

LESSON



THE TORAH

What's in the twenty-four books of the Jewish Bible? When and by whom were they transcribed? In this lesson, we review the contents of the Tanach—the Five Books of Moses, the eight books of the Prophets, and the eleven “Scriptural” books—and explore the relationship between the “Written Torah” and the many thousands of works of Jewish teaching that extend from it.

FOR OUT OF ZION SHALL
GO FORTH THE TORAH I
Yossi Rosenstein, acrylic
on canvas, Israel, 2021.

I. WHAT IS THE TORAH?

In this section, we introduce the aims and goals of this course. The vast body of Jewish learning includes many fields—Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Halachah, Kabbalah, Musar, Chakirah, and so on. Each of these “genres” includes works by hundreds or even thousands of different authors, composed over many centuries in every part of the world. Our goal is to understand the unique character and function of each genre of Torah, familiarize ourselves with its primary works and authors, and experience the “flavor” of learning it represents.

We begin with the basic question: What is the Torah? We learn that the term “the Torah” refers both to one specific book, as well as to the entire body of Jewish teaching. What is the nature of the relationship between the two “Torahs”? How did “Torah A” develop into “Torah B”?





FIGURE 1.1

Course Map—Genres of Torah

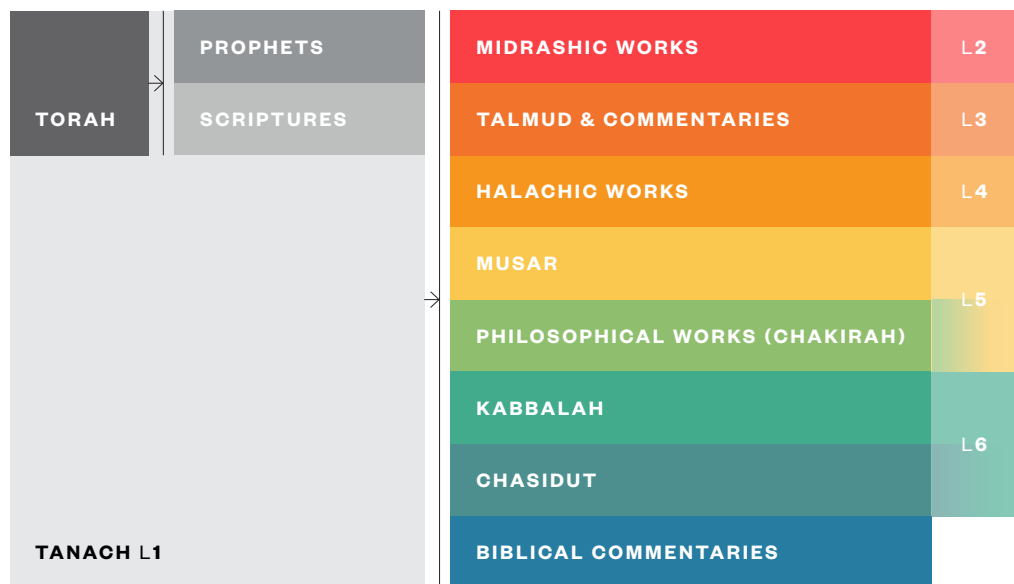


FIGURE 1.2

Two Definitions of Torah



(A)
THE TORAH

(B)
THE TORAH

II. THE WRITTEN TORAH AND THE ORAL TORAH

The Torah comes in two forms: written and oral. Jewish tradition insists that the “Written Torah” be treated as an inviolable text—every word and letter is significant and must be meticulously preserved. In contrast, the “Oral Torah” must be preserved as an ongoing oral communication from teacher to disciple; for many centuries, it was even forbidden for it to be officially transcribed. This duality is integral to the nature of Torah.



TEXT 1

The Pen and the Mouth

Talmud, Gitin 60b

דְּבָרִים שֶׁבִּכְתָּב אֵי אֶתָּה רִשְׁאֵי לְאוּמָרָן עַל פֶּה.
דְּבָרִים שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה אֵי אֶתָּה רִשְׁאֵי לְאוּמָרָן בְּכֶתֶב.

The words that were given in writing—you are not allowed to communicate them orally. And the words that were taught orally—you are not allowed to communicate them in writing.



Frontispiece to the *Griselini Bible* depicting the binding of Isaac. Printed by the Bragadin printing office in Venice, this 1739 edition of the Tanach is most famous for its four engraved frontispieces. (Braginsky Collection 150)

BABYLONIAN TALMUD

A literary work of monumental proportions that draws upon the legal, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and historical traditions of Judaism. The 37 tractates of the Babylonian Talmud contain the teachings of the Jewish sages from the period after the destruction of the 2nd Temple through the 5th century CE. It has served as the primary vehicle for the transmission of the Oral Law and the education of Jews over the centuries; it is the entry point for all subsequent legal, ethical, and theological Jewish scholarship.



QUESTION

Why is the Torah formulated as both a written text and an oral dialogue? What would be lacking if it were only a written document, or only an oral tradition?

Four horizontal grey bars for writing answers.



*Jewish Bookshop on
Wentworth Street,
Pearl Binder, in The Real
East End by Thomas Burke
(London, U.K.: Constable,
1932), lithograph.*

III. THE TWENTY-FOUR BOOKS OF TANACH

In this section, we survey the twenty-four books of the Written Torah, which the world knows as “the Jewish Bible.” We learn that these are divided into three categories—“Torah,” “Prophets,” and “Writings”—representing three levels of Divine revelation. We are introduced to the contents of each book, its author/transcriber, and its historical background. We also peruse selected texts (appearing in the “Additional Features” for this lesson) that highlight the variety of historical, legal, philosophical, mystical, and inspirational content in these books.

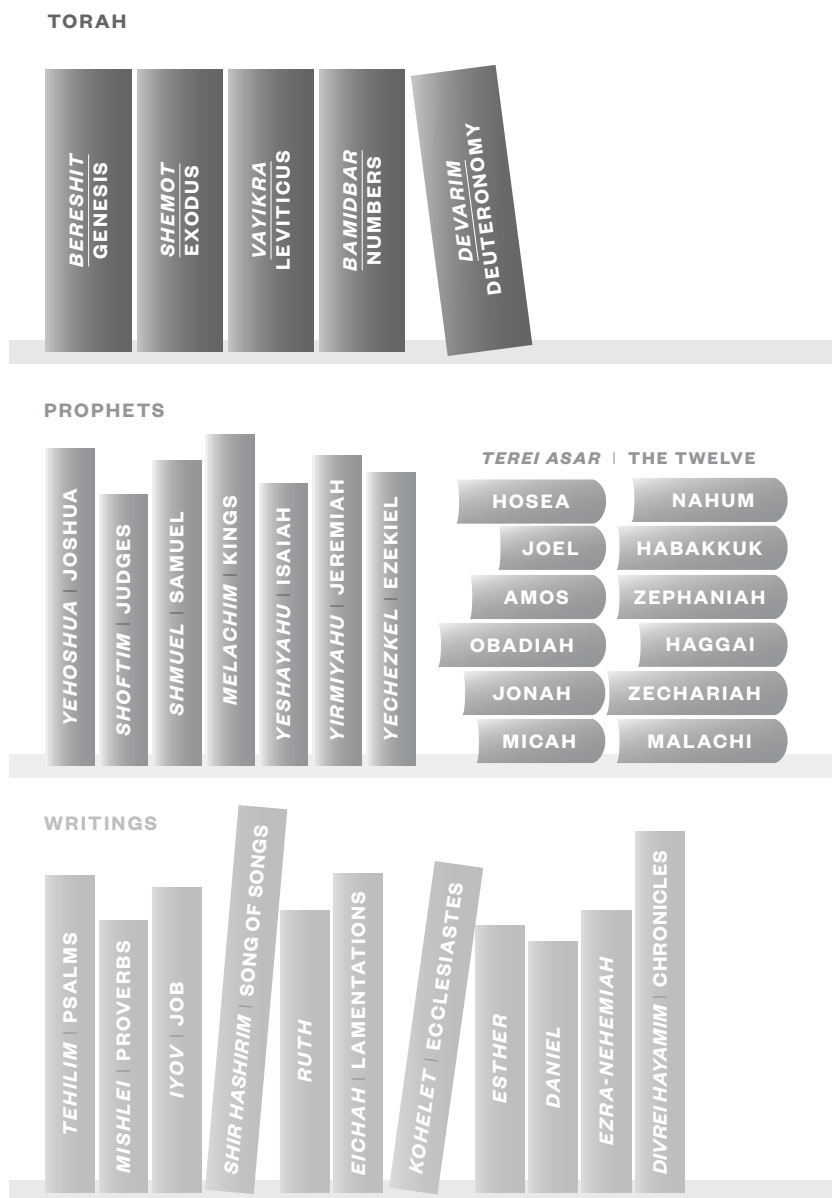


BOYS TIME
Alex Levin, oil on canvas.



