

the mere word of individuals. "Aaron . . . performed the signs *before the eyes of the people*" (Shmos 4:30). "He raised the rod and struck the waters in the river *before the eyes* of Pharaoh and *the eyes of his servants*, and all the waters of the river were turned to blood" (ibid. 7:20). "Israel *saw* Egypt dead on the shore of the sea" (ibid. 14:30). "Israel *saw* the great hand which G-d had done to Egypt" (ibid. 14:31). "On the third day G-d will come down *before the eyes of all the people* upon Mount Sinai" (ibid. 19:11). "*All the people saw* the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking" (ibid. 20:18). "The sight of the glory of G-d was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain *before the eyes* of the children of Israel" (ibid. 24:17). "And *all the people saw* the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent" (ibid. 33:10). "Aaron and *all the children of Israel saw* that the skin of the face of Moses shone" (ibid. 34:30). "The cloud of G-d was on the tabernacle by day and the fire was over it by night *before the eyes of all the house of Israel* throughout all their journeys" (ibid. 40:38). "I took you forth from Egypt *before the eyes* of the nations" (Vayikra 26:45). "You O G-d *are seen eye to eye*, and Your cloud stands over them and You go before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire" (Bamidbar 14:14). "On the day after the Passover, all the children of Israel went out with a high hand *before the eyes of all Egypt*" (ibid. 33:3). "G-d put signs and wonders upon Pharaoh . . . *before our eyes*" (Dvarim 6:22).

310. Significantly, the *very last words* of the Torah are: "All the powerful hand and great fear which Moshe did *before the eyes of all Israel*" (ibid. 34:12).

311. Thus the entire multitude of eye-witnesses testify to the veracity of Moses and of the Torah, which claim was made by no other religion. The multitude of contemporary and later opponents of the Nazarene and of Mohamed testify loudly against their claims of miracles. But the people of Israel, although far from docile (659—665) and although they opposed Moses on

some occasions, *never contradicted any fact or statement* of the Torah.

312. The phenomenon of Prophecy in Israel has no counterpart among the nations. The divine origin of the prophetic books (the 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures) and the prophetic pronouncements is self-evident.

313. Down to two thousand years ago no human writer was able to free himself from the concept of idolatry. There was not one people that did not believe in many gods, and all ancient writings spoke of idols and sorcery. The Hebrew Scriptures are unique in their ideal of pure monotheism. There we find no quarreling gods, or rebellion by Satan (Lucifer) as in Christian theology, or any apparitions of demons, or any of the cruel or depraved practices of the ancient world.

314. No book of antiquity took so vehement a stand against immorality.

315. No book of antiquity was as vehement in behalf of the widow, the orphan, the poor, the stranger and the slave.

316. No book of antiquity imposed so many personal duties, without benefit to the king or priesthood, including the duty of studying and teaching.

317. No book of antiquity found fault so vehemently with its own protagonists (322—327).

318. No other book of antiquity forbids its people to conquer neighboring nations (Dvarim 2:5, 9, 19).

319. No other book of antiquity claims that its authenticity was demonstrated in the presence of millions of spectators.

320. In general, the phenomenon of Prophecy in Israel has no counterpart among the nations. It is evident throughout that the prophets did not speak that which they themselves wished to say, but that which G-d commanded them to say. Moses was reluctant to bring G-d's word (653). Samuel the prophet cried out to G-d all night (I Samuel 15:11) when He commanded him

652. Thus the Sages divulge a secret. The sons of Israel received the Torah because of their nature. G-d declared that for a fiery people He has prepared a fiery Torah. The Sages added a comment: "Had the Torah not been given to Israel, no nation could oppose them" (ibid.). The people of Israel possess so fiery a nature that they would have become builders of world empires, and their exceptional talents would have been expended on worldly achievements; they might have been a source of disturbance for others and for themselves. The Torah was made for them, and they were made for the Torah.

653. Let us see what is so fiery about this people.

When G-d proposed that Moshe should become their leader, Moshe was extremely reluctant. Five times he refused, and it was necessary for G-d to command him six times. To us it seems that a man like Moshe, when offered such a noble mission, should have accepted immediately, especially when the offer was made by G-d. He certainly was motivated by humility ("Who am I?" — Shmos 3:11), and it is proper to refuse honor at the first request to officiate as *Shliach Tsibur* ("At first he refuses, the second time he wavers, and the third time he makes haste" — Yerushalmi Brachos 5:3). But "One should not refuse the request of a great man" (Pesachim 86 B), despite considerations of humility. Therefore the episode of Moshe's repeated refusal to become G-d's emissary requires an extraordinary reason.

654. There was an extraordinary reason: the people of Israel. To be a successful leader of such a nation, in view of the undertakings and ordeals which lay ahead, required supreme gifts of character and supreme exercise of virtue and wisdom. Moshe said not merely "Who am I" but also: "Behold, they will not believe me nor will they listen to my voice, for they will say: G-d did not appear to you" (Shmos 4:1). He said: You are sending me on a mission which is impossible for me; You know that they are the most difficult nation on earth to convince.

655. Moshe understood beforehand that his people was being prepared for a career of opposition to all the ideologies of

Created a Nation

Mankind: idolatry, Hellenism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Evolution and communism; and therefore he knew that their stubborn loyalty to the true G-d was the foundation upon which their history would be erected. To persuade this great multitude, as they had already become in Egypt, to do anything in concerted action would be *nothing less than a stupendous miracle*. They would not believe anyone who claimed that he was sent by G-d, 1) because of their extreme solicitude for the preservation of their traditions 2) and because of their exceptional strength of character.

656. From the Gemara in Gittin (59 A) we see what a miracle it was when this nation of strong - characterized individualists agreed in unison to accept the Torah. "From the days of Moshe down to Rabbi (Judah the Nasi) we do not find Torah and greatness (of authority) in one person." In retrospect it may seem to us quite understandable that they accepted the Torah, because today we are the people of the Torah. But at that time they were separate groups: Reuven, Shimeon, Levi, Judah.... and among them were many important individuals who had their own ideas. The fact that all united to accept the Torah was partly due to a unique phenomenon. That phenomenon was Moses, a man possessed of unparalleled gifts of mind and body, *who was created especially for this purpose and whose like would never again appear* (Dvarim 34:10). Contributing to the personality of this unequalled man was the fact that in all our history he was 1) the greatest in Torah - knowledge and 2) the possessor of the most absolute power, *both of which qualities he needed* in order to achieve the acceptance of the Torah by the fiery nation. The Sages scanned all the generations and found but three junctures where one man excelled both in Torah and in power, and these were three times when the united consent of the nation was imperative for its existence. The miracle that the people of Israel unanimously (including Korach, Dathan and Abiram) accepted the Torah was due in part to the unique power of Moshe and his unique greatness in Torah.