |                    | ✓                        |                            | ✓                                |                    | ✓                     |          |                 |
| Pentateuchal++ Theory           |                    | ✓        |                    | ✓                        | ✓                          |                                  |                    |                       | ✓        |                 |
| Non-Pentateuchal Theories       |                    |          |                    |                          |                            |                                  |                    |                       |          |                 |
| Foundational Fragment<br>Theory | Paradigm<br>Theory |          |                    |                          |                            |                                  | ✓                  |                       |          | ✓               |

# The Status of the Pentateuch



One can only wonder why the original text of the Song of Songs is read in the synagogue on the Sabbath of Passover and not a midrashic interpretation of it. In fact, why is the original language of the Pentateuch read in the synagogue instead of a midrashic interpretation? Why not eliminate the bible altogether and read the Mishnah in the synagogue?..! Sometimes we are so eager to validate the divine origin of the oral Torah that we refuse to recognize any difference between the Torahs. But that is profoundly unrabbinic. The rabbis did not order the writing of a Torah scroll with the teachings of the oral Torah inserted in the spaces of the written Torah. Such a Torah scroll would be

unfit for use in the

# Sternography



[W]hy were both of them, the Holy and Blessed One and Moses, speaking at the time of the writing down of the Torah? But the Holy and Blessed One was speaking the Written Torah, and Moses began to speak the Oral Torah, which was founded by him; and only then did he write, including allusions in his writing to that Oral Torah that he grasped on his own. If so, it seems that this is why the text says, “Write down for yourself these commandments” (Exodus 34:27), rather than more simply, “Write down these commandments.” It said what it said—“write down for yourself”—so as to say, “write in allusions [to] that which is yours,” that Oral Torah which you apprehended on your own.

Nezer Hakodesh



# Mount Sinai and Marcel Duchamp

The tradition came to treat the Pentateuch as uniquely divine. But God *knew* that this would happen, in the wake of Sinai, and yet he went ahead with the theophany. He *knew* that these attitudes would become deeply integral to the entire tradition, and yet he gave the tradition his seal of approval. And thus, we can say that either (1) Moses *did* write it all down at God's behest, just as the stenographic model would suggest, or (2) the Pentateuchal text came to be in a somewhat less immediate manner, but God nevertheless foresaw its being attributed directly to him, as a central element of the tradition moving forward, and he *appropriated* it. Once you give Sinai this seal-giving function, the choice between those two alternatives is less significant.

# Stamp of Approval

To treat the Sinai theophany as granting a divine seal of approval to the traditions that came tumbling out of it is to ignore the fact that many *competing* traditions can be described as tumbling out of that one event. Presumably, God can't have been endorsing them all—given their incompatibility.



Tamar Ross: “within the interpretive community most committed to their study and practice” a “picture” or a “form of life” (Ross, 2004, p. 248). It is those pictures and forms of life, generated by the interpretive community within the Jewish nation, i.e., by those *most* committed to the study and practice of Judaism, that God can be said to be endorsing, provisionally, and not for all time, but for each generation in its time, as the interpretive tradition continues to generate new pictures and new forms of life, as it evolves towards its heavenly paradigm.



The rabbis would appeal to the practices of committed Jewry in order to resolve rabbinic. Popular custom (*minhag*) has authoritative status. Moreover, the rabbis are not permitted to create edicts that the religious community will not accept.

Rabbi Sacks writes (1993, p. x): A reading of the history of the Jews at times of crisis—the Babylonian exile, the Maccabean revolt, the destruction of the Second Temple, fifteenth-century Spain—suggests that the pattern of Jewry’s continuity is determined at such moments by its most intensely religious members.