FIGURE 1.3

The Jewish Bible



For a detailed chart, see the infographic “Contents of the Twenty-Four Books of the Tanach” on Side B of the pullout card provided with your Student Textbook.



TEXT 2

Encyclopedia of Life

Mishnah, Avot 5:21

הַפֶּה בָּהּ וְהַפֶּה בָּהּ, דְּכֹלֵא בָּהּ.
 וְבָהּ תִּתְחַזֵּי, וְסִיב וּבִלְהָ בָּהּ, וּמִנָּה לֹא תִזְוַע,
 שְׂאִין לָהּ מִדָּה טוֹבָה הַיְמָנָה.

Delve and delve into it, for all is in it;
 see with it; grow old and worn in it; do not
 budge from it, for there is nothing better.


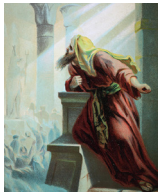

AVOT (ETHICS OF THE FATHERS; PIRKEI AVOT)

A 6-chapter work on Jewish ethics that is studied widely by Jewish communities, especially during the summer. The first 5 chapters are from the Mishnah, tractate Avot. Avot differs from the rest of the Mishnah in that it does not focus on legal subjects; it is a collection of the sages' wisdom on topics related to character development, ethics, healthy living, piety, and the study of Torah.



FIGURE 1.4

Three Modes of Divine Communication

SECTION OF WRITTEN TORAH		MODE OF DIVINE COMMUNICATION
TORAH (FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES)		Direct Communication
NEVIIM—PROPHETS		Prophecy
KETUVIM—WRITINGS		<i>Ru'ach Hakodesh</i> ("Divine Spirit")



TEXT 3

Beyond Prophecy

Exodus 33:11 and Numbers 12:6–8

וְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים,
כַּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ.

G-d* would speak to Moses face-to-face,
as a man speaks to his fellow.

אִם יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֲכֶם, ה' בְּמִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים אֶתְוֹדַע, בְּחִלּוֹם
אֶדְבָּר בוֹ. לֹא כֵן עֲבָדֵי מֹשֶׁה, בְּכָל בַּיִתִּי נֶאֱמָן הוּא. פֶּה
אֶל פֶּה אֶדְבָּר בוֹ, וּמִרְאָה וְלֹא בְּחִידָת, וּתְמִנַת ה' יִבִּיט.

If there be a prophet among you, I, G-d, will
make Myself known to them in a vision; I will
speak to them in a dream. Not so is My servant
Moses; in all My house he is trusted. Mouth
to mouth I speak with him, in a vision and not
in riddles; he gazes at the image of G-d.

* Throughout this book, “G-d” and “L-rd” are written with a hyphen instead of an “o” (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred Divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.



TEXT 4

The Limits of Prophecy

Talmud, Megilah 14a

אַרְבָּעִים וְשִׁמּוֹנָה נְבִיאִים וְשִׁבְעַת נְבִיאֹת נִתְנַבְּאוּ לָהֶם
לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלֹא פָחַתּוּ וְלֹא הוֹתִירוּ עַל מֶה שֶׁכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה.

Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses
prophesied to the people of Israel, and
they neither subtracted from nor added
to what is written in the Torah.



TEXT 5

The Divine Spirit

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:45

שִׁימּוּצָא הָאָדָם כְּאֵלּוּ עֲנִין אֶחָד חָל עָלָיו, וְכֹחַ אַחֵר הַתְּחִידֵשׁ
וְיִשְׁמְהוּ לְדַבֵּר. וַיִּדְבֵּר בְּחֻכְמוֹת אוּ בְתִשְׁבָּחוֹת אוּ בְדַבְרֵי
הַזְּהָרָה מוֹעִילִים אוּ בְעֲנִינִים הַנְּהַגִּים אוּ אֱלוֹקִים; וְזֶה
כָּלוּ בְעֵת הַיְקִיצָה וְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ הַחוּשִׁים עַל מְנַהֲגֵיהֶם.
וְזֶהוּ אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא מְדַבֵּר בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ.

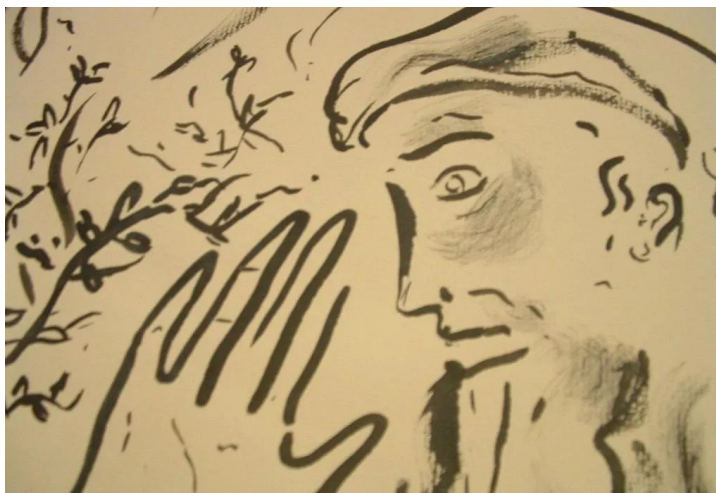
וּבְזֶה הַמִּין מ'רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ' חִבֵּר דָּוִד תְּלִים, וְחִבֵּר
שְׁלֹמֹה מְשָׁלִי וְקֹהֶלֶת וְשִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים; וְכֵן דְּנִיָּאל וְאִיּוֹב
וְדַבְרֵי הַיָּמִים וְשֶׁאֵר ה'כְּתוּבִים' בְּזֶה הַמִּין מ'רוּחַ
הַקֹּדֶשׁ' חִבְּרוּ... וְעַל פְּיוֹצָא ב'רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ' הַזֶּה
אָמַר דָּוִד "רוּחַ ה' דָּבַר בִּי וּמָלְתוּ עָלַי לְשׁוֹנֵי" - רְצוֹנוֹ
לֹאמַר, שֶׁהִיא הַבִּיאָתָהּ לְדַבֵּר בְּאֵלּוּ הַדְּבָרִים.

The person feels as if something has come upon them, and as if they have received a new power that drives them to speak. They speak words of wisdom, or compose hymns, or exhort their fellows with useful advice, or discourse on matters of communal leadership or theology; all this while they are awake and in the full possession of their senses. Such a person is said to speak by *ru'ach hakodesh*.

It was through this kind of Divine inspiration that David composed the Psalms, and Solomon composed the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; also Daniel, Job, Chronicles, and the rest of the “Writings” were written in this manner. . . . In reference to such *ru'ach hakodesh*, David says, “The spirit of G-d spoke in me, and His word is on my tongue” (II SAMUEL 23:2); i.e., the spirit of G-d caused him to speak these words.

**RABBI MOSHE
BEN MAIMON
(MAIMONIDES, RAMBAM)
1135-1204**

Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of Halachic consensus.



A PROPHET

Shoshanna Brombacher, India
ink on colored paper, 2003.

