

22 May 2007 [Shavuot 5767]  
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Tikkun LeI Shavuot

## Shavuot in Talmud and Midrash

*(Mostly Soncino translation and commentary; emphasis mine; some language tweaks)*

### Only Israel accepted the Torah

Mechilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Exodus 20:2

It was for the following reason that the ancient nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah, in order that they should have no excuse for saying, 'Had we been asked we would have accepted it'. For, behold, they were asked and they refused to accept it, for it is said, "He said, the Lord came from Sinai..." (Deut. 33:2).

He appeared to the children of Esau, the wicked, and said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They said to Him, "What is written in it?" He said to them, "You shall not murder" (Deut. 5:17) They then said to Him, "The very heritage which our father left us was 'By the sword you shall live' (Gen. 27:40).

He then appeared to the children of Ammon and Moab. He said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They said to Him, "What is written in it?" He said to them, "You shall not commit adultery" (Deut. 5:17) They, however, said to Him that they were, all of them, the children of adulterers, as it is said, "Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father" (Gen. 19:36)

He then appeared to the children of Ishmael. He said to them, "Will you accept the Torah?" They said to Him, "What is written in it?" He said to them, "You shall not steal" (Deut. 5:17) They then said to Him, "The very blessing that had been pronounced upon our father was, 'He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone' (Gen. 16:12)...

But when he came to the Israelites, they all opened their mouths and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7).

Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazar says, 'If the sons of Noah could not endure the 7 commandments enjoined upon them, how much less could they have endured all the commandments of the Torah!

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### Where the Torah was given

Why wasn't the Torah given in the Land of Israel? So the nations of the world should not have an excuse for saying, 'Because it was given in Israel's land, we have not accepted it.'

Another reason: to avoid causing dissension among the tribes, else one may have said, "In my territory the Torah was given"... Therefore the Torah was given in the desert, publicly and openly, in a place belonging to no one.

To three things the Torah is likened: to the desert, to fire, and to water. Just as these are free for all who come into the world, so are the words of Torah.

Mechilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Exodus 20:2

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Why was the Torah given in the desert? To teach you that if a man does not hold himself as unpossessed as the desert, he does not become worthy of the words of the Torah; and that, as the desert has no end, so there is no end to the words of Torah.

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 107a

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## Why God is hard on Israel

Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 27:9

When God was about to give the Torah, no other nation but Israel would accept it. It can be compared to a man who had a field which he wished to entrust to metayers. Calling the first of these, he inquired: 'Will you take over this field?' He replied: 'I have no strength; the work is too hard for me.' In the same way the second, third, and fourth declined to undertake the work.<sup>1</sup>

He called the fifth and asked him: 'Will you take over this field?' He replied 'Yes'. 'On the condition that you will till it?' The reply was again 'Yes'. But as soon as he took possession of it, he let it lie fallow. With whom is the king angry? With those who declared: 'We cannot undertake it,' or with him who did undertake it, but no sooner undertook it than he left it lying fallow?

Surely, with him who undertook it. Similarly, when God revealed Himself on Sinai, there was not a nation at whose doors He did not knock, but they would not undertake to keep it; as soon as He came to Israel, they exclaimed: All that the Lord has spoken will we do, and obey (Ex. 24:7). Accordingly, it is only proper that you should hearken; hence, 'Hear ye the words of the Lord, O House of Jacob' (Jer. 2:).<sup>2</sup> For if you do not, **you will be punished on account of your pledge.**

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(1) Corresponding to the four nations -- Seir, Ammon, Moab, and Ishmael, who refused to accept the Torah (Rashash).

(2) This throws a light on the doctrine of the Chosen Race as conceived by the Rabbis- it was not a doctrine of arrogance. but simply reciprocal. God chose Israel because no other people would accept His Revelation. Further, by this doctrine the Rabbis merely understood greater duties and responsibilities.

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## Israel is forever

Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 32:7

When Israel stood at Sinai and received the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Angel of Death: 'You have power over all the nations but not over this people, for they are My portion, and just as I live for ever, **so will My children be eternal**'; as it says, "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance... for the portion of the Lord is His people, Jacob the lot of His inheritance (Deut. 32:8ff). God said [to Jacob]: 'Do not be afraid, for just as I will never fall from My greatness, so **neither you nor your children will ever descend from their greatness**'.

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## Naaseh venishma' - We will do and we will listen

Talmud, Shabbat 88a

R. Simla lectured: When the Israelites gave precedence to "we will do" over "we will listen," (Ex. 24:7), 600,000 ministering angels came and set two crowns upon each man of Israel, one as a reward for "we will do," and the other as a reward for "we will listen".

But as soon as Israel sinned [with the Golden Calf], 1,200,000 destroying angels descended and removed them, as it is said, 'And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb. (Ex. 33:6)...

Resh Lakish said: [Yet] the Holy One, blessed be He, will return them to us in the future, for it is said, "and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads" (Is. 35:10); the joy from of old shall be upon their heads.

