

Purim and the "Randomness" of Life

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Chance and happenstance are everywhere in *Megillat Esther*. The salvation of the Jews begins with a sudden case of royal insomnia leading to the reading of a random selection from the royal chronicles (Esther 6:1). On the morrow, when the king seeks suggestions for honoring Mordechai, who should be standing in the anteroom waiting for a royal audience but Haman, coming to seek permission to hang Mordechai instead. Most tellingly, when the people take upon themselves the annual observance of these days of Adar as a holiday for eternity, they call it after the instrument of chance Haman played to determine the most fortuitous day for attacking them (Esther 9:26). It is the holiday of lots, a celebration of the random draw that was turned from disaster to salvation.

But chance and happenstance go much deeper. Rabbinic tradition ties the Torah's description of the original encounter between Israel and Haman's ancestors to the observance of Purim by mandating the reading of *Parashat Zachor* on the preceding Shabbat. The *parashah* describes Amalek as chancing upon Israel:

How he happened upon you by the way, and struck the weak stragglers in the rear, when you were faint and weary, and he feared not God.

Devarim 25:18

אֲשֶׁר קָרָה בְּדַרְוֹ וַיִּזְנַב בְּךָ כָּל
הַנְּחָשָׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עֵינֶיךָ וַיִּגַע וְלֹא
יָרָא אֱלֹהִים.
דְּבָרִים כ"ה:יח

The verb קרה, the root of the noun מקרה, suggests an accidental, unplanned encounter. Amalek's murderous attack is all the more shocking because it was random, accidental, and unplanned. The enemy chanced upon the weak and murdered them.

And so when Haman reports the events of the day, note how he describes the events:

And Haman recounted to his wife Zeresh and to all his supporters everything that had befallen him...

Esther 6:13

וַיְסַפֵּר הָמָן לְזֵרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל אֲהָבָיו
אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ ...
אִסְתֵּר וַיִּג

Again, the word קרה. Everything associated with the struggle against Haman is identified as chance and happenstance.

Lest we be misled by contemporary Hebrew usage in which קרה may convey only that

something happened, we find explicit reference in rabbinic literature to the connotation of coincidence and accidental occurrence. Consider, for example, Rashi's commentary on the first verse of *Parashat Vayikra*:

Every instance of divine command and speech is preceded by an act of summoning (קריאה). This is an expression of affection, language that the ministering angels use, as it says, "one calls to the other." The prophets of other peoples, however, experience revelation with an expression of happenstance, an expression of impurity, as it says "The Lord happened upon Bilaam."

Rashi, Vayikra 1:1

לכל דברות ולכל אמירות ולכל
צוויים קדמה קריאה, לשון חבה,
לשון שמלאכי השרת משתמשים בו,
שנאמר וקרא זה אל זה, אבל לנביאי
אומות העולם נגלה עליהן בלשון
עראי וטומאה, שנאמר ויקר אלהים
אל בלעם.
רש"י ויקרא א:א

Rashi's objective is to explain why the *Mesorah* mandates that the last letter of the word ויקרא be written with a smaller *aleph*. The reason: to emphasize that Scripture uses the word ויקרא rather than ויקר to describe Moshe's prophetic encounter. Moshe Rabbenu's prophetic moments were honorable and purposeful. Bilaam's interactions with the Divine were transitory and haphazard. קרה describes a tentative encounter, unplanned and unsatisfying. It is the verb used to describe an unplanned, accidental emission. Rabbinic tradition locates this notion in the word קרה, the same verb used to describe the interactions of Haman and Mordechai and the attack by Amalek at *Refidim*.

Purim and the Clash of Civilizations

The collective force of these observations is to cast *Megillat Esther*, and the holiday it promotes, as a clash of civilizations rather than the tale of the downfall of a single enemy of the Jews. Haman and his Amalekite forbears adhere to a philosophy of life that denies meaning and purpose, historical memory and accountability. Events are random, transitory. An individual should grab what life offers at every opportunity for there is no meaning other than self-gratification.