IV. THE DIVINE AND THE HUMAN IN TORAH

If the Written Torah is the product of Divine revelation, what is the nature of the Oral Torah? Are the teachings of the Oral Torah also of Divine origin, given to Moses at Mount Sinai and transmitted from teacher to disciple, or are they the product of human minds, the innovations of many generations of Torah scholars? The Torah itself seems to contain mixed messages on this question.



TEXT 6

The Sinaitic Origin of Torah

Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah 2:4

מִקְרָא, מִשְׁנָה, תְּלִמוּד וְאַגְדָּה,
אֶפְלוּ מָה שֶׁתְּלָמִיד וְתִיק עֲתִיד לְחַדֵּשׁ,
כִּבְר נֶאֱמַר לְמוֹשֶׁה בְּסִינִי.

Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, and Agadah,
even what a proficient student is destined to
innovate, were already said to Moses at Sinai.



Woodcut depiction of the giving of the Torah in a 1775 book of Jewish customs by Shimon Levy Ginsburg, printed by Gerard Johann Janson in the printing house of Israel Mondovi in Amsterdam. (Gross Family Collection, Tel Aviv)

JERUSALEM TALMUD

A commentary to the Mishnah, compiled during the 4th and 5th centuries. The Jerusalem Talmud predates its Babylonian counterpart by 100 years and is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic. While the Babylonian Talmud is the most authoritative source for Jewish law, the Jerusalem Talmud remains an invaluable source for the spiritual, intellectual, ethical, historical, and legal traditions of Judaism.



Explore the development of the written and oral Torah with **Rabbi Chaim Block**: *The Written and Oral Torah, Explained*
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TEXT 7

The Torah Is Not in Heaven

Talmud, Bava Metzi'a 59a–b

בְּאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם הִשְׁיב רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר כָּל תְּשׁוּבוֹת שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם
וְלֹא קִבְּלוּ הַיְמָנוּ. אָמַר לָהֶם: . . . "אִם הִלְכָה כְּמוֹתִי,
אֲמַת הַמַּיִם יוֹכִיחוּ!" חָזְרוּ אֲמַת הַמַּיִם לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם.
אָמְרוּ לוֹ: "אֵין מִבֵּיאִין רְאִיָּה מֵאֲמַת הַמַּיִם."

חָזַר וְאָמַר לָהֶם: "אִם הִלְכָה כְּמוֹתִי, כְּתָלִי בַּיִת הַמְדָּרֶשׁ
יוֹכִיחוּ!" הֵטוּ כְּתָלִי בַּיִת הַמְדָּרֶשׁ לִפְלֵי. גָּעַר בָּהֶם רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ,
אָמַר לָהֶם: "אִם תִּלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים מְנַצְּחִים זֶה אֶת זֶה בְּהִלְכָה,
אֵתֶם מָה טִיבְכֶם?" לֹא נִפְּלוּ מִפְּנֵי כְבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ,
וְלֹא זָקְפוּ מִפְּנֵי כְבוֹדוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר, וַעֲדִין מְטִין וְעוֹמְדִין.

חָזַר וְאָמַר לָהֶם: "אִם הִלְכָה כְּמוֹתִי, מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם
יוֹכִיחוּ!" יִצְאָת בַּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: "מָה לָּכֶם אֲצֵל
רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר, שֶׁהִלְכָה כְּמוֹתוֹ בְּכָל מְקוֹם!"

עֲמַד רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ עַל רִגְלָיו וְאָמַר:
"לֹא בַּשָּׁמַיִם הִיא!" (דְּבָרִים ל, יב).

מֵאֵי "לֹא בַּשָּׁמַיִם הִיא"? אָמַר רַבִּי יְרֵמְיָה: שֶׁכָּבֵר נִתְּנָה
תְּנֻחָה מִהַר סִינַי, אֵין אָנוּ מִשְׁגִּיחִין בְּבַת קוֹל. שֶׁכָּבֵר כְּתוּבָה
בְּהַר סִינַי בְּתוֹרָה, "אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת" (שְׁמוֹת כג, ב).

On that day, Rabbi Eliezer brought them all
sorts of proofs, but they were rejected. So he
said to them, . . . "If the law is as I say, this water
channel will prove it." The water channel began

flowing backward. Said they to him, “One does not cite Halachic proof from a water channel.”

Rabbi Eliezer then said to them, “If the law is as I say, the walls of the study hall will prove it.” The walls of the study hall leaned in and began to fall. Rabbi Yehoshua scolded the walls: “If Torah scholars are contending with each other in matters of Torah law, what is the nature of your involvement?” The walls did not fall, out of deference to Rabbi Yehoshua, and neither did they straighten, out of deference to Rabbi Eliezer; they still remain leaning.

Rabbi Eliezer then said to them, “If the law is as I say, let it be proven from Heaven!” There then issued a Heavenly voice, which proclaimed: “What do you want of Rabbi Eliezer—the law is as he says. . . .”

Rabbi Yehoshua stood on his feet and said: “[The Torah] is not in heaven!” (DEUTERONOMY 30:12).

What is the meaning of the statement, “It is not in heaven”? Said Rabbi Yirmiyah: “As the Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai, we take no notice of Heavenly voices. For You, G-d, have already written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, ‘Follow the majority’” (EXODUS 23:2).



TEXT 8

Prophets vs. Sages

Maimonides, *Introduction to the Mishnah*

אָלף נְבִיאִים, כָּלֶם כְּאַלְיָהוּ וְאַלְיָשָׁע, יְהִיו סוֹבְרִים סְבָרָא
 אַחַת, וְאַלְף חֲכָמִים וְחֲכָם סוֹבְרִים הִפּוּ הַסְבָּרָא הַהִיא,
 "אַחֲרֵי רַבִּים לְהִטּוֹת", וְהִלְכָה כְּדַבְּרֵי הָאָלֶף חֲכָמִים
 וְחֲכָם . . . וְכֵן אִם יַעֲיֵד הַנְּבִיא שֶׁהִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
 אָמַר אֵלָיו שֶׁהִדִּין בְּמִצְוָה פְּלוּגִית כָּךְ, וְכִי סְבַרְת פְּלוּגִי
 הִיא אֱמֶת . . . הוּא נְבִיא שֶׁקֶר . . . כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "לֹא
 בְּשִׁמְיִם הִיא". וְלֹא הִרְשָׁנוּ הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְלַמֵּד מִן
 הַנְּבִיאִים, אֶלָּא מִן הַחֲכָמִים, אֲנָשֵׁי הַסְּבָרוֹת וְהַדְּעוֹת.

If one thousand prophets, all on the level of Elijah and Elisha, have one opinion on a matter of Torah law, and one thousand and one sages have an opposite opinion, we must “follow the majority,” and the ruling is according to the opinion of the sages. . . . Similarly, if a prophet testifies that G-d has revealed to him that the law regarding this commandment is such and such, or that the opinion of a certain sage is the correct one, . . . he is a false prophet, . . . as it is written, “It is not in heaven.” G-d has not permitted us to learn Torah law from prophets, but from sages basing themselves on logical arguments and opinions.



TEXT 9

Moses Meets Rabbi Akiva

Talmud, Menachot 29b

בְּשַׁעַת שֶׁעָלָה מֹשֶׁה לְמָרוֹם, מֵצָא וְהִקְדֹּשׁ
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֵׁיּוֹשֵׁב וְקוֹשֵׁר כְּתָרִים לְאוֹתֵיזוֹת. אָמַר
 לְפָנָיו: "רְבוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, מִי מְעַכֵּב עַל יְדָדָה?"
 אָמַר לוֹ: "אָדָם אֶחָד יֵשׁ שֶׁעֲתִיד לִהְיוֹת בְּסוֹף
 כְּמָה דוֹרוֹת, וְעַקִּיבָא בֶן יוֹסֵף שָׂמוֹ, שֶׁעֲתִיד לְדַרֵּשׁ
 עַל כָּל קוֹץ וְקוֹץ תִּילִין תִּילִין שֶׁל הַלְּכוֹת."
 אָמַר לְפָנָיו: "רְבוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, הֲרֵאֵהוּ לִי" ...
 הֲלֵךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּסוֹף שְׂמוֹנָה שְׁוֹרוֹת, וְלֹא הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ
 מָה הֵן אוֹמְרִים. תִּשָּׁשׁ כָּחוֹ. כִּיִּן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְדָבָר
 אֶחָד, אָמְרוּ לוֹ תִּלְמִידָיו: "רַבִּי, מִנֵּין לָהּ?"
 אָמַר לָהֶן: "הֲלֹכָה לְמֹשֶׁה מְסִינִי". נִתְּיָשְׁבָה דַעְתוֹ.

