



**THE TORAH(S) OF THE NIGHT,
 or, Learning Torah in Dark Times**

I. KEEPING FAITH WHEN IT’S DARK OUTSIDE

1. תהלים צב, א-ג Psalm 92:1-3

מְזֹמֵר שִׁיר לְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת: טוֹב לְהַדוֹת לַה' וּלְזַמֵּר לְשִׁמְךָ עֲלִיּוֹן: לְהַגִּיד בַּבֹּקֶר חֶסֶדְךָ וְאִמּוֹנְתְךָ בַּלַּיְלוֹת:	A psalm. A song; for the sabbath day. It is good to give thanks to Hashem, to sing hymns to Your name, O Most High, To proclaim Your love in the morning, and Your faithfulness in the nights.”
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2. רד"ק על תהלים צב, ג Radak on Psalm 92:3 (1160-1235, French)

בלילות. לשון רבים כי כל הלילות אפילו לילות ימי השבוע הם פנויים יותר מהימים להגיד חסד ה' ואמונתו:	“in the nights”—expressed in the plural, because all nights, even weeknights, are more available than the days to speak of God’s lovingkindness and faithfulness.
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3. רש"י על תהלים צב, ג Rashi on Psalm 92:3 (1040-1105, French)

להגיד בבקר חסדך. בעת הגאולה: ואמונתך בלילות. ובעוד צרת הגלות להאמין בך שתשמור הבטחתך כל זה נאה וטוב:	“To proclaim Your love in the morning”—in times of redemption. “and Your faithfulness in the nights”—even in times of exile, to believe in You that you will keep your promises, is fitting and good.
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Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- The psalm speaks of gratitude to God, for “love” (*chesed*) in the morning, and for “faithfulness” (*emunah*) at night. What’s the difference, and why is one for the morning and the other at night?
- The psalm is for “*yom hashabbat*,” the Sabbath day. Why then does it take pains to include the night?
- Radak offers a practical explanation for the emphasis on night. Rashi takes a more allegorical approach, in which night is a time of physical or spiritual exile. Which do you find more compelling? Which is closer to your own experience of morning vs. night?
- Do you find it harder or easier to find gratitude and connection to God when times are tough? Why?



II. REISH LAKISH: MAN OF THE NIGHT

4. ויקרא רבה, מצורע, יט, א Midrash Vayikra Rabbah, Metzora, 19:1

רבי יוחנן וריש לקיש, [A debate between] Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish:

רבי יוחנן אומר אין רנה של תורה אלא בלילה, שנגאמר (איכה ב, יט): קומי רני בלילה [לראש אשמרות שפכי כמים לברך נכח פני א-דני ...] Rabbi Yochanan said:
 There is no song (*rinah*) of Torah except at night, “Arise, cry out (*roni*) at night [at the beginning of the watch-shifts; pour out your heart like water before the face of God...]”

ריש לקיש אומר ביום ובלילה, שנגאמר (יהושע א, ח): והגית בו יומם ולילה. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said:
 [rather,] during the day and at night, as it is said, “Study them day and night” (Joshua 1:8).

ריש לקיש הוה פשיט קראי וכד הוה מטי באילין קראי (משלי לא, טו): ותקם בעוד לילה (איכה ב, יט): קומי רני בלילה, הוה אומר יפה למדני רבי יוחנן, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish was reading biblical verses, and when he would come upon these verses: “Arise while it is still night” (Prov. 31:15), and “Arise, cry out at night” (Lam. 2:19), he would say: Rabbi Yochanan taught me well.

חזר ואמר לית אתון חמין אולפני מה נהיר באפי ולמה דהוה דלילא ודיממא. He therefore revised his statement and said,
 Can you not see how my learning lights up my face?! And why? Because it is at night and during the day.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- Rabbi Yochanan teaches about the “song of Torah” coming at night. How does Reish Lakish (=Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish) initially differ from, or add to, Rabbi Yochanan’s teaching? What then causes him to reconsider? What is the difference between Reish Lakish’s first statement and revised statement?
- Reish Lakish started life as a bandit, until Rabbi Yochanan taught him Torah and made him a rabbi. How might Reish Lakish’s past affect his attitude toward the night? How might the teacher-student relationship color the evolution of his thought?



