Shavuos - The Submarine

Question

One of our Rabbis once asked a great question: how could it be that many of the world’s greatest scientists and philosophers did not believe in *Hashem*? Why couldn’t they use their great intellects to figure out that *Hashem* exists? And if they couldn’t, does that mean that it’s hard to understand that *Hashem* created the world? Because if that’s true, how could the Torah require that every Jew, even the most simple one believe in *Hashem*?

The answer to the question is the holiday of Shavuos. Read the following story, and then you’ll understand the answer:

*Mashal*

After many weeks out at sea, Billy’s father finally returned home. He had been on a submarine, on a scientific exploration. Billy’s father wasn’t a scientist, though. He was just a sailor who knew how to drive the submarine.

“Well Dad, how was your voyage? What did you see?”

“It was amazing! We have a new submarine that can dive all the way to the ocean floor. Scientists have always thought that it’s impossible for anything to live there. After all, the sun doesn’t reach that far down. It’s pitch black down there, and it’s freezing. Not only that, but there are little volcanoes on the ocean floor. They shoot out ash and poisonous smoke. How could anything live in those conditions? But when we got there, we couldn’t believe our eyes! There were little shrimp-like animals living down there, and they were living right on top of the volcanoes! The poisonous gas went all over them, and it didn’t hurt them at all! It was unbelievable! The scientific world is going to be shocked by our discovery!”

The next day, Billy went to his biology class in college. The professor was lecturing about oceans.

“All life is found in the top part of the ocean. As you start going downward, there are fewer and fewer living things. On the bottom of the ocean, there is absolutely no life at all.”

“Um, excuse me professor?” Billy said. “There is life on the bottom of the ocean!”

“Ha ha! And where did you get your college degree from? What about your Master’s degree? Or your PhD? Or your award for most science knowledge?”

“Professor, I don’t have any of those things. I’m still just a student in college.”

“Well, then let me tell you something! I know everything that there is to know about science! So don’t tell me that there’s life on the ocean floor, because there isn’t!”

“But sir, there is. There are little shrimp-like creatures living down there, and they live right on top of the poisonous volcanoes!”

“Are you out of your mind? Who told you this?”

“My father.”

“Is he a scientist?”

“No, he’s a sailor.”

“Oh very nice, he’s a sailor! He can tie good knots. He must be very smart! Maybe your father got seasick and was hallucinating, because this is ridiculous!”

“I’m sorry sir, but it’s real.”

“You’re ruining my class with this nonsense! Get out of here!”

The next day, the phone rang in Billy’s home. Billy picked up the phone.

“Hello?”

“Um, hi Billy, this is your professor from college calling. Did you see today’s copy of the Science News?”

“No sir, I don’t really read the Science News.”

“Well, um, there was an article about how there was an expedition last week to the bottom of the ocean. It turns out that everything that you told me was true. But how did you know? You don’t know anything about science!”

“Professor, I told you already. I know it because my father told me.”

“But he’s not a scientist!”

“Yes, but he was there!”

*Nimshal*

You see, scientists might think that it makes no sense for there to be life on the bottom of the ocean, but the simple fact is that there is! [This part of the story is actually true. Scientists on this submarine really did discover animals living on the bottom of the ocean, and boy, were they surprised!]

In ancient times people used to believe that the world was flat. After all, if it were round like a ball, then everybody would keep falling off! Scientists also used to believe that the moon was made out of gas. Again, they had a very good reason for thinking this: if the moon were solid, it would fall down and crash onto the earth. But no matter how much sense these arguments seemed to make, we now know that they were wrong, because men have traveled around the entire world, and they didn’t fall off, and because men have walked on the moon, and it was solid! Once we know something to be true, then all of the logical arguments against it don’t matter, because we know that it’s true. The scientific understanding must be wrong (in the case of the round earth and the solid moon, the old scientists simply didn’t know about something called gravity).

As we learned from our story, one way that someone can know that something is true is if his father saw it, and told him. If all of the scientists don’t seem to know that Hashem exists, then how can the simple Jew, who doesn’t know anything about physics or astronomy, be expected to know that *Hashem* exists? The answer is simply this: we don’t need to know science to know about *Hashem*. It could be that based upon science it would seem that *Hashem* doesn’t exist. But that doesn’t matter! The science is wrong! A Jew knows that *Hashem* exists because his father told him! Every Jew learned about *Hashem* from his father, who learned about Him from his father, all the way back to the generation that experienced the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. At Mt. Sinai, all of the Jews saw clearly that *Hashem* exists. There were approximately three million people who were present at Mt. Sinai. After witnessing the giving of the Torah, those people all knew without a doubt that *Hashem* exists, and they passed on this knowledge to the generations that followed.

The scientists might have many great reasons why *Hashem* can’t exist. But none of their reasons matter, even if we can’t explain why they are wrong. The simple fact is that we know that they are wrong, and the reason is that we heard it from our fathers, who were there, and who saw Him!