When Moses ascended on high, he found
 G-d attaching coronets to the letters of the
 Torah. Said Moses to G-d: "Master of the
 world! Why have You need for these?"

Said G-d to him: "There will be a man some
 generations hence, whose name is Akiva the son
 of Joseph, and he will expound mounds upon
 mounds of laws from each and every tittle."

Said Moses: "Master of the world,
 show him to me." ...

Moses was sitting behind eight rows [of Rabbi Akiva's disciples], but he did not understand what they were saying, and he became despondent. Until they reached one teaching, and Rabbi Akiva's disciples said to him, "Master, from where do you know this?"

Said Rabbi Akiva to them, "It is the law given to Moses at Sinai." And Moses's mind was eased.



Textual illustration in the *Ashkenazi Haggadah* depicting Rabbi Akiva discussing the story of Passover together with four other sages. Produced in Germany, c. 1460, this beautiful manuscript, decorated by Yoel ben Shimon Feibush, contains many miniatures and marginal drawings to accompany the Haggadah's text. (British Library, London)

V. A LIVING ORGANISM

One approach to resolving the paradox of Divine revelation and human innovation in Torah is with an analogy from the field of biology. A single cell, encoding everything that it will become, develops within the womb into a living organism. Similarly, the human mind is the “womb” in which the Divine truths communicated at Sinai gestate and develop into the life-wisdom and guidance of Torah.

In this section, we also answer the question (posed earlier in Section II) as to why Torah consists of both written and oral components. The Torah is a *partnership* of Divine revelation and human intellectual toil—a partnership that finds expression in the differences between the written and oral forms of Torah and the relationship between them.



FIGURE 1.5

The Torah as a Living Organism



(A)



(B)



TEXT 10

The Baker and the Weaver

Midrash, *Tana Devei Eliyahu, Eliyahu Zuta 2*

פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך, מצאני אדם אחד . . .
 והיה בו מקרא ולא היה בו משנה, ואמר לי: "רבי, מקרא
 נתן לנו מהר סיני, משנה לא נתן לנו מהר סיני."
 ואמרתי לו: "בני, מקרא ומשנה שניהם מפי הגבורה
 נאמרו. ומה בין מקרא למשנה? אלא משלו משל:
 למה הדבר דומה? למלך בשר ודם שהיה לו שני
 עבדים, והיה אוהבן אהבה גדולה. ונתן לזה קב חטין,
 ולזה קב חטין, ולכל אחד מהן נתן גם כן אגודה של
 פשתן. הפקח שבהן נטל את הפשתן וארג מפה יפה,
 ונטל את החטין ועשאן סלת, ובררה וטחנה ולשה
 ואפאה, וסדרה על השלחן ופרס עליה מפה יפה, והניחו
 עד שבא המלך. והטפש שבהן לא עשה כלום.
 לימים, בא המלך לתוך ביתו ואמר להם לשני עבדיו:
 'בני, הביאו לי מה שנתתי לכם'. אחד מהן הוציא
 את הפת של סלת על השלחן ומפה היפה פרוסה
 עליו, ואחד מהן הוציא את החטין בקפה ואגדה
 של פשתן עליהם . . . איזה מהן חביב יותר?
 כשנתן הקדוש ברוך הוא את התורה לישראל
 לא נתנה להם אלא כחטין להוציא מהן
 סלת, וכפשתן לארג מהן בגד . . ."

I was once traveling on the road when a person encountered me. . . . This person had Scripture,

TANA DEVEI ELIYAHU

A Midrashic work, sometimes referred to as *Seder Eliyahu*. Midrash is the designation of a particular genre of rabbinic literature usually forming a running commentary on specific books of the Bible. This work deals with the Divine precepts, their rationales, and the importance of knowledge of Torah, prayer, and repentance. The work is divided into 2 sections (*sedarim*): *Eliyahu Rabah* and *Eliyahu Zuta*.

but he did not have Mishnah. He said to me, “Master, Scripture was given to us at Mount Sinai; Mishnah was not given to us at Mount Sinai.” I said to him, “My son, both Scripture and Mishnah issued from the mouth of the Almighty. What is the difference between them? The following parable was said to explain this:

“There was a king who had two beloved servants. He gave a measure of wheat to one of them, and a measure of wheat to the other. He also gave each a bundle of flax. The wise one among them took the flax and wove a beautiful cloth out of it; he took the wheat and made fine flour from it, sifting it, milling it, kneading it, and baking it. He arranged it on a table and spread the beautiful cloth over it, setting it aside for when the king would come. The foolish servant did nothing.

“Then the king arrived in his palace and said to his two servants: ‘My children, present to me what I have gifted you.’ The first one brought out the bread made of fine flour on a table with a beautiful cloth spread over it; the other brought out the wheat in a box with the bundle of flax on top of it. . . . Now, which of the servants is more precious [to the king] . . . ?

“When the Almighty gave the Torah to the people of Israel, He gave it as wheat from which to make fine flour, and as flax from which to weave a cloth. . . .”



TEXT 11

Wording vs. Understanding

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,
Likutei Sichot 29, p. 176

בְּתוֹרָה שֶׁבִּכְתָּב מֵאֲכֹס מְעַן בְּרִכַּת הַתּוֹרָה בְּקִרְיָאָתָהּ, וְעַן
אֶפְלוּ לֹא יָדַע מֵאֵי קֵאָמֵר. בְּלִמּוּד תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּעַל פֶּה אֶבְעֵר,
אִיז אֵיב לֹא יָדַע מֵאֵי קֵאָמֵר, קָעַן מְעַן קִיִּין בְּרִכַּת הַתּוֹרָה
נִיט מֵאֲכֹס. לְמוֹדָה אִיז פֶּאֶרְבוּנְדֵן מִיט הַבְּנֵת הָאֲדָם.

With the Written Torah, a person says the blessing on the Torah when they read it, even if they don't understand what they are saying. With the Oral Torah, however, a person cannot say the blessing unless they understand what they are saying. For as regards the Oral Torah, "learning" entails human understanding.

**RABBI MENACHEM
MENDEL SCHNEERSON
1902-1994**

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as "the Lubavitcher Rebbe," or simply as "the Rebbe." Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe's scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.



A scene from the *Darmstadt Haggadah*, a fifteenth-century manuscript, elaborately decorated by Israel ben Meir Heidelberg. Its most lavish pages show remarkable scenes of men and women passing open books and studying together, emphasizing the communal sharing of knowledge and Jewish unity. (Darmstadt University and State Library, Germany)

VI. THE MANY FACES OF TORAH

The twenty-four books of the Written Torah include every subject and style of learning: law and ethics, history and biography, poetry and philosophy, cosmology and psychology. These expand into the various “genres” that developed in the Oral Torah—Halachah, Agadah, Kabbalah, Musar, and so on—empowering us to discover the area of Torah that most resonates with us.

Indeed, the Written Torah is the “source code” for the whole of the Oral Torah. As the examples in this section illustrate—and as we will repeatedly discover in the next five lessons—every teaching of the Oral Torah can be traced back to a source text in the Written Torah.



TEXT 12

The Perpetual Voice

Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horowitz,
Shenei Luchot Haberit, 1:25a–b

וְעֵינֵינוּ נֹתֵת הַתּוֹרָה, בְּאֵמֶת ה' יִתְבָּרַךְ כִּכְּבֹד נִתְּנָהּ, אֲבָל
עֵדֵינוּ נֹתֵת הַתּוֹרָה וְלֹא יִפְסֹק. וְדָבָר זֶה צָרִיף בְּאוֹר רָחֵב.