# Only Time Will Tell

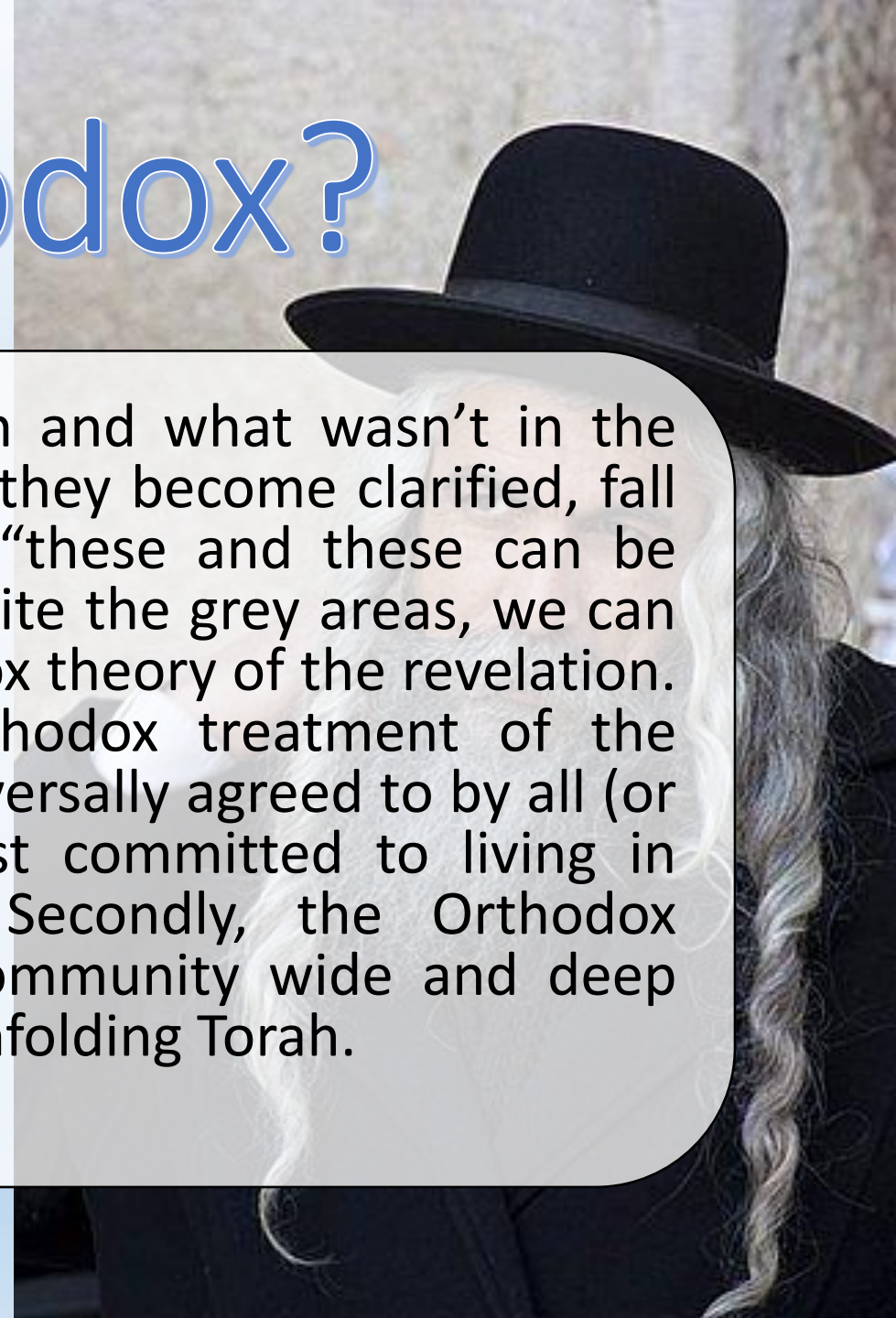
In the year 50ce, there was no criterion that allowed one to say which forms of Judaism were the right ones. On a purely theoretical level nobody could prove that the traditions of the Pharisees and the earliest rabbis were Torah while the writings of the Qumran sect and the teachings of the Sadducees were not. But by the year 600, it had become clear that this was the case. There is no conclusive way to explain why the philosopher Philo's first-century attempt to fuse Plato and Judaism did not become Torah, whereas Maimonides' twelfth-century attempt to fuse Aristotle and Judaism did . . .