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R. Eleazar said: When the Israelites gave precedence to "we will do" over "we will listen," a Heavenly Voice went forth and exclaimed to them, 'Who revealed to My children this secret, which up to now only

the Ministering Angels knew, as it is written, "Bless the Lord, O you, his angels, you mighty ones, who do his word, who listen to the voice of his word!" (Ps. 130:20) -- first they fulfil and then they hearken?'

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R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: What is meant by, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men." (Song of Songs 2:3)(1)?

Why were the Israelites compared to an apple tree? To teach you: just as the fruit of the apple tree precedes its leaves,2 so did the Israelites give precedence to "we will do" over "we will listen".

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'And they stood under the mount' (Ex. 19:17).

R. Abdimi b. Hama b. Hasa said: This teaches that **the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them, "If you accept the Torah, well and good; if not, you shall be buried here."**

R. Aha b. Jacob observed: This provides a strong protest against the Torah.

Said Raba, Yet even so, they re-accepted it in the days of Ahashverosh, for it is written, [the Jews] confirmed, and took upon them, etc. (Esther 9:27); that is, they confirmed what they had accepted long before.

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Hezekiah said: What is meant by, "You caused sentence to be heard from Heaven; The earth feared, and was tranquil" (Ps. 76:9)? If it feared, why was it tranquil, and if it was tranquil, why did it fear?

But at first it feared, yet subsequently it was tranquil,1 And why did it fear?

Even in accordance with Resh Lakish. For Resh Lakish said: Why is it written, "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day;(Gen. 1:31) What is the purpose of the additional "the"?2 This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, stipulated with the Works of Creation and said thereto. "If Israel accepts the Torah, ye shall exist; but if not, I will turn you back into emptiness and formlessness." 3

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(1) It feared lest Israel would reject the Torah, and became tranquil when Israel accepted it.

(2) In the case of the other days it is simply stated, a second day, a third day, etc., "a" being unexpressed in Hebrew.

(3) He thus translates homiletically: and the continuance of morning and eveningGod depended on the sixth day, sc. of Siwan, when Israel was offered the Torah. The general idea is: Without law and order as exemplified by the Torah the world must lapse into chaos and anarchy.

## Jewish trinities

Talmud, Shabbat 88a

A certain Galilean lectured before Rabbi Hisda: "Blessed be the Merciful One who gave a three-fold Torah [Torah, Neviim, Ketubim] to a three-fold people [kohanim, leviim, yisraelim] through a third-born [Moses, born after Aaron and Miriam] on the third day [of their abstinence from their wives] in the third month.

(The Trinity was not invented by Christians: An electronic search reveals **364** occurrences of 'three things' in Tanach/Talmud/Midrash/Zohar! Here are the first few, and they do not even exhaust the first book searched -- the Midrash on Genesis.

- R. Huna said in R. Mattenah's name: The world was created for the sake of three things: hallah, tithes, and first-fruits. (Bereshit Rabbah 1:7)
- R. Jonathan said: Three things were given as a gift to the world, the Torah, the luminaries, and rain. (Bereshit Rabbah 6:5)
- R. Levi said: The voice of three things travels from one end of the world to the other, yet no creature hears it, the day [i.e. the sun], the rain, and the soul when it departs [from the body]. (Bereshit Rabbah 6:7)
- R. Nehemiah of Siknin said: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is (Ex. XX, 11): these three things constitute the fundamental elements of the creation; they each waited three days and then produced three things. The earth was created on the first day, according to Beth Hillel, waited three days, the first, second, and third, and brought forth three generations: trees, herbs, and the Garden of Eden. The firmament [heaven] was created on the second day, waited three days, the second, third, and fourth, and brought forth three

generations: the sun, moon, and constellations. The seas were created on the third day, tarried three days, the third, fourth, and fifth, and produced three generations: birds, fish, and the Leviathan. (Bereshit Rabbah 12:5)

- R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Three things are equal in importance, earth, man, and rain. R. Levi b. Hiyyatha said: And these three each consist of three letters,<sup>3</sup> to teach that without earth there would be no rain and without rain earth could not endure; while without either man could not exist. (Bereshit Rabbah 13:3)
- R. Huna said: In three things Greece was in advance of this wicked State [Rome]: in navigation, in the arrangement of camp-vigils, and in language. (Bereshit Rabbah 16:4)
- R. Eleazar said in the name of R. Jose b. Zimra: Three things were said of the tree: it was good to eat, it was beautiful to the eyes, and it added wisdom (Bereshit Rabbah 19:5)
- R. Judan said in R. Leazar's name: Three things nullify a decree [of evil], prayer, righteousness, and repentance. (Bereshit Rabbah 46:12)
- [R. Levi said: ] AND THE LORD HAD BLESSED ABRAHAM IN ALL THINGS means...with three things: He had made him master of his evil inclination, Ishmael reformed, and his storehouse was never diminished in any way. (Bereshit Rabbah 59:7)
- R. Leazar said in the name of R. Jose b. Zimra: Three things were said of the [forbidden] tree: it was good to eat, beautiful to the eyes, and it added wisdom... (Bereshit Rabbah 65:13)
- R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: For three things I like the Medians; they do not tear [meat with their teeth] and eat, but cut it and eat; they kiss not on the mouth but on the hand; and they take counsel only in a field (Bereshit Rabbah 74:2)
- R. Jose and R. Judah were walking along a road, when they saw a heathen coming toward them. Said they: He will ask us three things: What are you, what is your profession, and whither are you going (Bereshit Rabbah 76:8) )

## Importance of women

On the eve of Shabbat, the Israelites stood at Mount Sinai, arranged with the men and the women apart. [God] said to Moses, "Go, speak to the daughters of Israel [and ask them] whether they wish to receive the Torah."