הַפְּסוּק אוֹמֵר: (דְּבָרִים ה', יט) "אֵת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה
דָּבָר ה' אֵל כָּל קְהִלָּתְכֶם בְּהָר... קוֹל גְּדוֹל וְלֹא יִסָּף."
פִּירֵשׁ רַש"י: "וְלֹא יִסָּף, מִתְּרַגְּמֵינוּ "וְלֹא פְּסֹק", כִּי
קוֹלוֹ חֲזָק וְקָנִים לְעוֹלָם. דָּבָר אַחֵר: וְלֹא יִסָּף, לֹא
הוֹסִיף לְהִרְאוֹת בְּאוֹתוֹ פְּמַבְי" עַד כָּאֵן לְשׁוֹנוֹ.

יֵשׁ בְּזֶה הָעֵינֵינוּ סוּד כְּמוֹס, וְהַשְּׁנֵי פְּרוּשִׁים כְּלָם הֵם
אֵמֶת. עֵינֵינוּ "לֹא יִסָּף" - לֹא הוֹסִיף, הוּא מִצּוֹת דְּרַבְּנָנוּ
וְחִבּוּרָתָן הֵן וְסִיגִיָּהֶן עֵדֵינוּ לֹא נִצְטוּוּ מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה. וְעֵינֵינוּ
"לֹא פְּסֹק" פְּרוּשׁ שְׂאֵף זֶה לֹא פְּסֹק מִהַקּוֹל הַהוּא, כִּי

**RABBI YESHAYAHU
HALEVI HOROWITZ
(SHALAH)
1565-1630**

Kabbalist and author. Rabbi Horowitz was born in Prague and served as rabbi in several prominent Jewish communities, including Frankfurt am Main and his native Prague. After the passing of his wife in 1620, he moved to Israel. In Tiberias, he completed his *Shenei Luchot Haberit*, an encyclopedic compilation of kabbalistic ideas. He is buried in Tiberias, next to Maimonides.

הָיָה כָּלוּל בְּקוֹל הַהוּא בְּכַח, אֲבָל לְכָל זְמַן וְעַתָּה, לֹא הִגִּיעַ
 עַד־יָן עֵת שְׂיֵצֵא מִפֶּחַ אֶל הַפֶּעַל, כִּי הָיָה הַדְּבָר תְּלוּי לְפִי
 הַתְּעוֹרָרוֹת הַתְּחַתּוּנִים וְלְפִי מֵהוּתָם וְאִיכּוּתָם, וְלְפִי
 מִדְּרָגוֹת נְשָׁמוֹת שֶׁבְּכָל דּוֹר וְדוֹר, וְאַזְ הוֹסִיפוּ הַחֲכָמִים
 לְהַתְּעוֹרֵר הַכַּח הָעֲלִיּוֹן וְיֵצֵא לַפֶּעַל בְּזִמְנוֹ וּבְעֵתוֹ, לֹא חָס
 וְשָׁלוֹם שֶׁחֲדָשׁוּ חֲכָמִים מִדְּעַתָּם, רַק כְּוִנּוּ דַעַת עֲלֵיוֹן.

[In the blessing recited before studying Torah, we say, “Blessed are you, G-d,] Who gives the Torah.” In truth, G-d has already given us the Torah [at Mount Sinai]; yet He still “gives the Torah,” perpetually. This matter requires some elaboration.

The Torah says (DEUTERONOMY 5:19): “These words G-d spoke to your entire assembly at the mountain . . . a great voice that did not cease.” Rashi explains the meaning of the words “did not cease” (*velo yasaf*) in accordance with the translation by Unkelos—“it did not stop,” for it is a powerful voice that endures forever. Rashi also offers a second interpretation of the words “*velo yasaf*”—“it did not anymore,” i.e., that G-d did not again speak so openly and publicly as He did at Sinai.

There is a profound significance in these two interpretations, as they are simultaneously true. The Divine voice spoke the Torah at Sinai and “did not anymore,” as all the subsequent laws and edicts instituted by the sages throughout the



generations were not explicitly commanded by G-d at the time. At the same time, “it did not cease,” for everything was included, in potential form, within that voice. It is only that “for everything there is a time and season” (ECCLESIASTES 3:1), and the time had not yet come for that potential to emerge into actuality, as that depends on the initiative of those down here below, in accordance with their nature and their abilities, and in accordance with the qualities of the souls of each generation. The sages of each generation were then roused to actualize from that potential in accordance with the time and season. Thus, the sages did not invent anything from their own minds, G-d forbid, but rather actualized the Divine intent.



TEXT 13

The Mitzvah of Shabbat

Exodus 20:8-10

זְכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ, שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ
כָּל מְלֶאכֶתֶךָ, וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work.
And the seventh day is a rest-day unto G-d.



TEXT 14

The Resting Mind

Mechilta, Exodus 20:9

”שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד׃”
 וְכִי אֶפְשֶׁר לוֹ לְאָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלֶאכֶתוֹ בְּשֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים?
 אֲלָא שְׁבוֹת כְּאֵלוֹ מְלֶאכֶתָּהּ עֲשׂוּיָהּ . . .
 שְׁבוֹת מִמְחֻשְׁבֵּת עֲבוּדָהּ.

“Six days you shall labor [and do all your work]”:

Is it possible for a person to do all their work
 in six days? But [the meaning of this verse is:]
 Rest [on Shabbat] as if your work is done.
 . . . Rest from even thinking about work.

MECHILTA

A Halachic Midrash to Exodus. Midrash is the designation of a particular genre of rabbinic literature usually forming a running commentary on specific books of the Bible. The name *Mechilta* means “rule” and was given to this Midrash because its comments and explanations are based on fixed rules of exegesis. This work is often attributed to Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, a contemporary of Rabbi Akiva, though there are some references to later sages in this work.



TEXT 15

The Two Paths

Deuteronomy 30:15–19

רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת
 הַטּוֹב, וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע . . .
 הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ, הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה,
 וּבַחֲרָתָּ בְּחַיִּים.

See, I have set before you this day,
 life and good, and death and evil. . . .

Life and death I have set before you,
 blessing and curse; and you shall choose life.



TEXT 16

The Basis of Morality

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 5:1–4

רְשׁוּת לְכָל אָדָם נִתְּוֶנָה, אִם רָצָה לְהִטּוֹת עֲצָמוֹ לְדָרֶךְ
טוֹבָה וְלִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק, הִרְשׁוּת בְּיָדוֹ, וְאִם רָצָה לְהִטּוֹת
עֲצָמוֹ לְדָרֶךְ רָעָה וְלִהְיוֹת רָשָׁע, הִרְשׁוּת בְּיָדוֹ . . .

וְדָבָר זֶה עֶקֶר גָּדוֹל הוּא, וְהוּא עִמּוּד הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "רְאֵה נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים" . . . אֵלֹהֵינוּ
הִקְלָה הָיָה גּוֹזֵר עַל הָאָדָם לִהְיוֹת צַדִּיק אוֹ רָשָׁע, אוֹ
אֵלֹהֵינוּ הָיָה שֶׁם דָּבָר שֶׁמוֹשֵׁף אֶת הָאָדָם בְּעֶקֶר תּוֹלְדוֹתוֹ
לְדָרֶךְ מִן הַדְּרָכִים, אוֹ לְמַדְע מִן הַמַּדְעוֹת, אוֹ לְדַעָה מִן
הַיְדַעוֹת, אוֹ לְמַעֲשֵׂה מִן הַמַּעֲשִׂים . . . הַיֵּאֵף הָיָה מְצַוָּה
לָנוּ עַל יְדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים: עֲשֵׂה כֹּה וְאַל תַּעֲשֵׂה כֹּה . . . ?
וּמָה מְקוֹם הָיָה לְכָל הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָהּ? וּבֵאֵי זֶה דִּין וְאֵיזָה
מִשְׁפָּט נִפְרַע מִן הָרָשָׁע אוֹ מִשָּׁלֵם שְׂכָר לְצַדִּיק . . . ?