5. תלמוד בבלי, עבודה זרה ג, ב **Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 3b**

<p>אמר ריש לקיש כל העוסק בתורה בלילה הקב"ה מושך עליו חוט של חסד ביום שנאמר יומם יצוה ה' חסדו ובלילה שירו עמי מה טעם יומם יצוה ה' חסדו משום דבלילה שירו עמי</p>	<p>Reish Lakish said: Anyone who engages with Torah at night, the Holy Blessed One draws upon them a thread of lovingkindness by day, as it is said, "By day may Hashem guarantee God's lovingkindness, and by night may God's song be with me..." (Ps. 42:9). What does this mean? By day God's lovingkindness will be with me <i>because</i> by night God's song was with me [i.e., I studied Torah].</p>
<p>איבא דאמרי אמר ר"ל כל העוסק בתורה בעולם הזה הדומה ללילה הקב"ה מושך עליו חוט של חסד בעולם הבא הדומה ליום שנאמר יומם יצוה ה' חסדו [וגו']</p>	<p>And some say that Reish Lakish said: Anyone who engages with Torah in this world, which is likened to the night, the Holy Blessed One draws upon them a thread of lovingkindness in the world to come, which is likened to the day...</p>

6. תלמוד בבלי, עירובין סה, א **Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 65a**

<p>אמר רב יהודה: לא איברי ליליא אלא לשינתא.</p>	<p>Rav Yehudah said: Night was not created except for sleeping.</p>
<p>אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: לא איברי סיהרא אלא לגירסא.</p>	<p>Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Moonlight was not created except for learning.</p>
<p>אמרי ליה לרבי זירא מחדדן שמעתך אמר להו דיממי נינהו</p>	<p>They said to Rav Zeira: Your teachings are sharp. He said to them: They were formulated during the day.</p>

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- Reish Lakish apparently became an enthusiastic advocate for the value of Torah study at night. How does he understand the relationship between such study and human well-being?
- Why is "this world" likened to the night? Is this characterization positive or negative? If negative, why learn Torah at night?
- How does Rav Zeira's statement relate to Reish Lakish's teaching—is it a rebuke? What does it imply about the relationship between nighttime Torah and daytime Torah?



III. SHAVUOT AND REDEMPTION

7. **רות ג, יג Ruth 3:13**

<p>ליני הלילה, והיה בבקר אם-יגאלך טוב יגאל, ואם-לא יחפץ לגאלך וגאלתיך אנכי, חי-יהוה; שכבי, עד-הבקר.</p>	<p>Stay for the night, Then in the morning, if he will redeem you, good, let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, then I will redeem you, as Hashem lives! Lie down until morning.</p>
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8. **מדרש רות רבה, ו, ד Midrash Ruth Rabbah 6:4**

<p>ליני הלילה בעולם הזה שכלו לילה, והיה בבקר בעולם שכלו טוב, אם יגאלך טוב יגאל, זה הקדוש ברוך הוא, שגאמר (תהלים קמה, ט): טוב ה' לכל.</p>	<p>“Stay for the night”—this refers to this world, which is entirely night. “Then in the morning”—this refers to [the world to come,] a world which is entirely good. “if he will act as a redeemer, <u>“good” will redeem</u>”—this refers to the Holy Blessed One, as it says, “Hashem is good to all” (Ps. 145:9).</p>
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Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- In the Book of Ruth, which we read on Shavuot, the wealthy landowner Boaz finds Ruth, a young widow, lying next to him at night. But he realizes that a closer kinsman has the right of first refusal to “redeem” Ruth by marrying her (*yibum*, or levirate marriage). Why does Boaz urge Ruth to “stay for the night ... until morning?” instead of sending her home? What does it imply about his understanding of night and morning? About their relationship?
- The midrash reads this interaction as a teaching not about *yibum* but about ultimate redemption, *ge'ulah*. Ruth is all of us, and the redeemer is not a kinsman but the Holy Blessed One. How does the midrash understand God’s role in our lives, especially in times of darkness? What does it mean for us to “stay the night”?