Why were the women asked [first]? Because **the way of men is to follow the opinions of women**, as it is said, "Thus shall you say to the House of Jacob" (Ex. 19:3) -- these are the women -- "and declare to the Children of Israel" (ibid.) -- these are the men. They all replied as with one mouth, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7).

Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 41

Why did [God] command the women first? Because **they are prompt in the fulfilment of the commandments**.

Another explanation: **So they should introduce their children to the study of the Torah.**

R. Tahlifa of Caesarea said that God said: 'When I created the world, I only commanded Adam first, and then Eve, too, was commanded, with the result that she transgressed and upset the world; **if I do not now call unto the women first, they will nullify the Torah.**'

Midrash Rabbah, Exodus 28:2

## The Ten Commandments' location in Torah

Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Exodus 20:2

Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah? The Rabbis gave a parable. To what may this be compared? To the following: A king who entered a province said to the people, "May I be your king?" But the people said to him, "Have you done anything good to us that you should rule over us?" What did he do then? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then when he said to them, "May I be your king?", they said, "Yes".

Likewise, God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them. He fought for them the battle with Amalek. Then He said to them, "I am to be your king". And they said to him, "Yes, yes".

## God judges the nations

Talmud, Avodah Zarah 2b-3b

[The Romans will come and] The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them: 'With what have you occupied yourselves?' They will reply: 'O Lord of the Universe, we have established many market-places, we have erected many baths, we have accumulated much gold and silver, and all this we did only for the sake of Israel, that they might have the time to occupy themselves with the study of the Torah.'

The Holy One, blessed be He, will say in reply: 'You foolish ones among peoples, all that which you have done, you have only done to satisfy your own desires. You have established marketplaces to place courtesans in them; baths, to revel in them; as for silver and gold, that is mine, as it is written: "Mine is the silver and Mine is the gold, says the Lord of Hosts (Haggai 2:8). Are there any among you who have been declaring this?' And 'this' is nothing other than the Torah, as it is said: "And this is the Law which Moses set before the children of Israel" (Deut. 4:44). They will then depart, crushed in spirit.

On the departure of the Kingdom of Rome, Persia will step forth.

(-Why Persia next?

-Because they are next in importance.

-And how do we know this?

-Because it is written: "And behold, another beast, a second, like a bear" (Dan. 7:5); and R. Joseph learned (Kiddushin 72a) that this refers to the Persians, who eat and drink greedily like a bear, are fleshly like a bear, have shaggy hair like a bear, and are restless like a bear.)

The Holy One, blessed be He, will ask of them: 'With what have you occupied yourselves?'; and they will reply, 'Sovereign of the Universe, we have built many bridges, we have captured many cities, we have waged many wars, and all this for the sake of Israel, that they might engage in the study of the Torah.

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them: 'You foolish ones among peoples, you have built bridges to extract toll, you have subdued cities to impose forced labor. As to waging war, I am the Lord of battles, as it is said: "The Lord is a man of war" (Ex. 15:3). Are there any among you who have been declaring this?'. And 'this' means nothing other than the Torah, as it is said: "And this is the Law which Moses set before the Children of Israel (Deut. 4:44). They, too, will then depart, crushed in spirit.

(But why should the Persians, having seen that the Romans achieved nothing, step forward at all? -They will say to themselves: 'The Romans have destroyed the Temple, whereas we have built it.') [Cyrus's edict, Ezra 1:2ff]

And so will every nation fare in turn.

(But why should the other nations come forth, seeing that those who preceded them had achieved nothing? They will say to themselves: The others have oppressed Israel, but we have not. And why are these [two] nations singled out as important, and not the others? - **Because their reign will last till the coming of the Messiah.**)

The nations will then contend: 'Lord of the Universe, have you given us the Torah, and have we declined to accept it?

(But how can they argue thus, seeing that it is written, "The Lord came from Sinai and rose from Seir unto them, He shined forth from Mount Paran" (Deut. 33:2) ? And it is also written, "God comes from Teman" (Habakkuk 3:3). What did He seek in Seir, and what did He seek in Mount Paran?

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(1) Seir or Edom representing the predecessors of Rome; Paran, those of Ishmael, Gen. 21:21.

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R. Johanan says: This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, offered the Torah to every nation and every tongue, but none accepted it, until He came to Israel who received it.

(How, then, can they say that the Torah was not offered to them?)

Their contention will be this: 'Did we accept it and fail to observe it?

But surely the obvious rejoinder to their plea would be: 'Then why did you not accept it?'