Freedom of choice has been granted to every person. If a person wants to turn to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is theirs; and if a person wants to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is theirs. . . .

This truth is a fundamental principle and a pillar of the Torah and its commandments. As it is written, "See, I have set before you this day, life [and good, and death and evil]. . . ." Were G-d to decree that a person should be righteous or wicked, or if there were to exist something

in the very essence of a person’s nature that would compel them toward a particular path, a particular conviction, a particular character trait, or a particular deed, . . . how could G-d command us through the prophets “do this” and “do not do this” . . . ? What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous . . . ?



TEXT 17

The Divine Attributes

I Chronicles 29:11

לָךְ ה' הַגְדָּלָהּ וְהַגְבִּירָהּ וְהַתְּפָאֶרֶת וְהַנִּצְחַח וְהַהוֹדָה,
כִּי כָל בְּשָׂמַיִם וּבְאָרֶץ לָךְ ה' הַמְּמֹלָכָה . . .

To You, G-d, is greatness, and power, and beauty, and victory, and splendor, as all that is in heaven and earth; to You, G-d, is kingship. . . .

CHRONICLES

Biblical book. The book of Chronicles (Divrei Hayamim), commonly divided into two parts, is the concluding book of the Writings (*Ketuvim*) section of the Tanach. Chronicles contains a genealogical list from Creation until the establishment of the first Kingdom of Israel, and then it briefly surveys the history of the Davidic dynasty until the destruction of the First Temple. The book was written by Ezra the Scribe in the fourth century BCE. The book has been artificially divided into I Chronicles and II Chronicles, but it is essentially one book.



Initial word panel to Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of *Teshuvah*, in an elaborate manuscript copied in Spain and decorated in Spain and Italy, c. 1400. (U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

KEY POINTS

- 1 *Two Meanings of Torah.* The term “Torah” has two primary meanings. In its more specific sense, it refers to the Five Books of Moses (the “*Chumash*”) inscribed in the Torah scroll. In the broader sense of the term, “the Torah” is the entire body of Jewish teaching, consisting of numerous “genres”—Bible, Midrash, Talmud, Halachah (Torah law), Musar (ethics and self-improvement), Chakirah (philosophy), Kabbalah, etc.—composed by many thousands of authors over a period of more than 3,300 years. The two “Torahs” are two faces of the same coin, two articulations of the same truths.
- 2 *The Written Torah and the Oral Torah.* The Torah comes in two forms: written and oral. Jewish tradition insists that the “Written Torah” be treated as an inviolable text—every word and letter is significant and must be meticulously preserved. In contrast, the “Oral Torah” must be preserved as an ongoing oral communication from teacher to disciple; for many centuries, it was even forbidden that it be officially transcribed. This duality is integral to the nature of Torah.

- 3 *The Jewish Bible.* The twenty-four books of the Written Torah (also known as “the Jewish Bible”) are divided into three categories—”Torah,” “Prophets,” and “Writings”—representing three different levels of Divine revelation. All 613 *mitzvot* (Divine commandments) are in the “Torah” section, while the books in the “Prophets” and “Writings” sections are the source for many of the historical, philosophical, moral, and inspirational teachings of the Torah.
- 4 *The Divine and the Human in Torah.* G-d desired that the Torah should embody a partnership between Him and us. The Torah therefore incorporates both Divine and human elements, involving a collaboration of Divine revelation and human intellectual toil. In the Written Torah, the Divine side of the partnership dominates, and is expressed in the precise wording of the text. In the Oral Torah, the human contribution is more pronounced, and finds expression in our analysis, exposition, and application of its content.
- 5 *The Source Code.* The letters and words of the Written Torah are the “source code” for the entire body of Jewish teaching. Thus, every subject, teaching, or law in the Oral Torah has its source in the Written Torah.

Selected Readings from Tanach

TORAH

GENESIS

The Beginning

GENESIS 1:1-5

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְהוֹ וְנִבְהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר.
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל
אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ.
וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה
וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד.

In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.

And the world was desolate and void, and darkness on the face of the deep; and the spirit of G-d hovered upon the face of the water.

And G-d said, "There shall be light!" And there was light.

G-d saw the light that it is good; and G-d separated between the light and the darkness.

And G-d called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night"; and it was evening and it was morning, one day.



Good and Evil

Bereshit Rabah, 2:5

Said Rabbi Avahu: In the beginning of Creation, G-d beheld the deeds of the righteous and the deeds of the wicked. ... "And the world was desolate and void"—these are the deeds of the wicked. "There shall be light"—these are the deeds of the righteous. But I still do not know which of these G-d desires. When it says, "G-d saw the light, that it is good," I know that G-d desires the deeds of the righteous, and does not desire the deeds of the wicked.

Tanya, Chapter 29

In truth, evil has no actual substance at all. This is why evil is compared to darkness, which has no actual substance, and therefore is automatically banished in the presence of light. So, too, the forces of evil, although they seem to possess much vitality, ... are automatically nullified in the presence of holiness, as physical darkness is nullified in the presence of physical light.

Also see: Lesson 5, Texts 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9; Lesson 6, Text 5.

The Creation of the Human Being

GENESIS 1:26-28; 2:7-15

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים: "נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ. וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל הַרְמֹשׁ הַרְמֹשׁ עַל הָאָרֶץ."
וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ,
בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ; זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם.
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים; וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים,
"פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹשׁוּ-הָ..."
וַיִּיצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה,
וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה...
וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם; וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגֶן עֵדֶן לְעִבְדָּהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ.

G-d said: "Let us make a human being in our image, after our likeness. And they shall rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, and the beasts, and all the earth, and every crawling thing that crawls upon the earth."

And G-d created the human in His image, in the Divine image He created him; male and female He created them.

G-d blessed them, and G-d said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and conquer it. . . ."

And G-d Almighty formed the human, dust from the earth, and He blew into his nostrils a breath of life; and the human became a living soul.

And G-d Almighty took the human; and He put him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to keep it.



The Meaning of "Adam"

Shenei Luchot Haberit, Toldot Adam, 3a

The name *Adam* ("human") is the explanation of the story of humanity and of humanity's ultimate purpose. If a person connects themselves Above, and emulates G-d and follows in G-d's ways, then they are called by the name Adam in the sense of *edameh le'elyon*, "I resemble the Supernal One" (Isaiah 14:14). . . . But if a person separates from this Divine attachment, then they are Adam in the sense of the *adamah*, "soil" from which they were taken, as the human is dust, and to dust does the human return.

Also see: Lesson 2, Text 2; Lesson 6, Texts 12 and 13.

The First Jew

GENESIS 12:1-8

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם: "לֵךְ לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָה.
וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְךָ גְדוֹל וְאֶבְרַכְךָ וְאֶגְדַּלְהָ שְׁמוֹה וְהָיָה בְרָכָה.
וְאֶבְרַכְהָ מִבְּרַכְיָה וּמִקְלָלָהּ אֲדָר וּנְבָרְכוּ בָךְ כָּל מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאֲדָמָה".
וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם בְּאִשְׁרֵי דְבַר אֱלֹהֵי ה', וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט;
וְאַבְרָם בֶּן הַמִּשְׁשָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן.
וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֵת
כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ וְאֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן;
וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן.
וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שָׂכָם עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרָה; וְהִכְנִיעַנִי אִזְּ בְּאֶרֶץ.
וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר, "לְזָרְעָךָ אֶתְּן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת";
וַיְבַן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה הַנִּבְרָאָה אֵלָיו.
וַיַּעֲתֵק מוֹשֶׁם הַהֵרָה מִקְדָּם לְבֵית אֵל וַיֹּט אֶהְלֵה;
בֵּית אֵל מִיָּם וְהָיָה מִקְדָּם, וַיְבַן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה, וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה'.

G-d said to Abram: "Go you from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house; to the land that I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make great your name; and you will be a blessing.

