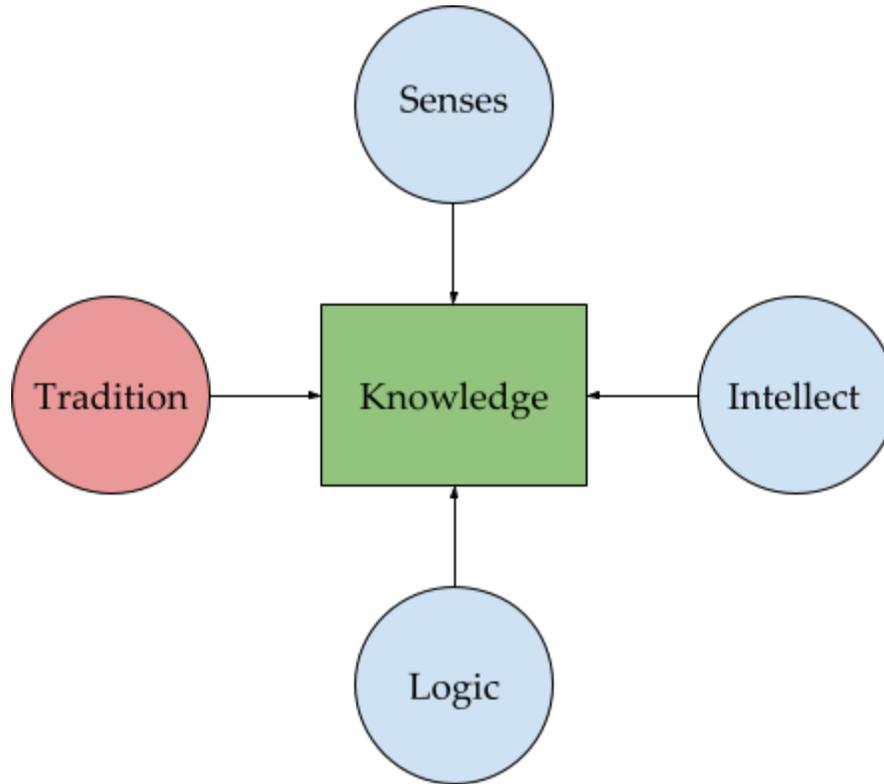


Trust, Conspiracies, and the Kuzari



Rav Saadia Gaon on Social Epistemology

1. Rav Saadia Gaon, *Emunot Vede'ot* III:6

Furthermore, let me say that it was well known to the All-Wise, exalted and magnified be He, that His precepts and the accounts of His signs would in the course of time require transmitters, in order that these matters might seem as authentic to posterity as they did to the early ancestors. Therefore did He render the human mind susceptible to the acceptance of authenticated tradition and the human soul capable of finding repose therein, so that His Scriptures and traditions might be acknowledged as true.

I deem it proper also to call to mind the following details that lend color to the validity of tradition. For example, were it not for the fact that man felt satisfied in their hearts that there is such a thing in the world as authentic tradition, no person would be able to cherish legitimate expectations on the basis of the reports he receives about the success of a certain commercial transaction, or the usefulness of a specified art... Nor would he heed the warnings about the dangers of a certain road, or the announcement of the prohibition of a certain act. [However,] without such expectations and apprehensions he would fail in his undertakings.

Again, were it not for the assumption that there exists in the world [such a thing as] authentic tradition, men would accept neither the command nor the interdict of their ruler, except when they saw him with their own eyes and heard his words with their own ears. In the event of his

absence, however, the acceptance on their part of his command and interdict would cease. But if things were like that, it would mean the end of law and order, and the death of many human beings.

Also, were it not for the existence in the world of such a thing as authentic tradition, no man would be able to identify the property of his father or his inheritance from his grandfather. Nay, he would not even be certain of being the son of his mother, let alone of his being the son of his father. The result would then be that the affairs of men would always be subject to doubt, to the point where human beings would believe only what they perceive with their senses at the time of perception. Such a viewpoint would be close to the theory of the Skeptics, whom we have mentioned in the first treatise.