This, then, will be their contention: 'Lord of the Universe, did you suspend the mountain over us like a vault as you did to Israel and did we still decline to accept it?'

For in commenting on the verse: "And they stood under the mountain" (Ex. 19:17), R. Dimi b. Hama said: This teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, suspended the mountain over Israel like a vault, and said to them: 'If you accept the Torah, well and good, but if not, your grave will be here.')

Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them: 'Let us then consider the happenings of old,' as it is said, "Let them announce to us former things" (Is. 43:9). 'There are 7 commandments which you did accept [the Noahide laws]. Did you observe them?'

(How do we know that they did not observe them? - For R. Joseph learned (B.K. 38a): He stands and shakes the earth, He sees and makes the nations tremble (Hab. 3:6). What did He see? He saw that the nations did not observe even the seven precepts which the sons of Noah had taken upon themselves,<sup>1</sup> and seeing that they did not observe them, He stood up and released them from them.

Then they benefited by it -- according to this it pays to be a sinner!

[But] said Mar the son of Rabina: The release from those commands only means that even if they observed them they would not be rewarded. But why should they not? Is it not taught: R. Meir used to say. 'From where do we know that even an idolator who studies the Torah is equal to a High Priest? From the following verse: "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My ordinances which, if a man do, he shall live by them." (Lev. 18:5). It does not say "If a Priest, Levite, or Israelite do, he shall live by them," but "a man"; here, then, you can learn that even a heathen who studies the Torah is equal to a High Priest!' What is meant, then, is that they are rewarded, not as greatly as one who does something which he is bidden to do, but as one who does something which he is not bidden to do. For, R. Hanina said: **He who is commanded and does, stands higher than he who is not commanded and does.**<sup>2</sup>)

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(1) No idol worship, blasphemy, bloodshed, adultery, robbery, eating the limb torn off a living animal; and establishing courts of justice. These were imposed on all men, Jews and non-Jews alike. (Sanh. 56a ff, Rambam's Guide for Perplexed, 3:48).

(2) Principle: Moral act finds its sure basis only when prompted by command of God. Thus, when man acts in obedience to God, his merit is greater.

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The nations will then say, 'Sovereign of the Universe, has Israel, who accepted the Torah, observed it? The Holy One, blessed be He, will reply, 'I can give evidence that they observed the Torah.' 'O Lord of the Universe,' they will argue, 'can a father give evidence in favor of his son? For it is written, "Israel is My son, My firstborn."' (Ex. 4:22)

Then will the Holy One, blessed be He, say: 'Heaven and Earth can bear witness that Israel has fulfilled the entire Torah.'

But they will [object], saying: 'Lord of the Universe, Heaven and Earth are partial witnesses, for it is said, "If not for My covenant with day and with night, I should not have appointed the ordinances of Heaven and Earth."' (Jer. 23:25)<sup>4</sup>

(And R. Simeon b. Lakish further said: What is conveyed by the phrase. And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day? (Gen. 1:31) It teaches us that God made a condition with the works of creation, saying: 'If Israel accept my Law, well and good, but if not, I shall reduce you to a state of chaos'<sup>6</sup>; which accords with the comment of R. Hezekiah on the verse, "You caused sentence to be heard from Heaven, the earth trembled and was still: (Ps. 76:9). If the earth trembled, how could it be still, and if it was still, how could it tremble? But at first it trembled, and subsequently it became still.)<sup>8</sup>

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, will say, 'Some of yourselves shall testify that Israel observed the entire Torah.

- Let Nimrod come and testify that Abraham did not [consent to] worship idols;
- let Laban come and testify that Jacob could not be suspected of theft; (Gen. 31:37)
- let Potiphar's wife testify that Joseph was above suspicion of immorality;
- let Nebuchadnezzar come and testify that Hanania, Mishael and Azariah did not bow down to an image;
- let Darius come and testify that Daniel never neglected the [statutory] prayers;<sup>10</sup>
- let Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, and Eliphaz the Temanite [and Elihu {a friend of Job; Job 32:2} the son of Barachel the Buzite]<sup>12</sup> testify that Israel has observed the whole Torah; as it is said, Let them [the nations] bring their [own] witnesses, that they [Israel] may be justified.<sup>13</sup>

The nations will then plead. 'Offer us the Torah anew and we shall obey it.'

But the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to them, 'You foolish ones among peoples, he who took trouble [to prepare] on Shabbat eve can eat on Shabbat, but he who has not troubled on Shabbat eve, what shall he eat on the Shabbat? Nevertheless, I have an easy command which is called Sukkah; (Lev. 23:42) go and carry it out.'<sup>15</sup>

(But how can you say so: does not R. Joshua b. Levi say: What is [the meaning of] the verse, "The ordinances which I command you this day, to do them?" (Deut. 7:11) It is that this day only [the present] is the time to do them,' they cannot be done tomorrow [in times to come]: this day is the time in which to do them, but not in which to be rewarded for them.

[Why then should they be offered this observance in the Messianic time?]

Because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not deal imperiously with His creatures.

