

From The Mussar Movement, Volume 1, Part 2 pages 139 to 151.

Having returned from one of his journeys to Memel he (RYS) entered the hotel where he was accustomed to lodge. He noticed a change in the hotelkeeper's attitude to Judaism, that the latter had lost his respect for Torah and mitzvot. Asked the reason for the change, the hotelkeeper told R. Israel that a skeptic had been there a few days earlier and had denied, in his presence, that there was reward and punishment. To prove his point, he sent out for some non-kosher salami, and declared that if there was D-vine reward and punishment, the salami should stick in his throat and choke him to death. The skeptic ate the salami and nothing happened. He brazenly denied the existence of ID-vine providence. Ever since then the hotelkeeper had been confused. His faith had been shaken. Making no attempt to answer, R. Israel retired to his room.

A few hours later the hotelkeeper's daughter came home from school. She told her father that she had received her report card and had earned two distinctions: one in mathematics, the other in singing. R. Israel called the girl to his room. He asked her to be so kind as to sing for him, to prove that she had really deserved the distinction. The girl refused. R. Israel sent for her father. He complained that the daughter was ill-mannered and had refused his request. Astonished, the father asked his daughter how she could have had the audacity to disobey R. Israel. She replied that, on the contrary, she had considered it ill-mannered and unreasonable suddenly to be called on to stand up and sing at the wrong time and in the wrong place in order to prove her singing ability. Was it reasonable that she should be compelled to demonstrate her abilities to any and every person* who refused to accept the evidence of the certificate? Were she to do so, she would look mad! After all, she had been awarded a certificate, and whoever wanted verification would have the opportunity to obtain it at the proper time. Her argument impressed her father and he

agreed with her.

R. Israel sent the girl from the room. Then he turned to the father and said that his daughter's reply was the answer to his question about D-vine providence. Had not G-d already proved His providence by the revealed miracles of the Exodus? And we have a certificate attesting to this - the Torah, which was given to us. Similarly G-d had demonstrated His providence in the encounter of Elijah with the prophets of Baal. Then all the people had fallen on their faces and cried: "The L-rd, He is G-d!" So, too, the hand of G-d was evident in the days of Mordecai and Esther, in the miracles of the Hasmoneans and many other historical events. Is it reasonable, then, that, for every fool who suddenly appears and declares that he does not believe, G-d should change the order of Creation and the course of nature, in order to prove that D-vine judgment does exist? Furthermore, there would be no end. Every day someone else would come - one will say: "If there is reward and punishment, let me choke on trefah food"; another, "If there is D-vine providence, let me fall from my horse on Shabbat," and so on ad infinitum. Whoever wishes to discover the existence of G-d need only examine our eternal certificate, confirmed before the eyes of all the world. There was no need of additional proofs.

These examples of R. Israel's train of thought are illustrations of his plain, perfect faith, derived from sense perception and sensation. This was not to mean that one should not reinforce and verify his beliefs by rational proofs; but the rational cognition has to be converted into sense perception, till it becomes like seeing with the eyes - like the girl with her certificate.