"I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

And Abram went, as G-d had spoken to him, and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy-five years old when he went out from Haran.

Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all their possessions that they had acquired, and the souls they had made in Haran; and they went out to go to the land of Canaan, and they came into the land of Canaan.

Abram passed through the land, until the place of Shechem, until the plain of Moreh; and the Canaanites were then in the land.

And G-d appeared to Abram, and He said, "To your seed I will give this land"; and there he built an altar to G-d, who had appeared to him.

He removed from there to the mountain, east of Beth-El, and he pitched his tent; Beth-El was to the west and Ai was to the east, and there he built an altar to G-d, and he called in the name of G-d.



Unequivocal Choice

Rabbi Yehudah Loew of Prague, *Netzach Yisrael*,
Chapter 11

We know that Abraham recognized the truth of G-d at a young age, and devoted many decades to teaching this truth to the world, to the point of self-sacrifice—all before G-d spoke to him to leave his land and birthplace and journey to the Holy Land. So why doesn't the Written Torah tell us anything about Abraham's righteousness and his achievements in the first 75 years of his life?

Because the Torah wishes to emphasize that G-d's choice to make a great nation of the descendants of Abraham was not a consequence of Abraham's particular merits. If that were the case, then the subsequent sins and failings of the Jewish people may arguably cause them to forfeit their chosenness. Rather, G-d's choice has no cause or reason, and is therefore eternal and immutable. In the words of the sages (*Ethics of the Fathers* 5:17): "A love that is dependent on something—when that thing ceases, the love ceases; but a love that is not dependent on any thing, never ceases."

Soul Makers

Shir Hashirim Rabah, 1:22

Regarding Abraham and Sarah it is written, "the souls that they made in Haran." Yet if the entire world would convene, they could not create a single flea! Rather, these are the converts whom Abraham and Sarah converted. Said R. Chunya: Abraham would convert the men, and Sarah would convert the women.

Abraham would invite them into his home, give them to eat and to drink, show them love and fellowship, and bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence. This teaches us that whoever brings a person close to the Almighty, it is considered as if they have created them.

The Burning Bush

EXODUS 3:1-17

וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנָנוּ כִּהֵן מִדְיָן; וַיִּנְהַג
אֶת הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמִּדְבָּר, וַיָּבֹא אֶל הַר הָאֱלֹקִים חֹרֵב.

וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ ה' אֵלָיו בְּלִבַת אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסְּנֶה;
וַיֵּרָא, וַהֲגִה הַסְּנֶה בְּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ, וְהַסְּנֶה אֵינְנוֹ אֲכָל.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה: אֲסֶרְהָ נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הַמְּרֹאֶה
הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה; מִדּוּעַ לֹא יִבְעַר הַסְּנֶה?

וַיֵּרָא ה' בִּי סֵר לְרֹאוֹתַי; וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ
הַסְּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר, "מֹשֶׁה! מֹשֶׁה!" וַיֹּאמֶר, "הֲנִי."

וַיֹּאמֶר, "אַל תִּקְרַב הֵלֶם; שֵׁל גַּעֲלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ, כִּי
הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדֹמָת קֹדֶשׁ הוּא."

וַיֹּאמֶר: "אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹקֵי אֲבִיךָ, אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם
אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב"; וַיִּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה
פָּנָיו, כִּי יָרָא מֵהִבִּיט אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה', "רְאֵה רְאִיתִי אֶת עֵינֵי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם; וְאֶת
צַעֲקוֹתָם שְׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נִגְשָׁיו, כִּי יִדְעִתִּי אֶת מַכְאֲבָיו.

וְאֶרְדּ לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלַהֲעֲלֹתוֹ מִן הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא,
אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה, אֶל אֶרֶץ זָבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ; אֶל
מָקוֹם הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי.

וְעַתָּה, הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלָי; וְגַם
רְאִיתִי אֶת הַלַּחֲץ אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם לֹחֲצִים לָהֶם.

וְעַתָּה לָכֵה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל פְּרַעֲוִה; וְהוֹצֵא
אֶת עַמִּי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם."

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים, "מִי אֲנֹכִי כִּי אֵלֶךְ אֶל
פְּרַעֲוִה, וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם?"

וַיֹּאמֶר, "כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, וְזֶה לָךְ הָאוֹת כִּי
אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ: בְּהוֹצִיאֶךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם,
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה."

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים, "הֲנִי אֲנֹכִי בָּא אֶל בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם, 'אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי
אֵלֵיכֶם'; וְאָמְרוּ לִי, 'מִה שָׁמוּ?' מַה אֶמַּר אֲלֵהֶם?"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה, "אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה"; וַיֹּאמֶר:
"כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, 'אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם'."

Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock after the desert, and he came to the mountain of G-d, to Horeb.

And an angel of G-d appeared to him in a heart of fire, from within the thornbush; and he saw that, behold, the thornbush is burning with fire, and the thornbush is not consumed.

And Moses said, "Let me turn away and see this great sight; why is the thornbush not burned?"

G-d saw that he had turned away to see. And G-d called to him from within the thornbush, and He said: "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

And He said: "Do not come near to here; shed your shoes from your feet, as the place upon which you are standing, it is holy ground."

And He said: "I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob"; and Moses hid his face, as he was afraid to look toward G-d.

And G-d said: "I have seen, seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cries before their taskmasters; I know their hurt.

"And I have descended to save them from the hand of Egypt and to bring them up from that land to a good and broad land, to a land that flows with milk and honey; to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Emorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

"And now, behold the cry of the Children of Israel has come to Me; I have also seen the oppression that the Egyptians are oppressing them.

"Now go, and I will send you to Pharaoh; and take out My people, the Children of Israel, from Egypt."

And Moses said to G-d: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take out the Children of Israel from Egypt?"

And He said: “For I will be with you. And this is your sign that I Myself have sent you: when you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain.”

And Moses said to G-d: “Here I am coming to the Children of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The G-d of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they will say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What should I say to them?”

And G-d said to Moses, “I will be that which I will be.” And He said: “So you shall say to the Children of Israel: *Eh-yeh* (‘I will be’) has sent me to you.”



The Thornbush

Midrash Tanchuma, Shemot 14

Why did G-d appear to Moses in a thornbush? For G-d said: I wrote in My Torah, “I am with them in their affliction” (Psalms 91:15). They are enslaved, so I, too, am in a place of constriction, in a bush that is full of thorns.

Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, cited in Sefer Hasichot 5702

“The heart of fire” that Moses beheld in his vision at Mount Horeb is the heart of the simple Jew.

The Torah (Deuteronomy 20:19) likens the human being to a “tree of the field.” But the field has many types of trees. The Talmud (Taanit 7a) compares the righteous Torah scholars to fruit trees—stately, beautiful trees that bestow fragrance and nourishment upon the world. These trees burn: They burn with the ecstasy of their Torah learning, with the fervor of their prayer, with the warmth of their good deeds. But theirs is a fire that is satiated by the sense of achievement and fulfillment they experience in their G-dly endeavors.

The thornbush, however, burns with a fire that is never satiated. The simple Jew who has a limited understanding of the Torah, of the words of the prayers they utter, and of the significance of the *mitzvot* they perform—theirs is a thirst never quenched. Their heart burns with a yearning for G-d they can never hope to still, with a love they can never hope to consummate.

When Moses beheld the sight of “the thornbush that burns with fire but is not consumed,” he said: “Let me turn away and see this great sight.” Moses recognized that he must turn away from his own lofty station in order to awaken in himself the insatiable fire of the simple Jew.

G-d’s Names

Midrash Rabah, Shemot 3:6

G-d said to Moses: You wish to know My name? I am called by My deeds. When I judge the creations, I am called *Elokim*. When I battle the wicked, I am called *Tzevakot*. When I abide with the sins of humanity, I am called *Kel Shakai*. When I have compassion upon my world, I am called YHVH.