With apologies to my friend and former colleague, Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Haman is "fooled into randomness." He does not recognize any destiny other than the roll of the dice. The history of Amalek and Israel has no meaning for him. Everything that has befallen him is happenstance and random.

Other details in the *Megillah* reinforce this assessment of Purim's overarching theme of destiny throughout history. A broad hint may be found in the reaction of Haman's spouse and supporters to news of his first failure in competition with Mordechai. As we noted above, Haman has described what happened to him by chance (אשר קרהו). Their response is profoundly important:

And his advisers and Zeresh his wife said to him: If Mordechai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish extraction, you will not prevail but rather fall completely before him.

Esther 6:13

ויאמרו לו חכמיו וזרש אשתו אם
מזרע היהודים מרדכי אשר החלו
לנפל לפניו לא תוכל לו כי נפול
תפול לפניו.
אסתר ו:יג

Haman's entourage has finally grasped the pattern. This is not a struggle between an egomaniacal politician with murderous intent and his intended victim, but the ongoing clash between perfidy and honor, evil and good, Amalek and Israel.

This is the beginning of Haman's education which will end abruptly on the gallows. There are greater forces at work than Haman has realized, forces much more powerful than the roll of the dice. Consider how the *Megillah* translates into Hebrew the word פור:

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, a pur, that is, the lot (גורל), was cast before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

Esther 3:7

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן הוּא הֻדָּשׁ נִסָּן בְּשָׁנַת
שְׁתַּיִם עֶשְׂרֵה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ הַפִּיל פּוּר
הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל לְפָנָי הַמֶּן מִיּוֹם לְיוֹם וּמִחֹדֶשׁ
לְחֹדֶשׁ שָׁנִים עֶשְׂרֵה הוּא הֻדָּשׁ אָדָר.
אֶסְתֵּר ג':ז

The word for lot is גורל which means, by extension, fate and destiny. Haman has not understood his real destiny (גורל) while ironically placing his faith in the lottery (גורל) that brings his ultimate defeat. Haman has struggled against his destiny and lost.

The principal audience for the *Megillah*'s lessons about fate and destiny is Am Yisrael to whom it is addressed by Mordechai and his *Beit Din* (rabbinical court). In this context, one of the more puzzling features of the *Megillah* may be understood. The text makes only oblique references to *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu*. Some are only homiletical, e.g., the allusion to the King of Kings in the insomnia episode discussed previously. The most direct is, of course, in the instruction given to Esther by Mordechai in IV, 14:

For if you completely hold your peace at this time, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, and you and your father's house will perish. Who knows whether you reached your royal office only for such a time as this?

כִּי אִם הִתְקַרְשׁ תִּתְקַרְשִׁי בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת רְחוּ
וְהִצְלָה יִעֲמֹד לְיִהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אֲחֵר
וְאֵת וּבֵית אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם
לְעֵת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת.

Esther is not to leave the fate of her people to chance even with Divine Providence in her favor. In the ongoing struggle with Amalek, her people will be delivered. For her own destiny, however, she needs to carry out the plan set forth by Mordechai.

In an age when the Divine countenance is hidden from humanity, Amalek has been fooled into randomness, denying the force of Jewish history until events unfold that make it glaringly obvious to those around him. Mordechai, as the keeper of Jewish tradition, needs no such lesson. He has been aware of the dynamics of the relationship between the two contending peoples from the outset. He mobilizes Esther to wield the weapons at her disposal: prayer and repentance combined with statecraft.

The Lottery among Hebrews and Pagans

There are broader lessons to be learned, some enormously relevant to contemporary debate, in the use of chance and happenstance in the *Megillah*. They require us to focus on the nature

of chance and randomness in Jewish tradition and the civilizations with which it continues to contend.

Among the Hebrews, the lottery was used not to determine Divine Will but merely to ensure a fair division. See Mishlei XVIII, 18:

The lot causes disputes to cease and separates the contending powers.