And why does He term it an easy command? Because it does not affect one's purse.)

Straightaway will every one of them busy himself to make a booth on top of his roof; but the Holy One, blessed be He, will cause the sun to blaze forth over them as at the Summer Solstice.<sup>18</sup> and every one of them will trample down his booth and go away, as it is said, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." (Ps. 2:3)

(But you have just said 'The Holy One, blessed be He, does not deal imperiously with his creatures? - True! but with the Israelites, too, it occasionally happens

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(4) If not for My covenant (i.e., the Torah, which is to be meditated day and night), I should not have appointed etc.

(6) The phrase is made to read - There was evening and there was morning [only because of] the sixth day of Sivan, the date of the revelation at Sinai.

(8) The earth feared that its inhabitants could not abide in the absence of a moral code to serve as the foundation of society; but it was set at rest when sentence was heard from heaven, i.e., when the Divine commandments were proclaimed from Sinai.

(10) His windows were open in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem, and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. (Dan. VI, 11). This is the earliest record of the practice, still observed by Jews the world over, of offering prayers thrice daily: morning (Shaharith), afternoon (Minhah) and evening (Ma'arib) with face turned towards the Holy City.

(12) Buz, according to Gen. XXII, 21, was a son of Nahor; his descendant Elihu, therefore, being an Israelite, is not to be included here (Rashi); cf. B.B. 15b, where it is discussed whether Elihu was an Israelite or a Gentile.

(13) Isa, *ibid*.

(14) Sukkah, booth, the temporary structure in which Jews dwell during the Festival of Tabernacles.

(15) To test their self-exertion for the sake of a religious observance.

(18) Lit., 'the cycle of Tammuz' which lasts from 21st June to 22nd September. The Jewish Calendar, while being lunar, takes cognisance of the solar system, to which it is adjusted at the end of every cycle of nineteen years. For ritual purposes, the four Tekufoth are calculated according to the solar system, each being equal to one fourth of 365 days, viz. 91 days, 7 1/2 hours. T. of Nisan, (vernal Equinox) begins March 21; T. of Tammuz (Summer Solstice), June 21; T. of Tishri (Autumnal Equinox). Sept. 23; T. of Tebeth (Winter Solstice) Dec. 22.

that the summer solstice extends till Sukkot and they are vexed [by the heat].<sup>1</sup> But does not Raba say: He who is vexed thereby is freed from dwelling in the Sukkah? (Sukkah 26a)

- Granted, they would [in such circumstances] be freed, but would Israelites contemptuously trample it down?) Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, will laugh at them, as it is said, He who sits in heaven laughs (Ps. 2:4). Said R. Isaac: 'Only on that day is there laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He!' Some connected that comment of R. Isaac with the following teaching: R. Jose says, In time to come idol-worshippers will come and offer themselves as proselytes. But will such be accepted? Has it not been taught (Yebamot 24a) that in the days of the Messiah proselytes will not be received; likewise were none received in the days of David or of Solomon?

- Well, they will be self-made proselytes,<sup>5</sup> and will place phylacteries on their foreheads and on their arms, fringes in their garments, and a Mezuzah on their doorposts, but when the battle of Gog-Magog will come about<sup>6</sup> they will be asked, 'For what purpose have you come?' and they will reply: 'Against God and His Messiah' as it is said, "Why do the nations rage, and why do the peoples mutter in vain," etc. (Ps. 2:1) Then each of the proselytes will throw aside his religious token and get away, as it is said, "Let us break their bands asunder" (Ps. 2:3), and the Holy One, blessed be He, will sit and laugh, as it is said: "He who sits in heaven laughs." (Ps. 2:4) [It was on this that] R. Isaac remarked that there is no laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He, except on that day.

But is there not, indeed? Yet Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: 'The day consists of twelve hours; -during the first three hours the Holy One, blessed be He, is occupying Himself with the Torah, -during the second three He sits in judgment on the whole world, and when He sees that the world is so guilty as to deserve destruction, He transfers Himself from the seat of Justice to the seat of Mercy;<sup>10</sup> -during the third quarter, He is feeding the whole world, from the horned buffalo to the brood of vermin; -during the fourth quarter He is sporting with the leviathan,<sup>11</sup> as it is said, There is leviathan, whom You have formed to sport therewith?'<sup>12</sup> Said R. Nahman b. Isaac: Yes, He sports with His creatures, but does not laugh at His creatures except on that day.<sup>13</sup>

R. Aba said to R. Nahman b. Isaac: Since the day of the destruction of the temple, there is no laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He. Whence do we know that there is not? Shall we say from the verse, And on that day did the Lord, the God of Hosts, call to weeping and lamentation? (Isa. 22:12) But this refers to that day and no more. Shall we then say, from this verse:

"If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you?" (Ps. 137:5,6)

But this, too, excludes forgetfulness, but not laughter. Hence, [it is known] from the verse, "I have long time held my peace, I have been still, and refrained myself, now will I cry. (Isa. 42:14) What then does God do in the fourth quarter?<sup>17</sup> - He sits and instructs the school children,<sup>18</sup> as it is said, "Whom shall one teach knowledge, and whom shall one make to understand the message? Them that are weaned from the milk". (Isa. 28:9) "Who instructed them theretofore?<sup>20</sup> - If you like, you may say Metatron,<sup>21</sup> or it may be said that God did this as well as other things. And what does He do by night? - If you like you may say, the kind of thing He does by day; or it may be said that He rides a light cherub, and floats in eighteen thousand worlds; for it is said, "The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands shinan" (Ps. 68:18). Do not read Shinan, [repeated], but she-enan [that are not];<sup>23</sup> or it may be said, "He sits and listens to the song of the Hayyoth",<sup>24</sup> as it is said, By the day the Lord will command His lovingkindness and in the night His song shall be with me (Ps. 42:9).