IV. PRACTICAL ADVICE AND REAL TALK

9. **רבנו בחיי אבן פקודה** **Bachya ibn Pakuda** (1050-1120, Spanish)
חובות הלבבות, שער י', פ"ו, ס"כג-כט **Chovot Halevavot (Duties of the Heart), 10:6:23-29**
- ומהם שיתנפל בלילה ויתענה ביום אם יוכל
לסבול זה כי תפלת הלילה היא זכה יותר
מתפלת היום לכמה פנים.
מהם כי האדם בלילה יותר פנוי ממה שהוא
ביום.
ומהם שתאות הגוף מהמאכל והמשתה יותר
נחים בלילה ממה שהם נחים ביום.
ומהם הפסק חברה בינו ובין בני אדם כאוהב
יבקררו וחבר ידבר עמו ובעל חוב יתבעהו
במה שיש לו עליו.
ומהם נוח חושיו מרוב מוחשיו בלילה מפני
שאינו רואה מה שיטרידהו ולא שומע מה
שיפסיק עליו
ומהם המלטו מן החנופה ורחקו ממנה מפני
מעוט היושבים עמו בלילה ואפשר שלא יוכל
להתבודד ביום.
ומהם שיתיחד בזכר האלהים ויתבודד בו בעת
התיחד כל אוהב באוהבו והתבודד כל חושק
עם חשוקו כמ"ש (ישעיה כז) נַפְשִׁי אֲיִתִּיךָ
בְּלַיְלָה וגו' ואמר (שיר השירים ג':א) על
משכבי בלילות. וכבר נזכר יתרון תפלת הלילה
בספרי הקדש הרבה.
- A person should supplicate at night, and fast during the day, if they can tolerate it, for prayer at night is more pure than prayer during the day in several ways.
Among these: because a person has more free time at night than during the day.
Among these: because the appetites of the body for food and drink are more subdued at night, than during the day.
Among these: a break from socializing between a person and other people, such as a friend who visits or a fellow who converses or a creditor who comes to ask for what is due.
Among these: one's mind is more at ease from one's cares at night, because one doesn't see what would disturb them, and doesn't hear what would distract them.
Among these: one is free from flattery and distanced from it, because few sit with them at night, and one may not be able to have solitude during the day.
Among these: one can unite with consciousness of God, and be alone with God, at the hour when every lover unites with their beloved, and when every desirer is alone with their desired, as it is said, "At night I yearn for you..." (Isaiah 27:9), and "Upon my couch in the nights..." (Song of Songs 3:1).
10. **רמב"ם** **Rambam (Maimonides)** (1138-1204, Spanish-Egyptian)
משנה תורה, הלכות תלמוד תורה, ג, יג **Mishneh Torah, Laws of Torah Study 3:13**
- אף על פי שמצוה ללמוד ביום ובלילה אין אדם
למד רוב חכמתו אלא בלילה, לפיכך מי שרצה
לזכות בכתר התורה יזהר בכל לילותיו ולא
יאבד אפילו אחד מהן בשינה ואכילה ושתייה
ושיחה וכיוצא בהן אלא בתלמוד תורה ודברי
חכמה...
- Even though it is a mitzvah to study during the day and at night, it is only at night that a person gains most of their wisdom.
Therefore, anyone who wishes to earn the crown of Torah should be careful with all of their nights, not to waste even one of them in sleeping, eating, drinking, talking idly, etc., but rather in the study of Torah and words of wisdom...
- How do the practical realities of the nighttime relate to an encounter with the divine? In what ways does this seem "realistic" or not in your experience?
 - What is gained or lost in codifying the Talmudic and midrashic teachings as halachah?



