Baym Rebns Tisch

(At the Rebbe's Table)

a dialectical discourse for flute, B_b clarinet, violin, violoncello and piano

David Jason Snow

After davening Shabbos musaf, the Rebbe graciously invites several congregants to join him at home for kiddush and lunch, among them a university professor who is passing through town. Once seated at the Rebbe's table, the assembled guests exchange pleasantries until the conversation turns to the subject of the conflict between tradition and modernity. The Rebbe does not comment on the matter, but one of his disciples ventures that there is no conflict for the man of faith, as the Torah has decisively settled the matter in favor of tradition. The professor respectfully suggests that since some areas of knowledge are not explicitly discussed in the Bible, there is much that can be learned through research and debate, coupled with an attitude of healthy skepticism. The Rebbe's disciple counters that the Torah is complete, and all knowledge is contained within it. To the contrary, the professor patiently explains that as one obvious example there is no mention of dinosaurs in the Bible, yet we all know... and he is interrupted by the disciple, who asserts that had dinosaurs ever roamed the earth, Moshe Rabenu would surely have noted their existence in the book of Breishis. But the fossil record, the professor protests, the physical evidence... The Rebbe's disciple simply raises his hands and shrugs. Who can understand the ways of HaKadosh Baruch Hu? He placed those bones in the ground for his own good reasons. Why question the Lord's wisdom? Even after hamotzi is made and while the meal is served, the debate continues and intensifies. First comes gefilte fish with chrain, followed by schnapps. Tongues are loosened, voices are raised. The professor makes a withering rebuttal, with silent respectful nods of acknowledgement around the table, until the Rebbe's man makes his point and the table bursts into raucous zmiros. Through it all, the Rebbe maintains his silence. Steaming bowls of chicken soup with knaidlach arrive. Professor, you seem to believe that all matters can resolved through the application of reason. What of a man forced to choose between evils? Kill a child to save a village. Would you do it? Could you? What is the reasonable course? Defiant, the professor declares, yes, yes, he would make such a choice, though in his heart he is not so sure. Cholent, brisket and potatoes. The professor does not yield: and if your Rebbe required you to follow him to the grave to bring Moshiach? Would you do it? Could you? You have only his word. Yes, we will follow the Rebbe to the grave, should he require it of us. And with that, the Rebbe's men rise from their place at the table, link arms and dance, while the Rebbe himself sits, never uttering a word.

Duration: 5'40

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