Now the Scriptures, too, assert that authentic tradition is as trustworthy as things perceived with our own eyes... a report is subject to falsification in two directions from which direct observation is immune. It may be due either to false impression or else to deliberate misrepresentation...

Now when we ponder these two criteria of the trustworthiness of traditions, our reason arrives at the conclusion that it is only the individual who is subject to and fooled by false impression or deliberate deception. In the case of a large community of men, however, it is not likely that all of its constituents should have been subject to the same wrong impressions. On the other hand, had there been a deliberate conspiracy to create a fictitious tradition, that fact could not have remained a secret to the masses, but wherever the tradition had been published, the report of the conspiracy would have been published along with it. When, therefore, a tradition is free from the above-mentioned two flaws, there is no third means of invalidating it. Accordingly, if the traditions transmitted to us by our ancestors are viewed in the light of these [three] principles, they will be found to be proof against these arguments, correct and unshakable.

2. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara Galli, 106

The skepticism with regard to miracle did not basically further contest its possibility in general, but its particular reality, the credibility to be given to the singular miracle. Miracle did not have to be proven like a universal proposition, but as a singular event. It needed witnesses. It is this necessity and only this necessity to prove the miracle that was always recognized and satisfied as much as possible...

For the proof of the miracle, it is therefore fundamental to go back to the eyewitnesses. In their hearing under oath, it is personal credibility, the judgment of their capacity for observation, and even their numbers that are decisive; as regards the number, for example, the ancient Jewish dogma confirmed the miracle of Sinai as more credible than the miracle of the empty tomb, due to the impressive number of "600,000" eyewitnesses. But this is no longer the deposition under torture that crowns the proof; in spite of all, it can be false, consciously or unconsciously, without him who is judging noticing it. Already Satan knows this in the Book of Job: only the testimony adhered to during the tortures of the interrogation is an absolute guarantee.

The Kuzari Proof

3. Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb, *Living Up to the Truth*, 2nd ed.

There are two broad possibilities. One: the event at Sinai took place and people witnessed it, and that caused their belief. Or two: the event did not take place. If the event did not take place, then someone invented the story and convinced the people to believe it.

The Kuzari's argument proceeds by investigating the second alternative, that the event didn't happen, that the story was made up and was sold. The argument shows that the second alternative is not credible. It is not credible to believe that the story was made up and then sold. If you can defeat the second alternative, that leaves only the first alternative, that it happened and was witnessed. That is the structure of the argument.

4. R. Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari* I:25

God commenced His speech to the assembled people of Israel: 'I am the God whom you worship, who has led you out of the land of Egypt,' but He did not say: 'I am the Creator of the world and your Creator.' Now in the same style I spoke to thee, a Prince of the Khazars, when thou didst ask me about my creed. I answered thee as was fitting, and is fitting for the whole of Israel who knew these things, first from **personal experience**, and afterwards through **uninterrupted tradition**, which is equal to the former.

Tradition and Trust in the Kuzari

5. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari* I:10–30

10. Al Khazari: Indeed, I see myself compelled to ask the Jews, because they are the relic of the Children of Israel. For I see that they constitute in themselves the evidence for the divine law on earth. He then invited a Jewish Rabbi, and asked him about his belief.

11. The Rabbi replied: I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles; who fed them in the desert and gave them the land, after having made them traverse the sea and the Jordan in a miraculous way; who sent Moses with His law, and subsequently thousands of prophets, who confirmed His law by promises to the observant, and threats to the disobedient. Our belief is comprised in the Torah—a very large domain.

12. Al Khazari: I had not intended to ask any Jew, because I am aware of their reduced condition and narrow-minded views, as their misery left them nothing commendable. Now shouldst thou, O Jew, not have said that thou believest in the Creator of the world, its Governor and Guide, and in Him who created and keeps thee, and such attributes which serve as evidence for every believer, and for the sake of which He pursues justice in order to resemble the Creator in His wisdom and justice?