V. ZOHAR AND THE ORIGINS OF THE TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

11. זוהר ג, צה, א (פרשת אמור) Zohar III:98a (Vayikra, Emor) (ca. 1300, Spain)

ואוליפנא דאורייתא דבעי ליה למלעי
בהאי ליליא
אורייתא דבע"פ
בגין דיתדכון כחדא
ממבועא דנהלא עמיקא.

We learned that the Torah we must labor in
on this night [of Shavuot]
is the Oral Torah,
so that they are purified together
from the deep wellspring of the stream.

לבתר בהאי יומא
ליתי תורה שבכתב ויתחבר בה
וישתכחון כחדא בזווגא חד לעילא...

Afterwards on this day [of Shavuot]
the Written Law will come and be connected with it,
and they will become as one in a coupling Above.

ועל דא חסידי קדמאי
לא הוו ניימי בהאי ליליא והוו לעאן באורייתא,
ואמרי: ניתי לאחסנא ירותא קדישא לן ולבנן,
בתרין עלמין.

Because of this the ancient pious ones
did not sleep that night but toiled in Torah,
and said, "We and our children will have a sacred inheritance
in two worlds [i.e., this world and the world to come]."

וההוא ליליא כנסת ישראל אתעטרא עליהו
ואתיא לאזדווגא ביה במלכא
ותרווייהו מתעטרי על רישייהו
דאינון דזכאן להכי.

And on that night the Jewish People adorns itself
and comes to be coupled with the Royal God,
and they both adorn the head
of those who merit it.

Guiding Questions for Discussion:

- The Written Torah (the Bible) is related to the day, and the Oral Torah (Mishnah, Talmud, and rabbinic elaborations to the present day) is related to the night. On Shavuot, we commemorate and reenact the giving of Torah—both Torahs—at Mount Sinai. But if the Oral Torah is an elaboration of the Written Torah, then why does the Zohar urge study of the Oral Torah first, at night, and what does this imply about the relationship of the two Torahs?
- The Zohar expresses, in its unique way, that Torah study unites us (and our ancestors and descendants) with God, and assumes that this is Torah study's ultimate goal. In what ways does this assumption resonate or not, for you? What does it mean to "merit" the "crown" of both Torahs?
- What does it mean for night and day, Written and Oral Torah, this world and the world to come, to transcend their sequence and exist as a cosmic unity in the divine realm? What might we draw from this teaching about the difficult times we are living through now?

Revelation, Spiritual Maturity and Resilience

FTJC Shavuot 5780-2020

Rabbi Lisa Goldstein

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740-1810) was sometimes known as "Derbarmdiger," or "the compassionate." In this teaching about the ways we perceive and serve Gd, we can see some of the compassion he was so beloved for.

קדושת לוי, שמות, יתרו כ"ב

וידוע מאמר חכמינו ז"ל שבמתן תורה נגלה להם כזקן, וביציאת מצרים נגלה להם כבחור. והענין הוא כך, ששני בחינות יש בעבודת הבורא ברוך הוא, יש מי שעובד להבורא ברוך הוא בגין דאיהו רב ושליט ואינו משים על לבו הטובות והחסדים מה שהשם יתברך ברוך הוא משפיע עליו, כי כל הטובות וכל התענוגים כלא נחשבו נגד תענוג עבודת הבורא ברוך הוא שהוא עובד למלך גדול ואדיר כזה אשר אלף אלפים ישמשוניה ואין שיעור למרכבות כבודו וזהו נקרא מוחין דגדלות שעובד להבורא ברוך הוא בגדלות השכל. ויש מי שעובד להבורא ברוך הוא מחמת שמשפיע עליו חסדים ושפע רב וזהו נקרא מוחין דקטנות שעובד להבורא ברוך הוא בקטנות השכל ולכן ביציאת מצרים שראו הניסים והנפלאות מה שעשה להם השם יתברך ברוך הוא שלקה להמצריים בעשר מכות ונס דים סוף וביזת הים אז עבדו להשם יתברך במוחין דקטנות. וזהו על הים נגלה להם כבחור בשכל קטן, ובמתן תורה שבמעמד הר סיני פסק זוהמתן, ולא היה נחשב אצלם שום תענוג עולם הזה עבודת הבורא ברוך הוא ועיקר עבודתם היתה להבורא ברוך הוא בגין דאיהו רב ושליט, וזהו מוחין דגדלות שעבדו להשם יתברך בשכל גדול. וזהו במתן תורה נגלה להם כזקן, שיש לו שכל גדול. [...]