R. Levi says: He who discontinues [learning] words of the Torah and indulges in idle gossip will be made to eat glowing coals of juniper, as it is said, "They pluck salt-wort with wormwood; and the roots of juniper are their food." (Job 30:4)<sup>26</sup>

Resh Lakish says: To him who is engaged in the study of the Torah by night, the Holy One extends a thread of grace by day, as it is said, "By day the Lord will command his lovingkindness, and in the night his song shall be with me." (Ps. 42:9)

For what reason will the Lord command his lovingkindness by day? - because His song shall be with me in the night.



Some report the exposition of Resh Lakish thus: To he who is engaged in the study of the Torah in this world, which is likened to the night, the Holy One, blessed be He, extends the thread of grace in the future world, which is likened to the day, as it is said: "By day the Lord, " etc.

(1) The test is therefore not exceptional or harsh.

(5) [Gerim gerurim, lit., 'dragged-in proselytes' a class of converts who judaize in mass under the impulsion of fear, v. Moore, G. F., Judaism I, 337].

(6) In the great drama of the Messianic age there will be a combat with the heathen powers under the leadership of Gog and Magog (Ezek. XXXIX).

(10) I.e., instead of meting out punishment, exercises clemency.

(11) [A huge sea monster, real according to some but according to others imaginary. We have here a magnification of God's power in sporting with the mightiest, as men do with their animal pets.]

(12) Ps. CIV, 26; hence we see there is laughter before the Lord!

(13) [The discomfiture of the nations which sought to rule without the restraints of the moral law will prove the most laughter-provoking sight.]

(17) According to the statement that all laughter has been eliminated since the Destruction.

(18) [I.e., who died in their infancy (Rashi); the development of their personality that survives death is in the special care of the Eternal.]

(20) I.e., prior to the Destruction.

(21) [Metatron: Name of an angel, probably derived from Metator, meaning guide, precursor, he being regarded as the angel who went before the Israelites in the wilderness.]

(23) By altering itba into ibhta the verse is made to mean: The chariots . . . are twice ten thousand less two thousand, i.e., eighteen thousand.

(24) Hayyoth are angels that surround the heavenly throne (v. Ezek. III), proclaiming the praises and holiness of God.

(26) Job XXX, 4. By a very slight alteration, the verse - which speaks of the poor who pick vegetables and roots for their food - is made to read: They who break away from the table (of the Law) to idle gossip will have roots of juniper as their food.

## The Torah is not in heaven

Midrash Rabbah, Deuteronomy 8:6

**Deut. 30:**

**11. For this commandment which I command you this day, is not hidden from you, nor is it far off.**

**12. It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it?**

**13. Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it?**

**14. But the word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it.**

Another explanation 'It is not in heaven': Moses said to Israel: 'Do not say: "Another Moses will arise and bring us another Torah from heaven"; I therefore warn you, 'It is not in heaven', that is to say, no part of it has remained in heaven.'

Another explanation: R. Hanina said: The Torah has been given with all its characteristic teachings of meekness, righteousness, and uprightness, and also its reward.

Another explanation: What is the meaning of, 'It is not in heaven'? Samuel said: The Torah is not to be found amongst astrologers whose work is to gaze at the heavens. People said to Samuel: 'Lo, you are an astrologer, and yet you are also great in the Torah.' Whereupon he replied: 'I only engage in astrology when I am free-from studying the Torah.' 'When is that?' 'When I am in the bath.'

Another explanation: 'It is not in heaven'. Israel said to Moses: 'Our teacher Moses, lo, you say to us, 'It is not in heaven', 'Nor is it beyond the sea'; then where is it? ' He answered them: 'It is in a very near place, 'in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it'; it is not far from you, it is near unto you.'

Another explanation: 'in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it'. The Rabbis say: Solomon said seven things of the sluggard, but what Moses said was greater than all of them. How so?