13. The Rabbi: That which thou dost express is religion based on speculation and system, the research of thought, but open to many doubts. Now ask the philosophers, and thou wilt find that they do not agree on one action or one principle, since some doctrines can be established by arguments, which are only partially satisfactory, and still much less capable of being proved.

14. Al Khazari: That which thou sayest now, O Jew, seems to be more to the point than the beginning, and I should like to hear more.
15. The Rabbi: Surely the beginning of my speech was just the proof, and so evident that it requires no other argument.
16. Al Khazari: How so?
17. The Rabbi: Allow me to make a few preliminary remarks, for I see thee disregarding and depreciating my words.
18. Al Khazari: Let me hear thy remarks.

19. The Rabbi: If thou wert told that the King of India was an excellent man, commanding admiration, and deserving his high reputation, one whose actions were reflected in the justice which rules his country and the virtuous ways of his subjects, would this bind thee to revere him?

20. Al Khazari: How could this bind me, whilst I am not sure if the justice of the Indian people is natural, and not dependent on their king, or due to the king or both?

21. The Rabbi: But if his messenger came to thee bringing presents which thou knowest to be only procurable in India, and in the royal palace, accompanied by a letter in which it is distinctly stated from whom it comes, and to which are added drugs to cure thy diseases, to preserve thy health, poisons for thy enemies, and other means to fight and kill them without battle, would this make thee beholden to him?

22. Al Khazari: Certainly. For this would remove my former doubt that the Indians have a king. I should also acknowledge that a proof of his power and dominion has reached me.

23. The Rabbi: How wouldst thou, then, if asked, describe him?

24. Al Khazari: In terms about which I am quite clear, and to these I could add others which were at first rather doubtful, but are no longer so.

25. The Rabbi: In this way I answered thy first question. In the same strain spoke Moses to Pharaoh, when he told him: "The God of the Hebrews sent me to thee," viz. the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For Abraham was well known to the nations, who also knew that the divine spirit was in contact with the patriarchs, cared for them, and performed miracles for them. He did not say: "The God of heaven and earth," nor "my Creator and thine sent me." In the same way God commenced His speech to the assembled people of Israel: "I am the God whom you worship, who has led you out of the land of Egypt," but He did not say: "I am the Creator of the world and your Creator." Now in the same style I spoke to thee, a Prince of the Khazars, when thou didst ask me about my creed. I answered thee as was fitting, and is fitting for the whole of Israel who knew these things, first from personal experience, and afterwards through uninterrupted tradition, which is equal to the former.

26. Al Khazari: If this be so, then your belief is confined to yourselves?

27. The Rabbi: Yes; but any Gentile who joins us unconditionally shares our good fortune, without, however, being quite equal to us. If the Law were binding on us only because God created us, the white and the black man would be equal, since He created them all. But the Law was given to us because He led us out of Egypt, and remained attached to us, because we are the pick of mankind.

28. Al Khazari: Jew, I see thee quite altered, and thy words are poor after having been so pleasant.
29. The Rabbi: Poor or pleasant, give me thy attention, and let me express myself more fully.
30. Al Khazari: Say what thou wilt.

Trusting the Jews? *The Kuzari's* Narrative Frame

6. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari* I:1, 4, 9–10

1. ... After this the Khazari said to himself: I will ask the Christians and Muslims, since one of these persuasions is, no doubt, the God-pleasing one. As regards the Jews, I am satisfied that they are of low station, few in number, and generally despised...