Kedushat Levi, Exodus, Yitro 22

We know the sages' saying that at the giving of the Torah, Gd appeared to the Israelites as an old man and at the time of the Exodus, Gd appeared to them as a young man. This is how we explain it: There are two ways of serving the blessed Creator. One way to serve the blessed Creator is to recognize His great power and not even think about the goodness and kindness that the Blessed Name showers upon you. Then all goodness and pleasure are considered as nothing compared to the pleasure of serving the blessed Creator. It's like you are serving a great and powerful king who is served by many

thousands of people; there is no measure to his glorious presence. This is called *mochin degadlut*, big mind, when you are serving with mature spiritual intelligence. But when you serve the blessed Creator in order to receive kindness and great abundance, this is called *mochin dekatnut*, small mind, because you are serving the blessed Creator with immature spiritual intelligence. So at the time of the Exodus, the people saw the miracles and wonders that the Blessed Name performed for them, in striking the Egyptians with ten plagues and the miracle of the Sea, and they served the Holy Name with *mochin dekatnut*. That's why Gd appeared to them at the Sea like a young man, to reflect their immature spiritual intelligence. But in the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, their defiled state ceased and all earthly pleasures seemed insignificant compared to serving the blessed Creator, so great and powerful. They served the Holy Name with mature spiritual intelligence, with *mochin degadlut*. [...]

1. Levi Yitzchak is exploring the midrash (Pesikta Rabbati 21:5) that says that the Israelites (and by extension, we) perceive Gd differently depending on our situation. Some interpret this to mean that when the Israelites were terrified by the approaching Egyptians, they saw Gd as a young, strong warrior arising to defend them, while at Sinai, they saw Gd as a wise, elderly law giver. Levi Yitzchak sees "old" and "young" differently, as being indicative of spiritual maturity or lack thereof. How does he understand spiritual maturity? How do you understand it?
2. Levi Yitzchak frames his understanding of spiritual maturity in the context of what one's motivation is for "serving Gd." For him, as well as the other early Hasidic masters, this was not limited to observing mitzvot. He was very interested in "*avodah bagashmiyut*," serving Gd through worldly activities, through everything we do. How do you understand serving Gd? What are your major motivations for doing so?

וכל מי שעובד להשם יתברך במוחין דגדלות אין לו שום מורא ופחד מכל המאורעות שבאות עליו, כי אף על פי שלפי הנראה הוא צרה אך בתוך מחשבתו ולבו הוא אינו נחשב אצלו לצרה, כי לבו נכון ובטוח שבוודאי לא יגיע לו שום נזק אך בחוץ לפי הנראה הוא צרה. ומי שעובד להשם יתברך במוחין דקטנות אזי כשבא עליו איזה מאורע מן המאורעות אזי נופל עליו פחד גדול שאפילו במחשבתו ולבו האי גברא בהאי פחדא יתיב ועל ידי זה מתגבר עליו כח החיצונים שהוא תחת ממשלתם וכשהם מתגברים עליו אזי הוא תחתם:

When you serve the Blessed Name with *mochin degadlut*, you do not experience dread or fear from anything that might happen to you, even if it seems like something terrible. But in your thoughts and your heart, it doesn't appear to be terrible, because your heart is

steady and trusting that no harm will come to you, even if from the outside, it seems terrible. But if you serve the Blessed Name with *mochin dekatnut*, when one of the things that can happen does happen to you, great fear can descend upon you; even in your thoughts, you can be paralyzed by your fear. In this way, negative forces can gain power over you.