1. People say to the sluggard: 'Your teacher is in the city, go and learn Torah from him.' To this the sluggard's answer is: 'I fear the lion in the road.' Whence this? For it is said, The sluggard says: There is a lion in the way (Prov. 26:13).
  2. People say to him: 'Lo, your teacher is in the province, arise and go to him,' and he replies: 'I fear lest there be a lion in the streets,' as it is said, Yea, a lion is in the streets (ib.).
  3. They say to him: 'But he lives near your house,' and he replies: 'The lion is outside,' as it is said, There is a lion without (Prov. 22:13).
  4. They say to him: 'He is in the very house.' He replies: 'If I go and find the door locked I will have to return.'
  5. They say to him: 'It is open.' Whence this? For it is said, The door is turning upon its hinges, and the sluggard is still upon his bed (Prov. 26:14).
  6. Finally, when he knows not what further answer to give, he says to them: 'Be the door open or closed, I desire to sleep a little longer,' as it is said, How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard, When will you arise from your sleep? (Prov. 6:9).
- When he arises from his sleep in the morning and food is placed before him, he is too lazy to put it into his mouth. Whence this? For it is said, The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish, and will not so much as bring it back to his mouth (Prov. 29:24).
7. And what is the seventh thing? The sluggard will not plow when winter sets in, therefore he shall beg in harvest and have nothing (Prov. 20:4). What is the meaning of, 'The sluggard will not plow when the winter sets in'? R. Simeon b. Yohai said: This refers to one who not having learnt Torah in his youth, desires to learn it in his old age and is not able. And this is the meaning of, 'Therefore he shall beg in harvest and have nothing.'

But what Moses said is the greatest of them all. How so? "But the word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it." You need but utter the word with your mouth.

## The Ten Commandments

(Adapted from Sefer HaTodaah of Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov)

"Maamad Har Sinai" - The Stand at Mt. Sinai

When the Jewish People stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and accepted the Torah, was probably the most momentous event in the history of the human race. At that time, what occurred taught the following profound lessons:

- \* There is a God in the World
- \* The World was created by God
- \* God established rules for the behavior of Man and, at the root of them, are these ten:

**1.** "I am Hashem, your God, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence." (Shemot 20,2)

1. Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (RAMBAN) asks, "Why did Hashem introduce Himself to the Jewish People as the One Who had taken them out of slavery in Egypt. Great as that was, wasn't He also the One Who had done something even greater; namely, created the universe? And RAMBAN answers that while it's true that Hashem had created the universe, there had been no human witnesses present at that event! Whereas, there had been millions of witnesses to the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. And these witnesses were expected to pass that testimony onward from generation to generation, till our day.

2. The Ten Commandments are written as commands to individuals, so that each individual should know and realize that the Commandments are meant for him, and he cannot say, "let them be fulfilled by others."

3. Since Hashem had appeared to the Jewish People at the Sea as a warrior, and at Sinai as a Teacher of Torah, and He would appear to them in the time of Shlomo as a young man, and in the time of Daniel as an old man full of mercy - the Holy One Blessed be He said to them, "Although you see different manifestations, you should realize that I Was the One at the Sea, I Am the One here at Sinai, I Am the One at all times - I Am the L-rd your God."

2. "You shall not make a carved image nor any likeness of that which is in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the water beneath the earth. You shall not prostrate yourself before them nor worship them, for I am Hashem your God - a jealous God, Who visits the sin of fathers on children to the third and fourth generations, for My enemies; but Who shows kindness for thousands [of generations] to those who love Me and observe My commandments." (Shemot 20:4-6)

1. This is one of the three cardinal sins in Judaism, such that if Person A approaches Person B and says to him, "I will kill you if you do not worship idol so-and-so," Person B must allow himself to be killed rather than worship the idol.

2. The ratio of the "mercy" of God to His "judgment" is at least 500 to 1. For we see that he visits the sins of the fathers onto the sons only to a maximum of four generations, whereas he remembers the good deeds of the fathers for thousands (minimum of thousands is two thousand). Perhaps the way this trans-generational transfer of guilt and merit works is like this: A parent's sinful behavior can affect a child, but only up to a maximum of four generations. Whereas, an ancestor's good behavior will "sink into the bones" of the descendants, and remain as a positive influence for at least two thousand generations.

3. "You shall not take the name of Hashem, your God, in vain, for Hashem will not absolve anyone who takes His Name in vain." (Shemot 20:7)

1. Do not be quick to take oaths which involve mention of Hashem's Name. And do not let oaths become commonplace in your mouth, because someone who behaves in this manner, will swear even when he or she has no desire to do so. Therefore, it is forbidden to swear even on something true (this is why many people, when asked to swear, in certain administrative and judicial contexts, will request the right to "affirm," rather than swear). And anyone who desecrates God's Name by swearing falsely or even truthfully (in a matter not justifying use of God's Name) his end will be that Hashem, acting in accordance with the principle of "midah k'neged midah," or "measure for measure," will cause information that this person would have preferred to remain private, to enter the public arena, and be "bandied about" like something trivial.

4. "Remember the Day of Shabbat to sanctify it. Six days shall you work and accomplish all your work; but the seventh day is Shabbat to Hashem, your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, your animal, and your convert within your gates - for in six days Hashem made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, Hashem blessed the Day of Shabbat and sanctified it." (Shemot 20:8-11)

1. According to Jewish Tradition, Hashem uttered the Command of "Remember the Shabbat" and the Command of "Guard the Shabbat" (which is the form of the Shabbat command as it appears when Moshe reviews the history of the People of Israel in the Book of Devarim, and refers to the events described here the first time around, in the Book of Shemot) simultaneously, which is impossible for a human being to do, and yet the Jewish People were enabled to understand the Command. This is to teach that to "Remember" Shabbat, which relates to the positive aspects of Shabbat and to "Guard Shabbat", which relates to the prohibition side of Shabbat, are both essential aspects of the Holy Day.