מִדְּנִיּוֹת יִשְׁבֵּית הַגּוֹרֵל וּבֵין עֲצוּמִים
יִפְרִיד:

If the game of chance is fair, then settling a dispute by a random throw gives each party the same opportunity. Priestly duties were therefore allocated in the *Beit ha-Mikdash* by lot, called *payyis* (פַּיִס). See Mishnah Yoma II, 2:

It once happened that there were two kohanim who were tied as they ran up the ramp. One of them pushed the other, who fell and broke his leg. Seeing that there was such a danger, they instituted that the ashes not be removed from the altar except by lot. There were in all, four lots.

מעשה שהיו שניים שווים רצים ועולים
בכבש, ודחף אחד מהן את חברו, ונפל
ונשברה רגלו; וכשראו בית דין שהן באין
לידי סכנה, התקינו שלא יהו תורמין את
המזבחה אלא בפּיֵס. ארבעה פייסות היו
שם.

After an unfortunate accident, it was deemed safer and fairer for the kohanim to vie for the precious honors in a lottery. R. Shlomo Adeni in his commentary *Melechet Shlomo*, derives the word פַּיִס from the Hebrew root פִּיַס, to make peace between contending parties, an etymology consistent with the verse in Mishlei cited above.

If the Hebrew tradition was to view the stochastic process of the lottery as an instrument of fairness, the pagan world approached it in its own characteristic fashion. The fall of the dice, the outcome of chance, was seen to be driven by unknown miraculous forces. This is why the process is known as divination, signifying determining the will of the Divine. The Torah in Vayikra XIX, 26 specifically forbids this practice:

Do not eat on blood, do not act on omens and or on the basis of lucky times.

לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל הַדָּם לֹא תִנְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא
תַעֲזֹבְנוּ:

The first clause has been interpreted by the Ramban and others to refer to unnamed occult practices in order to interpret the verse coherently. The second clause has been interpreted by Biblical commentators as a form of divination but we should be much more interested in Chazal's approach in Gemara, *Sanhedrin* (65b). Their comment comes on a second verse in Devarim 18, 10:

There shall not be found among you one who passes his son or daughter through fire, practices divination, seeks lucky times, divines with omens, or practices witchcraft.

Our rabbis taught: divines with omens- This is he who says his bread fell from his mouth or his staff fell from his hand, or his son is calling him from behind, a raven is calling him, a deer

לֹא יִמָּצֵא בָּךְ מְעַבֵּיר בְּנוֹ וּבִתּוֹ בְּאֵשׁ
קִסָּם קִסְמִים מְעוֹזְנִין וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף:
תנו רבנן: מנחש - זה האומר פתו
נפלה מפיו מקלו נפלה מידו. בנו
קורא לו מאחריו. עורב קורא לו,
צבי הפסיקו בדרך, נחש מימינו

crossed his path, he found himself with a snake on his right or a fox on his left; don't start your tax collection with me or it is morning or it is the first of the month, or it is the beginning of the week.

ושועל משמאלו; א.ל תחיל ב',
שחרית הוא, ראש חודש הוא מוצאי
שבת הוא.

In the Baraisa's interpretation, the prohibition of *nichush* lies in basing one's decisions in everyday life upon the outcome of random events. Rashi gives the examples of paying taxes or repaying a loan. Basing one's mercantile behavior on random factors not related to the facts of the transaction is a violation of the Torah's prohibition.

The Torah outlaws the pagan practice of reliance upon the stochastic outcome of an event, be it the outcome of a game or a chance event in life. The pagan mind, seeing that the outcome is not attributable to perceptible forces, assigns an unseen cause which is then projected to be divine.

The religious roots of this approach to life may perhaps be found in the notion of Divine Omnipotence. If God is all powerful, it is certainly within His capabilities to promulgate His Will in any way He deems appropriate. It is not outside the realm of the logical that the Omnipotent God could cause foxes to appear or, for that matter, reward young women with appropriate matches for the communal baking of Challah. Because God could conceivably do something does not, however, argue that He does. I am alternately amused and saddened by the efforts spent to perform magical acts whose efficacy is doubtful and which may violate explicit halakhic strictures. Furthermore, there is a theological danger in the reliance on stochastic outcomes to determine God's Will. There is a marked tendency to ascribe to the instruments of chance and magic a power of their own that ultimately threatens faith in God's Omnipotence. Flirting with idolatrous practices in the name of *chesed* is self-defeating and foolish.