Levi Yitzchak distinguishes between *mochin degadlut*, having the most expanded perspective of where we stand in the vastness of the spiritual universe, and *mochin dekatnut*, being largely focused on our own selves. What do you make of his claim that if you can be in a state of *mochin degadlut*, we experience less fear? Is this true of your experience? What helps you broaden your spiritual perspective beyond yourself? What inhibits you from doing so?

וזהו כוונת דוד המלך עליו השלום בהלל המצרי שאמר (תהלים קיח, י) כל גוים סבבוני בשם ה' כי אמילם סבוני גם סבבוני בשם ה' כי אמילם, דקשה הכפל. ומה גם שבפעם השני אמר גם סבבוני מהו גם. אך לדרכינו יובן שפיר, שדוד המלך עליו השלום אמר כל גוים, כל המאורעות שבאו עלי. מן האומות סבבוני, הם היו רק סובבים אותי מבחוץ אבל במחשבתי לא היה לי שום מורא ופחד מזה, כי היה לבי נכון ובטוח שהשם יתברך יכרית אותם מעלי ויציל אותי מן המאורע. וזהו בשם ה' כי אמילם, כי דוד המלך עליו השלום היה תמיד עובד השם יתברך במוחין דגדלות אבל לפעמים כשנפל ממדריגתו ועבד להשם יתברך במוחין דקטנות אזי כשהיה בא אליו איזה מאורע נפל עליו פחד גדול גם במחשבתו. וזהו סבוני, לפעמים בא אלי איזה מאורע מן האומות גם סבבוני הסביבה היה בי ממש כי נפלתי ממדריגתי והייתי מרגיש הסביבה במחשבתי כי נפל עלי פחד ומורא. ואף על פי כן בשם ה' כי אמילם, בטחתי בחסד עליון שיכרית כל הקמים עלי ויוציאני מצרה לרצה

This is what King David (peace be upon him) meant in the Hallel psalm (Psalm 118): "All the nations surrounded me. In the name of YHVH I will overcome them. They beset me and also surround me; in the name of YHVH I will overcome them." Why is this doubled? And what does "also" mean in the second phrase? He said, "They also surround me." What does "also" mean? We can understand this nicely. When King David said, "all the nations," he meant "all the things that happen to me." "All the nations surround me" means they only surround me on the outside, but in my thoughts, I have no dread or fear because of this. My heart is steady and trusts that the Holy Name will rid me of them and will rescue me from whatever happens. This is

the meaning of "In the name of YHVH I will overcome them." King David always served the Blessed Name with *mochin degadlut*! But sometimes he would fall from his high spiritual level and serve the Holy Name with *mochin dekatnut*, so that when something happened to him, great fear also descended upon him. This is the meaning of "they beset me:" Sometimes things happen to me. "The nations also surround me." They really surrounded me because I have fallen from my high spiritual level and I feel surrounded in my thoughts; such dread and fear have descended upon me. Still, "in the name of YHVH I will overcome them." I will trust in that supernal kindness that Gd will remove all that threatens me and bring me out from trouble (*tzarah*) to satisfaction (*ratzah*).

What do you think Levi Yitzchak means when he says that King David always served Gd from *mochin degadlut* - but that he fell from his spiritual level to a place of *mochin dekatnut*? When you experience a setback in your spiritual life, how do you react? What would help you, like Levi Yitzchak, be the compassionate one for yourself and others?

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Lisa Goldstein

Preferring Sages to Prophets:

Interpretation as Revelation

Sources compiled & translated by Laynie Soloman
Shavuot 5780

What comes to mind when you think about a 'sage'?

What about a 'prophet'?

What are the differences, similarities in the associations you have with each of these words? Where did/do these associations come from?

I. Preferring Prophets

Pirkei Avot 1:1

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples and make a fence for the Torah.

מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמָסָרָהּ
לְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ, וְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים, וְזִקְנִים
לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים מְסָרוּהָ לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת
הַגְּדוּלָה. הֵם אָמְרוּ: שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים, הֵווּ
מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, וְהַעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה,
וַעֲשׂוּ סִיג לַתּוֹרָה:

What does this story tell us about the relationship between 'sages' and 'prophets'?
Why do you think the rabbis who authored this mishnah would tell this story?

Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 12a

Rabbi Avdimi from Haifa says: From the day that the Temple was destroyed prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the Sages.

Is that to say that a Sage is not a prophet?

This is what Rabbi Avdimi is saying: Even though prophecy was taken from the prophets, it was not taken from the Sages.

Ameimar said: And a Sage is preferable to a prophet, as it is stated: **“And a prophet [navi] has a heart of wisdom” (Psalms 90:12).**¹, i.e., he is wise. When comparisons are drawn, who is compared to whom? You must say that the lesser is compared to the greater.

אמר רבי אבדימי דמן חיפה מיום שחרב בית המקדש ניטלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה לחכמים אטו חכם לאו נביא הוא הכי קאמר אע"פ שניטלה מן הנביאים מן החכמים לא ניטלה אמר אממר וחכם עדיף מנביא שנאמר (תהלים צ, יב) ונביא לבב חכמה מי נתלה במי הוי אומר קטן נתלה בגדול

*So, are sages prophets or not?!
How are sages like/not like prophets, according to this sugya?
What do you think of the claim that sages are 'preferable' to prophets?!*

II. Unfolding Revelation

Zohar 2:6b (trans. Elliot R. Wolfson)

Thus the holy One, blessed be G!d, wanted to reveal to us the supernal mysteries that he produces, as it is written, 'Indeed, my Lord God does nothing without having revealed his secret to his servants the prophets' (Amos 3:7).

The sages are more preferable to prophets in every time, for with regard to the prophets, sometimes the holy spirit rested upon them and sometimes it did not, but with regard to the sages, the holy spirit does not depart from them for even one second. Furthermore, they know what is above and what is below, but they do not need to disclose...

וּבְעָא קוּדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא לְאַחֲזָא לָן, סִתְרֵי עֲלָיָא דְהוּא עֲבִיד, הִדָּא הוּא דְכִתִּיב, (עמוס ג') כִּי לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה ה' אֱלֹהִים דְּבַר כִּי אִם גְּלָהּ סוּדוֹ אֶל עֲבָדָיו הַנְּבִיאִים. וְחִכְמֵי עֲדִיפֵי מִנְבִיאֵי בְכָל זְמַן, דְּהָא לְנְבִיאֵי לְזִמְנִין שְׁרַת עֲלֵיהוּ רִיחַ קוּדְשָׁא, וְלְזִמְנִין לֹא, וְחִכְמִין לֹא אַעֲדֵי מִנְהוֹן רִיחַ קוּדְשָׁא אֶפִּילוּ רְגַעָא חֲדָא, (זעיר) דִּידְעִין מַה דִּי לְעִילָא וְתַתָּא, וְלֹא בָּעוּ לְגַלְאָהּ. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי (יהודה) כֹּלָא חֲכַמְתָּא, וְחֲכַמְתָּא דְר' אֶלְעָזָר יִתִּיר מְכַלְהוּ.

How does this text from the Zohar expand, elaborate on, or enhance the idea that sages are preferable to prophets?

¹ The word *ve'navi* in the original context of this verse means: "and we will arrive." The full verse reads: and we will arrive with a heart of wisdom.

Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), p. 9

Revelation, for instance, is to the mystic not only a definite historical occurrence which, at a given moment in history puts an end to any further direct revelation between mankind and God. With no thought of denying Revelation as a fact of history, the mystic still conceives the source of religious knowledge and experience which bursts forth from his own heart as being of equal importance for the conception of religious truth. In other words, instead of one act of Revelation, there is a constant repetition of this act.