2. The way to fulfill the Commandment of "Remember the Shabbat" is to recite the Kiddush at the Shabbat table. This is the minimum requirement; for other aspects of this command, see Remember the Shabbat.

3. Shammai the Elder used to say, "Remember the Shabbat" before it comes, and "Guard it" once it has come. It was said about Shammai the Elder that the remembrance of Shabbat "never left his mouth." He would buy a nice item, and say "this is for Shabbat." And they said further about Shammai the Elder that he would eat all week "for the honor of Shabbat;" he would buy a nice cow, and he would say, "This is for the honor of Shabbat." Then if he found a nicer one, he would eat from the first and set the second aside for the Shabbat. But Hillel the Elder had a different characteristic; he would trust Hashem to provide the best for each day on that day, and would say, "Blessed is Hashem each day."

4. Turnus-Rufus, the Roman official, asked Rabbi Akiva concerning the Shabbat, "How is one day different from any other day?" Rabbi Akiva responded, "How is Turnus-Rufus different from other men? Turnus-Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva to clarify his meaning. Rabbi Akiva said, "You asked me, 'How is the Shabbat different from other times?' and I asked you, 'How are you different from other men?'" Turnus-Rufus angrily responded, "The Emperor wishes to honor me!" To which Rabbi Akiva answered, "The King of Kings wants the Jewish People to show honor to the Shabbat."

**5.** "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days will be lengthened upon the land that Hashem, your God, gives you." (Shemot 20:12)

1. "Honor your father and your mother;" and it is also written "a person should revere his mother and father." What is reverence and what is honor? "Reverence" includes such behaviors to be avoided as not to stand in their place or sit in their place, not to contradict them and not even to lend your support to what they have to say. "Honor" includes such actions as to provide food and drink, indirectly and even directly, to provide clothing and even, if necessary, to dress them, to cover them, to bring them in and take them out, etc., etc., in accordance with their needs.

2. "They asked Rav Ulla, 'To what extent is a child obligated to honor his or her parents?' He answered, 'go and see how a certain non-Jewish resident of Ashkelon behaved, and his name was Dama, son of Nesina. Once the Rabbis wished to purchase an object from them for ritual purposes, for the sum of six hundred thousand "shekalim," let's say, dollars, but the key to the safe was under the head of his sleeping father, and Dama would not disturb his father!' "

3. "They asked Rabbi Eliezer, 'To what extent is a child obligated to honor his or her parents?' He said to them, 'to the extent that even if the parent would throw the child's wallet into the ocean for no reason, the child should not embarrass the parent!' "

**6.** "You shall not murder!" (Shemot 20:13)

1. This is one of the three cardinal sins in Judaism, for which an individual is obligated to give up his life. This means that if Person A approaches Person B and says to him, "I will kill you if you do not kill person C," Person B should allow himself to be killed, rather than murder Person C.

**7.** "You shall not commit adultery!" (Shemot 20:13)

1. This is the third of the three cardinal sins in Judaism, such that if Person A approaches Person B and says to him, "I will kill you if you do not commit adultery with the wife of Person C," Person B must allow himself to be killed rather than commit adultery.

**8.** "You shall not steal!" (Shemot 20:13)

1. This form of stealing is the stealing of souls; that is, kidnapping, for which the penalty is "bet-din," Jewish Court-administered death. Stealing of money, for which the penalty is financial, is referenced elsewhere in the Torah.

**9.** "You shall not bear false witness against your fellow!" (Shemot 20:13)

1. Jewish Tradition holds that one is not even allowed to speak favorably about other individuals, because that too can relatively easily lead one to speak ill of that person. For example, if one says, "What a nice house (car, job, wife, etc.) so-and-so has," it is easy to see how that can lead to feelings of jealousy and "lashon hara," unfavorable speech, or worse.

**10.** "You shall not covet your fellow's house. You shall not covet your fellow's wife, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your fellow!" (Shemot 20:14)

1. In the Devarim version of the Utterances, or Commandments, a different verb is used. Here the prohibition is "Lo Tachmod!," "Do not actively desire!" There, in Devarim, the verb is "Lo Titaveh!," "Do not desire in your heart!" For there is a causal chain - if one allows himself to desire someone else's property, etc., that will lead to more active desire, which will lead to stealing, etc., etc.

2. How is it possible to command someone concerning his or her emotions? First of all, it is possible, as we see from other commands, positive (such as "You shall love your neighbor as yourself!") and negative ("You shall not hate your neighbor in your heart!"). Alternatively, the meaning here is that one should distance the thought of possessing some "thing" "belonging" to someone else so far outside the realm of possibility, that the thought actually recedes from one's imagination.

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