as a token of our covenant and love
even before it was given and God handed us the Torah
collectively said "Yes!" to each of God's commandments
that mystical encounter in the wilderness where Israel
nation sees it all as having happened at Mount Sinai.
Within a century before the Common Era, the Jewish
it was canonized by Ezra and his followers around the
called the Torah, or the "Teaching", and consists of the
Judaism is a civilization built around a text. That text is

Text and Interpretation

The Book

The People

TORAH

Judaism's

IDEAS

BEST

10

Arthur Green

A Brief Guide for Seekers

AUTHOR OF THERE ARE THE WORDS: VOCABULARY OF JEWISH SPIRITUAL LIFE

"Superb ... a gem as valuable for one beginning
of soul and purpose."
—RABBI RACHEL COWAN
The most famous story of that early era tells of a disaster that occurred within a city and the decision of a rabbi to deal with the situation. The following chapter calls for the same kind of democracy, proclaiming that there had never been such a decision, and that the rabbi, clearly aware of the situation, be the one to deal with the matter. The rabbi's decision was unanimously supported by all the community leaders, and its outcome was not only successful but also provided a model for future decision-making. Judaism now means the community, the people, deciding through a process of interpretation. The phrase, "interpretation," was already revised through communal means and beliefs. Before the death of the community, the book was held close to the heart, and may hold its own place in the future. If you read the initial text, it became a beginning of a new day. If you read the second text, it became the beginning of a new day.
he seeks. for our interpretation of Torah becomes a sort
her. she reveals a bit more of her face to him each time
dwelling in a higher tower. Knowing how much he loves
as a male lover of Torah, which is a beautiful maiden
influenced by images of childbirth. depict the interpreter
The Kabbalists, meditated Spanish Jewish mystics,

means...”

clearly. God said it. I believe it. Now let’s talk about what it
(even a strictly Orthodox one, by the way) would read,
my class and told the students about it. “This,” I said.
picking truck parked nearby with a bumper sticker that
One day I was leaving my house to teach a class of
never been fundamentals in terms of how to read them. a tradition of faithfulness to our sacred texts, but it has
embrace all these meanings. Judaism is always been enough to
in the world of God, but it is expansive enough to
and then yet another. All hewed up in a low. Torah
them as a legitimate reading: daven grafter—another read-
interpretations of a single verse, preserving each of
Torah. Given the midrashic sources will offer mult-
reveal new facets of each word and more. all seeking to reveal new facets of each word and
intertextual, cross-reading, typological, acronyms, and

This process of creative reading of interpretational mis-
evolving model perspectives.

The Sabbath. To “close in the temple”, one opens the
and the reference on not only regarding technological advances (radio-
Torah will have to be considered forward, brought up-to-
discussion beyond space and time, know that
in about natural kinds evolution? The One Who set it in
in the argument. Within this be a personalized way of talk-
something deeply: the One Who wanted His children to win
was the will of God? They did it in the presence of that

How could they dare to make such changes? If Torah

mindsets?

years liable to execution should be considered a count of
found no passion in seven—and some said seventy
the early ages. They proclaimed the any high court that
Indeed the death penalty itself was anathema to come of
no record of post-Biblical Jews ever carrying them out.

24) Such are called “homous killems” in some parts of
she is put to death along with her mother (Deut. 22:23)
not city. How. she is presumed to share in the ability and

Judaism’s Ten Best Ideas
4. Sefat Emet, Keseshim 1871, s.v. ba-Midrash.


1. Bava Mezia 79b.

Chapter 7: Torah—The People and the Book

To live...

We, together with God, bring life to Torah and Torah, 

us in the numerous chambers of our endless creativity. 

Guarantor of its infinite expansity but also dwells within 

ever moment. God not only resides behind the text as 

to say that God "gives" the Torah, rather now in the press. 

We make Torah come to life. Only then are we able 

To read Torah in a way that speaks to his or her own 

takes that "eternal life" implanted within us and uses it 

can become the "Torah of truth." Only when each reader

once to the ancients (hence the past tense of "has given").

A Hasidic reading of this blessing: "The Torah, given 

Blessed are You, Y-H-W-H, Who gives the Torah." Listen 

the Torah of truth and implanted eternal life within us. 

text that is read. "Blessed are You Who has given us 

God's Torarith source resides at each portion of the 

A Jew who is called forth to participate in the syna-

the source, Torah has the power to reshape us as well. 

but as long as we are busy reading and engaging with 

text, we have a chance to reshape it in our own image. 

we find ourselves within it. As we work to interpret the 

But it also affirms the text: we make Torah our own as 

room within tradition for our own unique perspective. 

That's a key point. Interpretation opens and widens 

opens her secrets before us.

the text. We seek her out and connect her. But is she who 

myriad by this unfolding grace of deeper meanings within 

the Torah, and ourselves into ever greater bounds of imm-

in every act of love with a living partner, drawing both "her " 

literary criticism onto a passive text, we are here engaged 

read carefully." Rather than our working the cold magic of 

pulls the curtains apart and open. The neighborhood has to be 

writing his interpretive "travel." Penetrate her window as she 

of seduction. We picture the music singing and strings