This new Revelation, to himself or to his spiritual master, the mystic tries to link up with the sacred texts of the old; hence new interpretation given to the canonical texts and sacred books of the great religious. To the mystic, the original act of Revelation to the community—the, as it were, public revelation of Mount Sinai, to take one instance—appears as something whose true meaning has yet to unfold itself; the secret revelation is to him and the real and decisive one. And thus, the substance of the canonical texts, like that of all other religious values, is melted down and given another form as it passes through the fiery stream of the mystical consciousness.

*Can you try to restate this in your own words?
What is Scholem saying about the nature of revelation?
What does this have to do with the idea of sages being preferable to prophets?
What do you think of this!?*

III. *Sechel* & the Fulfillment of Torah**Maharal - *Tiferet Yisrael*, Ch. 69 (R' Judah Loew ben Bezalel, 16th century Prague)**

And because the Torah was given from HaShem Yitbarach through the prophet, and the virtue of intellect (*sechel*) is greater than the prophet, like it says (Bava Batra 12a), **the sage is preferable to a prophet**, as the intellect works, it is greater than nature, as Rabbi Akiva brought proof that the action of the intellectual is greater than nature, so that the action of the intellect is greater than the prophecy that our sages, of blessed memory, said: **the sage is preferable to a prophet**, and therefore the sages are a *tikkun* and a completion of the Torah. And even though it was given at Sinai through Moshe, and he was a prophet of G'd, in any event it was on the part of wisdom, for greater than prophecy is the completion of Torah through intellect, for it clarifies everything...

ומפני כי התורה ניתנה מן השם ית' על ידי הנביא ומעלת השכל הוא יותר מן הנביא וכמו שאמרו (ב"ב י"ב ע"א) חכם עדיף מנביא, לפיכך כמו שפועל השכל הוא יותר גדול מן הטבע כמו שהביא רבי עקיבא ראיה כי פעולת האדם השכלי יותר גדול מן הטבע כך פעולת השכל יותר גדול מן הנבואה שכך אמרו ז"ל חכם עדיף מנביא ולכך החכמים הם הם תיקון והשלמה אל התורה.

ואף שנתנה בסיני על ידי משה שהיה נביא ה' מכל מקום מצד החכמה שהיא גדולה מן הנבואה השלמת התורה על ידי השכל שהוא מברר הכל...

This thing teaches about the things that we said, since the Torah is clarified through the sages, since they have a special, separate intellect (*sechel*), and *sechel* is above prophecy, and *sechel* clarifies everything, and therefore those who err they will not know and they will not understand in *chochma*; for if they were also wise in creation, they would see before them the thing that all things are completed through the human intellect, so too Torah comes into the world like all of the natural things come into the world—natural things do not enter the world clarified entirely, only with the human intellect, which is needed to clarify them.

And thus the brilliant Torah that came to Moshe through prophecy did not come entirely clarified and fulfilled, and through the interpretations of the words by the sages is the clarification and fulfillment of the prophecy.

דבר זה מורה על הדברים שאמרנו כי בירור התורה הוא על ידי חכמים שיש להם שכל נבדל והשכל למעלה מן הנבואה והשכל מברר הכל, לכך הטועים האלו לא ידעו ולא יבינו בחכמה כי אילו היו מתחכמים גם כן בבריאה היו רואים לפנייהם דבר זה כי כל הדברים הם שיושלמו על ידי האדם השכלי וכך התורה באה לעולם כמו שבאו לעולם כל הדברים הטבעיים שלא באו לעולם מבוררים לגמרי רק כי האדם השכלי צריך לברר אותם.

וכן התורה השכלית שבאה למשה בנבואה לא באה כל כך בבירור ובזכוך פירוש הדברים ועל ידי החכמים התורה היא בירור וזכוך הנבואה.

What are the implications of the Mahara"l's suggestion that the Torah needs "tikkun and completion" from Sages? What does this imply about Torah? What does this imply about us as interpreters?

How do you feel about this idea that our interpretations are a "tikkun" and fulfillment of the Torah?

Where do you think this 'sechel' comes from? Who has it?