# Is this Orthodox?

Sometimes only time will decide what was in and what wasn't in the Torah. The grey areas, at any given time, until they become clarified, fall under the disclaimer that, at least for now, "these and these can be regarded as the words of the living God." Despite the grey areas, we can begin to see why this is still a distinctly Orthodox theory of the revelation. First of all, it justifies the distinctively Orthodox treatment of the Pentateuchal texts—since this treatment is universally agreed to by all (or at least, the vast majority) of the Jews most committed to living in accordance with the revelation at Sinai. Secondly, the Orthodox community stands out today as displaying community wide and deep commitment to living in accordance with the unfolding Torah.



A glowing, fiery book with the text "External Problems with the Revelation" overlaid. The book is the central focus, appearing as a bright, glowing yellow and orange flame-like shape. The text is white with a thin black outline, centered over the book. The background is dark, with wisps of smoke or fire around the book.

# External Problems with the Revelation

# Non-Jewish Continuations of Sinai

- First of all, the revelation was an event in the life of a nation, giving a seal of approval to the evolving forms of life among the faithful of *that* nation.
- The authority of Moses, and all future prophets, stems from Sinai.
  - Moses tells us that there will be false prophets who even perform miracles. They are sent to test us. If they establish a new religion, they are to be regarded as false... unless, perhaps, they can conjure a second Sinai-like experience.

# Biblical Criticism

- Methodological Naturalism
- Our theory is compatible with even the most “threatening” conclusions of Biblical criticism



[W]e can imagine a renegade group of whimsical physicists proposing to reconstruct physics by refusing to use any beliefs that comes from *memory*, say, or perhaps memory of anything more than one minute ago. Perhaps something could be done along these lines, but it would be a poor, paltry, truncated, trifling thing. And now suppose that, say, Newton’s laws or special relativity turned out to be dubious and unconfirmed from this point of view: that would presumably give little pause to more traditional physicists. This truncated physics could hardly call in to question physics of the fuller variety.

# Archaeological Concerns

- What has been disproven?
- What genre is the Bible?
- On our theory all that needs to have occurred was the revelation at Sinai, even to a smaller nation that described in the text.

In the Hasidic literature . . . We all have an Adam and Eve inside of us, defying God and then exiled. We are all Abraham, called to leave our natural state and to go to a faraway place where we will be blessed. We all have a Moses and a Pharaoh within us, confronting one another time and again, until the time of personal redemption from the narrow confines of self-absorption. We each have within us the capacity to stand at Sinai and receive the Torah anew.



The background of the slide is a red and white halftone dot pattern. In the center, a hand is shown holding a human eye. The eye has a green iris and a black pupil. The hand is positioned as if presenting the eye. The title 'Ethical Challenge' is written in large, red, outlined letters across the top of the image.

# Ethical Challenge

Sommer cannot bring himself to believe in a God who sanctions genocide. But our theory of the revelation makes no such claim about God. Rather, it claims that God was willing to be *viewed* as endorsing genocide in ancient times, as he sought to guide a barbaric world towards the light. To allow yourself to be viewed in such a way *is* pretty horrifying, but no *more* horrifying than the human situation to which God was addressing himself.

At an event at Sinai, God gave an endorsement to a religious tradition that would evolve among the nation of Israel. That tradition would come to view the Pentateuch as a sacred written constitution, never to be amended (at least not without a second Sinai-like event). His endorsement demands that, today, we should relate to the Pentateuch as if it were dictated word for word by God to man (which, perhaps it really was). Whether or not this is an historically accurate account of the genesis of the Pentateuch (which, perhaps it really is), God foresaw that the religious tradition stemming from Sinai would (at least) evolve to endorse this attitude as central to its very identity. Accordingly, even if God didn't write the Pentateuch word for word (which he may well have done), it is as if God has now appropriated the text of the Pentateuch as his own, by his very appearance at Sinai. The Pentateuchal text is only one part of the Torah. That which is fixed is the words; not their interpretation. God also endorsed, at Sinai, the process of evolving traditions and interpretations that the faithful of Israel would develop over time, including their relationship with other books of the Bible. There may be wrong turns from time to time, but guided by *ruach hakosdesh* (the holy spirit of God), the general trajectory is such that the unfolding content of the revelation, through the religiously observant communities of the Jewish people, brings the content of the Earthly Torah ever closer to the content of the Heavenly Torah.