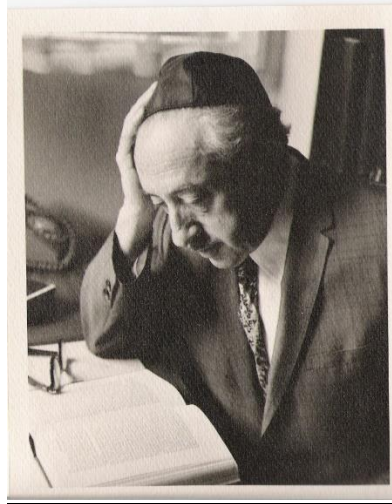




## **Faith and Belief as the Basis for a Living Torah**

Rahel Berkovits



**Rabbi Professor Eliezer Berkovits ז"ר**

**b. 1908 (Grossverdein, Transylvania) – d. 1992 (Jerusalem, Israel)**

### **Short Biography:**

#### *Education:*

Yeshiva of the Shevet Sofer (Pressburg), R. David Zvi Hoffman (Frankfurt-am-Main), Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary (Berlin) headed by R. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg, Ph.D. in Philosophy University of Berlin.

#### *Rabbinical Pulpits:*

Berlin, Germany (1933–39), Leeds, England (1940–46), Sydney, Australia (1946–50), and Boston, U.S. (1950–58). Chairman department of Jewish philosophy- Hebrew Theological College Chicago, U.S. (1958-1975).

*Aliyah* to Jerusalem 1976.

#### *Publications:*

19 books on topics in Jewish Philosophy and Halakha (German, English and Hebrew)  
50 (approx.) articles



1)

**Brought us before Mount Sinai**

**קָרַבְנוּ לְפָנֵי הַר סִינַי**

The covenant is the most intense form of the encounter. But the encounter must be real for me, or else it does not exist for me; and so it is with the covenant too. The covenant with my ancestors was concluded with them. As an event in history, it could not but affect the lives of their children as well; yet it could not be a covenant with the children. For me it is history, not encounter, that my forefathers encountered God. However, where there is no encounter, there may be philosophizing about religion, but there is no religion. For the revelation at Sinai to be revelation for me, it must be addressed to me, and so the covenant had to be concluded with all generations.

This could be done because, while the generations of the wilderness did pass away, God is timeless and therefore the manifestation at Sinai is timelessly directed to Israel. The revelation at Sinai never belongs to the past, it never ceases to be. It is as if the divine Presence, never departing from the mountain, were waiting for each new generation to come to Sinai to encounter him and to receive the word. Judged from the aspect of God's relationship to Israel, as revealed at Sinai or in the exodus from Egypt, these encounters are ever-present events. The miracles and the signs, the thunder and the lightning are gone; but not God, nor the word, nor Israel. And so it is for the eye of faith to see what has been withdrawn from the senses, and for the ear of faith to hear, notwithstanding the silence.

*God, Man and History, page 44*

2)

**מֵהָעֵדוּת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים**

**What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws**

One may discuss the relationship between faith and deed in Judaism successfully with the help of the understanding of the new concept of faith that emerged from Christianity's rejection of the law and of the deed. The source of the rejection was not a new insight into the nature of faith but rather a new evaluation of life, of human existence. With the depreciation of the law, the deed – to which it leads – was devalued. The deed was degraded because one had lost faith in the meaning of the works of man. At the root of it all was despair over man and the world. In the philosophy of the Christian apostle, man and the world stood in the sign of hopelessness. This meant, of course, not only rejection of the law but also the rejection of the old faith. According to Judaism, faith in God extends to God's creation too. Because he trusts in God, the Jew knows that God's evaluation of His creation, *כי טוב*, that it is good, is valid forever. It applies to man no less than the rest of creation. Man, too, is good, because he is capable of goodness, because he may well serve the purpose which God intended for him in his creation. Because of this, his life, in all its creaturely existence, is significant; it carries on itself the marks of divine approval.

*Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism, page 139*



3)

We would then see that in this generation, we have been called upon, as it were, by another *bat kol* to accept the responsibility to make use of whatever is still left of the Oral Torah in its textual solidification. It would be the beginning that would lead us back to the original source and strength of *halakhah*. It would be the beginning of its restoration to its original vitality and dignity, for the sake of which God concluded this covenant of mutuality with Israel. What is needed is not less study of Torah, but better study of Torah. What is needed is at least one talmudical research institute that would be dedicated to this task of rediscovery of *halakhah* and—at first—its intellectual restoration. What is needed is not less dedication to *halakhah*, but more faith in *halakhah*. Where there is greater faith, greater boldness is justified.

Crisis and Faith p.96

4)

but again one might ask, have all the explanations of what is possible within the Law already been given? One does not ask these questions because the Torah has become a burden and one wishes to break away from it; one asks because one believes in the eternal vitality of the divine revelation, because one is committed with one's whole existence to the proposition that the teaching is *Torat Hayim*, the way of life for the Jew.

Crisis and Faith p. 117

5)

"אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שיש פתרון מפני שאני מאמין. מפני שאני מאמין באל-הי ישראל ובתורתו אני מאמין ג"כ בכחו האיתן והנצחי של ההלכה לפתור את הבעיות העוברות את חיי עם ישראל"

Private correspondence to Rav Weinberg c.1960's



6)

וַנִּצְעַק אֶל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ

**And we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers**

The man of faith is forever with his “It,” i.e., with himself; the man of trust is always with his “Thou.” He who has faith, when he questions, doubts; he who trusts, when he questions, makes demands by virtue of the life of the relationship in which he stands. Occasionally God reveals

his approval of those who contend with him, as He did in the case of Job. He rejects the well-meaning defenders of His “justice” toward Job in the words which He addresses to Eliphaz the Temanite . . .

Thus, notwithstanding their trust in God, Jews through the ages contended with Him, talking back to Him, as it were, because of the unconvincing performance of divine providence in history. They were trusting and they were questioning, but their trust did not weaken their questioning and their questioning did not undermine their trust. On occasion, they even “called” God to a *Din Torah* (rabbinical court), endeavoring to judge Him according to the laws of the Torah that are supposed to be binding on Him no less than on the Jew. It was no different during the Holocaust. Heshil Rapoport’s last words to his wife were: “Do not cry. We have done what was up to us to do. But I have a great deal to say before the Heavenly court.”

*With God in Hell*, pages 126–128

7)

**The door is opened for the prophet Elijah** פּוֹתְחִים אֶת הַדֶּלֶת לְאֵלֵיהוּ

It is an old Jewish custom to open the doors of our homes on the Seder nights to welcome the prophet Elijah. By this custom we wish to indicate that we are still waiting for tomorrow, waiting for Elijah to announce that tomorrow has come. I feel, however, that Elijah’s reply would be: Well, brother, tomorrow will come. But are you still wavering between two worlds, are you still trying to serve God and Baal? If so what is the good of tomorrow, what use are you going to make of tomorrow? Tomorrow will come. But are we prepared for tomorrow, are we ready to make tomorrow? Tomorrow will come if the common guilt of the past is succeeded by the common responsibility of the future. Tomorrow will come if half-heartedness and compromise make way for faithful and unconditional service of God. Tomorrow comes only to those who are able and prepared to make tomorrow.

*Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, page 20