The New Atheism Fooled by Randomness

Just as Haman fooled himself into randomness, we find contemporary evidence of a related phenomenon in the pseudo-scientific attack on religion sometimes called the New Atheism. The leading proponents of this approach, including Richard Dawkins, abuse the notions of probability and randomness in ways obvious to anyone who has taken a good course in statistics. Although I intend to address these arguments in greater detail in another context, let us examine a few of the most central arguments advanced using probability to eliminate the role of the Creator.

We must first understand that the most enduring and intuitively attractive argument for the existence of God is the teleological argument, or argument from design. Patterns in nature and the complexity of its design suggest that there must have been a Designer. This does not necessarily entail that the Designer have all the characteristics that we associate with *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu* but it is an important first step for those who deny the existence of God with all His Attributes to deny Him any role in the creation of the universe.

Missing the majesty in the design of the universe is akin to Haman's insensitivity to historical

context and significance. In fact, Dawkins himself, when explaining natural phenomenon, is a remarkably evocative writer. It is when he adopts the role of theologian and philosopher, disciplines for which he obviously lacks training or temperament, that his work fails.

Dawkins makes an argument from improbability in his book *The God Delusion* that he considers to be a conclusive strike at theism. He calls it "the ultimate Boeing 747 Gambit." He claims that he has never heard a theologian give a convincing answer. For my part, I wish all challenges to theism were so easily dispatched.

The argument is based on a remark attributed to the British astronomer Fred Hoyle who, although a life-long atheist and Darwinist, was shaken by the improbability of life as we know it emerging randomly on its own. He described it as probable as a tornado sweeping through a junkyard and assembling a 747 from scrap. On another occasion, he compared the probability of a single protein cell emerging on its own from amino acids to that of a solar system of blind men each simultaneously solving a Rubik's cube. For many advocates of Intelligent Design, Hoyle's statements seem a concession to the calculus of probability.

Not for Richard Dawkins, though. He turns Hoyle's argument on its head. If a tornado is not equal to the task of creating life, then, Dawkins maintains, neither is God. A tornado cannot explain an improbable event like the generation of life; according to Dawkins, God fails as an explanation for the same reason.

If the reader is having trouble understanding why Dawkins thought this argument the masterstroke that comes close to proving that God does not exist, he or she is not alone. Many philosophers and theologians, unlike confirmed atheists, have the same problem. What Dawkins is saying is simple: if the universe is improbable, then God could not have created it. The other side of the argument is just as coherent: if God did create the universe, then it isn't improbable. As the mathematician David Berlinski observes in *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions*, the most that Dawkins can say is that God made a universe that would be improbable had it been produced by chance.

Dawkins offers a model to explain the creation of the universe. All of life evolved with small random mutations. Each step in the process was slightly improbable. Taken together, the entire chain may seem highly improbable but not when broken down to an immense sequence of single steps. I wonder what happened to the notion of compound probability, especially in a path-dependent process.

Since Dawkins understands that Hoyle opened the door to an argument for Intelligent Design, the first step toward theism, he needs to make life much more probable. He accomplishes this, or believes he does, by introducing unspecified but binding laws of physics that force the mutations to happen the way that they did. To avoid the necessity to posit a Designer, Dawkins attempts to make the design not only probable but inevitable.

Some very important scientists, however sympathetic to atheism, dispute the probabilities as Dawkins describes them. The late Harvard biologist Stephen J. Gould writes in *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* that if we could replay evolution again, the result would be very different. The entire process is so highly dependent on chance that the result

might be no complex life-forms at all or life-forms very much unlike the human beings who walk the earth today. For Dawkins, evolution must be inevitable. It is an understatement to assert that this is more than a little controversial among evolutionary biologists today.

Inevitable evolution ironically sounds a lot like theism. If there are basic laws of physics or nature that perforce determine the creation of life, whether to introduce a conscious intelligence that put them in place is merely a matter of preference.

