

## The 120 days

### Introduction

-How many days did Moses stay up on Mt Sinai, in all?

Answer: 120 (3 consecutive sets of 40 days): The 120 days from Shavuot to Yom Kippur:

- 7 Sivan: Moses goes up mountain, gets tablets of Law [2nd day of Shavuot]
- 17 Tammuz: Moses comes down, sees Golden Calf, breaks tablets [40 days later]
- 18 Tammuz: Moses burns Golden Calf, judges transgressors
- 19 Tammuz: Moses goes up again for 40 days, pleads for mercy [up to 29 av]
- 1 Elul: Moses goes up a 3rd time for 40 days, gets second tablets [dispute: may have been 30 Av, the day before 1 Elul, to make 3rd set of 40 days end on 10 Tishri, i.e. Yom Kippur]
- 10 Tishri: God tells Moses "I have forgiven, as you ask", gives him the second tablets.

[Sources: Rashi, Exodus 32:1 and 33:11; Midrash Tanchuma on Ki Tisa, 31]]

-Torah on 2nd set of 40 days (Deut., not Ex.):

Deut: 9:18. And I fell down before God, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water; because of all your sin which you sinned, in doing that which was evil in the sight of God, to provoke Him.  
Deut 9:25. So I fell down before God the forty days and forty nights that I fell down; because God had said He would destroy you.  
Deut 9:26ff. And I prayed to God, and said: 'O Lord God, destroy not Your people and Your inheritance, that You have redeemed through Your greatness, that You have brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

### Details of the 120 days (Covered by Bruce Kaplan)

#### The “sod” on the 120 days

Midrash has intriguing and somewhat upsetting teaching: Israel is God's daughter, sister, and... mother! Exodus Rabbah 52:5:

"...it is written, 'Go forth, O you daughters of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, even upon the crown with which his mother has crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart' (S.S. 3:1).

...R. Isaac said: I have searched through the whole Bible but have not been able to find anywhere the statement that Bathsheba made a crown for [her son King] Solomon. [The verse must, therefore, symbolically refer to God and to Israel].

R. Shimon bar Yohai asked R. Eleazar, the son of R. Jose...He replied: '...it can be compared to a king who possessed an only child -- a daughter. He loved her so dearly, that he called her "my daughter", and when his love increased he called her "my sister", and finally "my mother."

-Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, first addressed Israel as "daughter" [then "sister", then "mother"; as "daughter"] as it says [in Psalms], 'Hearken, O daughter, consider and incline your ear...' (Ps. 45:11).

-When He loved Israel more, He called them "My sister", as it says [in Song of Songs], 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night (S.S. 5:2);

-and when He loved them even still more, He called them "mother", for it says [in Isaiah], 'Listen to me, my people; and give ear to me, O my mother; for Torah shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment for a light to the people.' (Isa. 51:4)

Thereupon R. Shimon bar Yohai arose and kissed [R. Eleazar] on his forehead... 'Had this been the only thing I had learnt in life, I would have been satisfied.' "

Freud 1800 years before Freud?

Modern Hassidic Rabbi YY Jacobson: This was discussed by the Hassidic masters. Started exposition with joke (as the Talmud says you are supposed to do):

-A young man said to his psychiatrist, 'Every thought I have turns to my mother. Everyone in my dreams turns into my mother. Last night I even had a dream that YOU were my mother. I woke up so upset that all I could do was go downstairs and eat a piece of toast. And I came running here for the session.'

-The psychiatrist replied, "What? Only one piece of toast for a big boy like you?"

Hassidic masters: Midrash refers to the progression of God's relationship to Israel, in the 3 pilgrimage festivals:

1. Pessah: God provides, helps us and saves us; we do nothing. We are God's 'daughter'.

2. Shavuot: We get Torah, enter partnership with God; each side has obligations, for goal of repairing the world. We are God's 'sister', almost His peer.
3. Sukkot: God disengages, semi-retires, lets us run the show and provide our own interpretations. We are God's 'mother'.

This third stage most difficult. God almost gave up on us after Golden Calf, but Moses argued successfully during middle 40 days, we got another chance, and rose to the challenge. We taught God that we could do teshuvah, as it were. Rabbi Jacobson writes:

The message here is too daring to be spoken clearly. Yet the Jewish mystics picked up on it and articulated it... We became, as it were, mentors to the Divine, showing Him how darkness can be transformed into light, how imperfection is the beginning of deeper perfection, and how destruction is the commencement of renovation. And this is the message of the third holiday, the festival of Sukkot, when we celebrate the renewed relationship between God and Israel forged on Yom Kippur following their estrangement. From sister we turn into mother. From partners with God, we became teachers to God... Yet here is the catch: To become a healthy mother, you first need to be a daughter and a sister.

-In Talmud, rabbis reject God's "take" on a point of Law:

God laughed and declared, 'My children triumphed over me; my children triumphed over me.' [Bava Metzia 59b]

-Lesson: WE, and not God, make the decisions, even those involving God.

-Talmud is a declaration of independence: 'Moses received the Torah from Sinai...' (Pirkei Avot 1:1) -- God almost sidelined!

What do you think of this interpretation?