4. The Scholastic: ... We believe in Him and in His abode among the Children of Israel, granted to them as a distinction, because the divine influence never ceased to be attached to them, until the masses rebelled against this Messiah, and they crucified Him. Then divine wrath burdened them everlastingly, while the favor was confined to a few who followed the Messiah, and to those nations which followed these few. We belong to their number. Although we are not of Israelite descent, we are well deserving of being called Children of Israel, because we follow the Messiah and His twelve Israelite companions who took the place of the tribes. Many Israelites followed these twelve [apostles], and became the leaven, as it were, for the Christians. We are worthy of the degree of the Children of Israel. To us was also granted victory, and expansion over the countries. All nations are invited to this religion, and charged to practice it, to adore the Messiah and the cross on which He was put, and the like. Our laws and regulations are derived from the Apostle Simon, and from ordinations taken from the Torah, which we study. Its truth is indisputable, as is also the fact that it came from God. It is also stated in the New Testament: I came not to destroy one of the laws of Moses, but I came to confirm and enlarge it...

9. The Doctor [of Islam]: Is not our Book full of the stories of Moses and the Children of Israel? No one can deny what He did to Pharaoh, how He divided the sea, saved those who enjoyed His favour, but drowned those who had aroused His wrath. Then came the manna and the quails during forty years, His speaking to Moses on the mount, making the sun stand still for Joshua, and assisting him against the mighty. [Add to this] what happened previously, viz. the Flood, the destruction of the people of Lot; is this not so well known that no suspicion of deceit and imagination is possible?

10. Al Khazari: Indeed, I see myself compelled to ask the Jews, because they are the relic of the Children of Israel. For I see that they constitute in themselves the evidence for the divine law on earth. He then invited a Jewish Rabbi, and asked him about his belief.

7. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari*, II:1

1. After this the Khazari, as is related in the history of the Khazars, was anxious to reveal to his Vezier in the mountains of Warsān the secret of his dream and its repetition, in which he was

urged to seek the God-pleasing deed. The king and his Vezier travelled to the deserted mountains on the seashore, and arrived one night at the cave in which some Jews used to celebrate the Sabbath. They disclosed their identity to them, embraced their religion, were circumcised in the cave, and then returned to their country, eager to learn the Jewish law. They kept their conversion secret, however, until they found an opportunity of disclosing the fact gradually to a few of their special friends. When the number had increased, they made the affair public, and induced the rest of the Khazars to embrace the Jewish faith. They sent to various countries for scholars and books, and studied the Torah. Their chronicles also tell of their prosperity, how they beat their foes, conquered their lands, secured great treasures; how their army swelled to hundreds of thousands, how they loved their faith, and fostered such love for the Holy House that they erected a Tabernacle in the shape of that built by Moses. They also honoured and cherished those born Israelites who lived among them. While the king studied the Torah and the books of the prophets, he employed the Rabbi as his teacher, and put many questions to him on Hebrew matters.

8. Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, *The Kuzari*, VI:22–25, 28

22. The Rabbi was then concerned to leave the land of the Khazari and to take himself to Jerusalem. The king was loath to let him go, and spoke to him in this sense as follows: What can be sought in Palestine nowadays, since the divine reflex is absent from it, whilst, with a pure mind and desire, one can approach God in any place. Why wilt thou run into danger, on land and water and among various peoples?

23. The Rabbi answered: The visible Shekhinah has, indeed, disappeared, because it does not reveal itself except to a prophet or a favoured community, and in a distinguished place. This is what we look for in the passage: "Let our eyes behold when Thou returnest to Zion." ...

24. Al Khazari: I thought that thou didst love freedom, but now I see thee finding new religious duties which thou wilt be obliged to fulfil in Palestine, which are, however, in abeyance here.

25. The Rabbi: I only seek freedom from the service of those numerous people whose favour I do not care for, and shall never obtain, though I worked for it all my life. Even if I could obtain it, it would not profit me—I mean serving men and courting their favour. I would rather seek the service of the One whose favour is obtained with the smallest effort, yet it profits in this world and the next. This is the favour of God, His service spells freedom, and humility before Him is true honour...

28. Al Khazari: If this be so, it would be a sin to hinder thee. It is, on the contrary, a merit to assist thee. May God grant thee His help, and be thy protector and friend. May He favour thee in His mercy.