



Taste of Chavruta — 5772 — Authority

KEY QUESTIONS:

- *What sorts of authority are there in ancient and modern Judaism? What about in modern society?*
 - *What is the source of these authorities?*
- *How do we deal with conflicts between Jewish and secular authorities?*
- *How do we reconcile subservience to earthly authorities with acknowledging that God's authority is ultimate?*

4. Rabbinic authority

Mishnah, Avot 1:1-12

Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets transmitted it to the men of the Great Assembly... Simon the Just was among the last of the Great Assembly... Antigono, man of Socho, received [the tradition] from Simon the Just... Jose son of Yoezer, man of Zeradah, and Jose son of Yochanan, man of Jerusalem, received [it] from them... Joshua son of Perachiah and Nittai of Arbel received [it] from them... Judah son of Tabbai and Shimon son of Shatach received [it] from them... Shemayah and Avtalyon received [it] from them... Hillel and Shammai received [it] from them.

משנה, אבות א'-י"ב

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמִסֵּרָה לַיהוֹשֻׁעַ, וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים, וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים מִסֵּרָה לְאַנְשֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה... שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִשִּׁירֵי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה... אַנְטִיגוֹנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל מִשְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק... יוֹסֵי בֶן יוֹעֶזֶר אִישׁ צְרָדָה וַיֹּסִי בֶן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם... יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִתַּי הָאֲרֵבֶלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם... יְהוּדָה בֶּן טַבַּאי וְשַׁמַּעוֹן בֶּן נִטַּי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם... שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטָלְיוֹן קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם... הֵלֵל וְשַׁמַּאי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.

John Dalton (daltonism) and Sir Humphrey Davy (lamp) were contemporaries of Antoine Lavoisier and Claude Berthollet. Michael Faraday learnt under Davy. James Prescott Joule learnt under Faraday and Dalton. Lord Kelvin learnt from Joule.

Gay-Lussac was a pupil of Berthollet, Robert Bunsen (burner) was a pupil of Gay-Lussac, and Justus von Liebig (condenser) was a pupil of Bunsen. Felix Hoffman and August Kekulé (carbon ring) learnt from Liebig, while Adolf von Baeyer learnt from Kekulé and Bunsen. William Henry Perkin was taught by Felix Hoffmann and Baeyer, who also taught Richard Willstätter and Hermann Graebe. Chaim Weizmann was sponsored in Manchester by Perkin and Graebe.

Extracted from biographies when composing a presentation on *Chaim Weizmann and the Chemistry*

If one must serve, I hold it better to serve a well-bred lion, who is naturally stronger than I am, than two hundred rats of my own breed.

Voltaire (1694-1778), quoted in a letter sent to Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime* (1856)



4. Rabbinic authority

Points to consider

What is the source of the rabbis' authority according to this text?

Why was it so important for the rabbis to be part of an unbroken chain of tradition? How important is this today? And, is it just important for rabbis?

As Rachel Elijor once noted at a Limmud Conference, this chain of authority is meritocratic—dependent only on the ability of each individual—and omits all heredity and wealth. Can you think of any notable Jewish authorities that were omitted from the given list?