There is no suggestion here that Dawkins' denial of the improbability of the evolutionary process is the moral or even philosophical equivalent of Haman's denial of historical destiny. Rather, the objective is to demonstrate aspects of contemporary debate that revolve around improbability and randomness and what may be at stake. In the next two sections, we will explore why these two notions figure so prominently in intellectual discourse.

Bad Statistics

In *The Blind Watchmaker*, Dawkins further develops the notion that the world evolved from self-perpetuating forces with no external influence. He borrows an argument from the nineteenth-century English biologist, T.H. Huxley, Darwin's most rabid proponent (he once described himself as Darwin's bulldog). Huxley famously coined the term agnostic and played a major role in framing the early debate around Darwinism. In his legendary discussion of Darwinism with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and others in 1860 at Oxford, known forever as the Huxley-Wilberforce Debate, Huxley is reputed to have argued that a troop of monkeys typing endlessly would eventually type one of Shakespeare's plays or poems. The implication, of course, is that even the most complex designs may be generated by random processes.

As the philosopher Thomas Nagel (in his book *Mortal Questions*) and others have observed, the New Atheists have made a religion of their philosophy. It matters little whether their (anti-) theological prepossessions accord with the facts. Dawkins is a true believer untroubled by doubt. Let's examine the probability to which Dawkins refers. Russell Grigg, decidedly a believer, opted to give the monkeys the benefit of the doubt and chose a much smaller literary work. In his article "Could Monkeys Type the 23rd Psalm?", he posits that a monkey can type one random letter per second. Assuming no coffee breaks and no slackers with efficient shift changes, the expected time to produce the entire psalm with its 603 characters including verse numbers and spaces in years is one with over a thousand zeroes after it. The current estimate of the age of the universe according to scientists is about one with twelve zeroes after it. The expected time it would take a monkey to type a single psalm is much longer than scientists believe the world has been around. A single Psalm could not have been produced randomly let alone an entire Shakespearean play. Similarly, life could not have been formed spontaneously from lifeless matter on the basis of the same calculus.

What makes the typewriter example so seductive is that there is a fixed number of keys on a QWERTY keyboard. If we assume a monkey has no preference for position on the keyboard and hits a key randomly at a fixed interval, something which can easily be simulated on a computer with a random number generator incidentally, then we can calculate the expected value of the time it would take to type a particular complex sequence to appear.

The intuitive appeal of the monkey example is that it gives the illusion of objectivity. A typewriter is an instrument that used to be familiar to every student and academic (my, how times have changed). Because we understand the random process that generates the letters on the page, we think we have a pretty good idea of the probability of a particular outcome. The problem with the monkey example is, though, what usually gets in the way of a Dawkins example: the hard facts. The numbers just don't add up.

Even if they did, this would be a strange basis for religion. Mathematical models of probability are just that. They do not in fact work in the real world since a perfectly fair coin is hard to come by and perfectly formed dice exist only in the imagination. Computers use techniques to simulate random numbers but these are actually pseudo-generators since there is no formula for generating a number sequence completely randomly. We cannot generate true randomness. Probability, indeed mathematics itself, is an abstract reduction that exists by virtue of the human mind.

The Old Materialism by Another Name

Far more relevant to our discussion, then, is this marked tendency among the New Atheists toward scientism, i.e., that the empirical, physical sciences constitute the only true approach to truth. For many Jews today, the most powerful force compelling their allegiance and inspiring their identification is Jewish history that derives from other sources of truth.

Jewish philosophy has largely been described as the confrontation of reason and revelation. The same can be said of all medieval religious thinkers and, for that matter, most medieval Western philosophers. The Enlightenment is largely cast as the result of the same confrontation.

The New Atheists (Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, etc.) use the same vocabulary. For them, it is science versus religion. Since they identify science and empiricism as the rational, they describe religion as revelation and therefore anti-rational. Better, of course, would be non-rational but their error is much more fundamental.

The Rav has something important to contribute here in his sometimes neglected *Halakhic Mind*. The schism is not between reason and revelation in our time but between scientism and philosophism. Better, the schism is between the regional and the universal.

The empiricist (meaning the scientist who attempts to describe our experience of the world) focuses on the regional, the specific, the microscopic. He (I'm going to use the male pronoun unabashedly to mean any gender) attempts to break down the physical world into its simplest parts in order to explain physical phenomena. This is what the Rav means by the regional. The empirical scientist focuses on specific phenomena looking for basic elements.

The philosopher, who stands in apposition to the scientist, goes in the other direction. He is not concerned with the micro but the macro. His analysis is horizontal, not vertical. He seeks the universal rather than the regional.

This is a powerful introduction to the Rav's description of the relationship of Jewish tradition to modern thought. The religious personality attempts to construct a notion of ultimate,

universal experience. He seeks “boundless ontological totality.” Totality here is an interesting word. It indicates ultimate, absolute reality. Ontological means relating to being or existence. Boundless ontological totality means to grasp the essence of everything. This is what the Rav means by the universal.

Philosophers, in the sense that they stand in apposition to empiricists here, seek to abstract from the regional, the micro. The real conflict is not between science and revelation but between the material and the abstract. Without reading too much in the *Megillah*, we can characterize Haman’s error in the same fashion. He focused on what had befallen him insensitive to the broader context in which he and Mordechai operated.

My major objection to Dawkins (and Hawking, for that matter) is that they assign reality to material phenomena only. In a real sense, the New Atheism is nothing new; it is the Old Materialism by another name.

Consider the Rav's words:

Philosophy is well aware of the fact that it is impossible to derive scientific data from any a priori process of cognition. Nor is the issue between philosophy and science the problem of whether the scientist has the right to interpret phenomena in accord with his vantage point and method. The problem is, rather, whether the scientist’s interpretation is to be exclusive, thus eliminating any other cognitive approach to reality.

This is really the heart of the matter. Compare Hawking’s words in *The Grand Design*:

Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. It has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. As a result scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge.

In conversation with atheists, our principal strategy must be to establish claims for non-empirical approaches to reality, to borrow some of the Rav’s language above. We must break the exclusive hold on truth by empiricist materialism. Focus on mathematics, music, poetry, and human memory. Without wood and strings, there is no violin but the music of a violin concerto can be discussed and understood independent of the materials used to play it. Mathematical truths would seem to have been true before apes evolved to the point that they could count. There may have been no Dickens without the physical mind of Dickens but *Great Expectations* is not a set of brain waves any more than it is the physical paper upon which it is printed.

If non-material ideas and emotions truly exist for us, and I would submit that these are the most important and cherished parts of life, then we need more than physics to explain our universe.

Again, in the Rav's words:

This priority of scientific knowledge to philosophical interpretation can be discerned twice in the history of philosophy. First, in the Aristotelian natural sciences and metaphysics... second, in the Galilean-Newtonian mathematical physics... Both adopted a scientifically purified world the subject matter of their studies.

Traditionally, philosophy began where science ended. There was no metaphysics without physics. Physics was logically prior to metaphysics. Priority, however, does not mean primacy. Abstraction was not a flight from reality but an embrace of what is truly real. What we perceive is-what is apparent to us; it, however, is ephemeral and therefore “unworthy of the efforts of the philosopher” who seeks ultimate reality.

Philosophy may have moved on from this Platonic conception of the world but it still fires the popular philosophic mind. What is important in the context of the Rav’s work is that there is no argument about physics between the scientist and the philosopher in Plato’s cave. The philosopher merely begins where the scientist ends.

The Jew’s reaction to nature and history must remain a sense of wonder and delight.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky displays His craftsmanship; The passage of days speaks eloquently, and the passage of nights reveals knowledge.

Tehillim 19:2-3

הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי וּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדָיו
מִגִּיד הַרְקִיעַ. יוֹם לְיוֹם יְבִיעַ אִמְרָ וְלַיְלָה
לַלַּיְלָה יַחְנֶה דַּעַת:
תהלים יט:ב-ג

We gaze in awe at the heavens and marvel at the wonders of Jewish history. We perceive the improbable in the design of nature and the miraculous in the Jewish experience, moved to give thanks, to sing praise and extol His Great Name.