The Holy Life

LEVITICUS 19:1-18

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.
 דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם:
 קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ, כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
 אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאָבִיו וְאִתּוֹ שְׁבֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ; אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
 אַל תִּפְנוּ אֶל הָאֱלִילִים וְאֱלֹהֵי מִסְכָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם; אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם...
 וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם, לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאת שְׂדֵךְ לְקַצֵּר,
 וְלִקַּט קְצִירֶךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט. וּכְרִמְךָ לֹא תַעֲוִלֵל, וּפְרִט כְּרִמְךָ
 לֹא תִלְקֹט; לְעֵנִי וְלַגֵּר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם, אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
 לֹא תִגְנוּבוּ, וְלֹא תִכְחָשׂוּ, וְלֹא תִשְׁקְרוּ אִישׁ בְּעַמִּיתוֹ.
 וְלֹא תִשְׁבְּעוּ בְשֵׁמִי לְשָׁקֵר; וְחִלַּלְתָּ אֶת שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי, אֲנִי ה'.
 לֹא תַעֲשֶׂק אֶת רֵעֶךָ, וְלֹא תִגְזֹל; לֹא תִלְוֶה פְעֻלַּת שְׂכִיר אֶתְךָ עַד בִּקְרוּ.
 לֹא תִקַּח לֶחֶם רֵעֶךָ, וְלִפְנֵי עֵינָיו לֹא תִתֵּן מִכְשָׁל; וְיִרְאֵת מִאֱלֹהֵי, אֲנִי ה'.
 לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ עֹוֹל בְּמִשְׁפָּט, לֹא תִשָּׂא פְנֵי דָל,
 וְלֹא תִהְדָּר פְּנֵי גְדוֹל; בְּצַדִּיק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתֶךָ.
 לֹא תִלֶּךְ רְכִיל בְּעַמִּיךָ, לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל דַּם רֵעֶךָ; אֲנִי ה'.
 לֹא תִשְׁנֹא אֶת אַחִיךָ בְּלִבְּךָ; הֹכֵחַ תֹּוכִיחַ
 אֶת עַמִּיתֶךָ, וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֶטָּא.
 לֹא תִקַּח וְלֹא תִטֹּר אֶת בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ, וְאֶהְבֵּת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ; אֲנִי ה'.

G-d spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the entire congregation of the Children of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, G-d your G-d, am holy.

Every person should fear their mother and their father, and you shall observe My Sabbaths; I am G-d your G-d.

Do not turn to the idols, and do not make molten gods for yourselves; I am G-d your G-d

And when you reap the harvest of your land, do not finish the edge of your field with your harvesting, and do not collect the gleanings of your harvest. Do not pick the underdeveloped clusters of your vineyard, and do not collect the gleanings of your vineyard; leave them for the pauper and the stranger. I am G-d your G-d.

Do not steal, and do not falsely deny a claim, and do not lie, one person to their fellow.



Harvest Gleanings for the Poor

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*,
Laws of Gifts to the Poor 1:1-5

When harvesting one's field, one should not harvest the entire field. Rather, one should leave a small portion of the standing grain at the end of the field for the poor, as the Torah states, "Do not finish the edge of your field in your harvesting." . . . The grain left standing is referred to as *pe'ah* ("edge"). . . .

Similarly, with regard to *leket* ("gleanings"): When harvesting the grain and binding it into sheaves, one should not collect the stalks that fall away during the harvest, . . . as it is stated, "Do not collect the gleanings of your harvest." . . . The same applies to *peret*, individual grapes that fall off during the harvest, and to underdeveloped grape clusters (*olelot*), as it is stated, "Do not pick the underdeveloped clusters of your vineyard, and do not collect the gleanings of your vineyard."

The Torah on One Foot

Talmud, *Shabbat* 31a

A gentile came before Shamai and said to him, "I wish to convert to Judaism, on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Shamai drove him away with the builder's measuring stick that was in his hand.

He then came to Hillel. Hillel converted him, and said to him: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary—go and learn it."

Do not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your G-d; I am G-d.

Do not oppress your fellow, and do not rob; do not keep a hired worker's wage with you overnight until morning.

Do not curse a deaf person, and do not place a stumbling block before a blind person; and you shall fear your G-d, I am G-d.

Do not commit an injustice in judgment, do not favor a pauper, and do not respect a great person; judge your fellow with righteousness.

Do not go around as a gossipmonger amidst your people; do not stand by the shedding of your fellow's blood; I am G-d.

Do not hate your brother in your heart; rebuke, rebuke your fellow, and do not bear a sin on his account.

Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge against the members of your people, and you shall love your fellow as yourself; I am G-d.

Journeys in the Desert

NUMBERS 9:15-23

ובימים הקים את המשכן, כסה הענן את המשכן לאהל העדת; ובערב יהיה על המשכן כמראה אש עד בקר.

כן יהיה תמיד, הענן יכסנו; ומראה אש לילה.

ולפי העלת הענן מעל האהל, ואחרי כן יסעו בני ישראל; ובמקום אשר ישכן שם הענן, שם יחנו בני ישראל.

על פי ה' יסעו בני ישראל, ועל פי ה' יחנו; כל ימי אשר ישכן הענן על המשכן יחנו.

ובהאריך הענן על המשכן ימים רבים; ושמרו בני ישראל את משמרת ה' ולא יסעו.

ויש אשר יהיה הענן ימים מספר על המשכן; על פי ה' יחנו, ועל פי ה' יסעו.

ויש אשר יהיה הענן מערב עד בקר, ונעלה הענן בבקר ונסעו; או יזמם וליילה, ונעלה הענן ונסעו.

או ימים, או חדש, או ימים, בהאריך הענן על המשכן לשכן עליו, יחנו בני ישראל ולא יסעו; ובהעלתו יסעו.

על פי ה' יחנו, ועל פי ה' יסעו; את משמרת ה' שמרו, על פי ה' ביד משה.

According to the cloud's ascent from over the Tent, after that, the Children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the Children of Israel would encamp.

At G-d's bidding the Children of Israel journeyed, and at G-d's bidding they encamped; all the days that the cloud would rest above the Tabernacle, they encamped.

When the cloud lingered over the Tabernacle for many days, the Children of Israel kept the charge of G-d and did not journey.

There were times when the cloud would be for several days above the Tabernacle; at G-d's bidding they encamped, and at G-d's bidding they journeyed.

And there were times when the cloud would be from evening until morning, and the cloud would ascend in the morning, and they would journey; or, for a day and a night, and the cloud would ascend and they would journey.

Or for two days, or for a month, or for a year, when the cloud lengthened its time over the Tabernacle to rest upon it, the Children of Israel would encamp and not journey; and when it ascended they would journey.

At G-d's bidding they would encamp, and at G-d's bidding they would journey; they kept the charge of G-d, by the word of G-d through Moses.

On the day the Tabernacle was erected, the cloud covered the Tabernacle that was a tent for the Testimony; and at evening there was over the Tabernacle like an appearance of fire, until morning.

So it was always, the cloud covered it; and an appearance of fire at night.

The Birth of a People

DEUTERONOMY 4:32-35

כִּי שָׁאַל נָא לְיָמִים רִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנַי, לְמִן הַיּוֹם
אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם עַל הָאָרֶץ, וּלְמִקְצֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד
קִצְעַה הַשָּׁמַיִם; הִנְהִיָּה כַּדָּבָר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה, אוֹ הַנִּשְׁמָע כְּמִוְהוֹ.

הַשְּׁמָע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מִדְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ
הָאֵשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶתְּהָ וַיִּחִי.

אוֹ הַנִּסָּה אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹא לְקַחַת לּוֹ גּוֹי מִקֶּרֶב גּוֹי, בְּמִסַּת פְּאוֹתַי
וּבְמוֹפְתַיִם וּבְמִלְחָמָה וּבִיד חֲזָקָה וּבְזִרְעוֹ נְטוּיָה וּבְמוֹרָאִים
גְּדֹלִים; כָּכֵל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְכֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֶיךָ.
אֶתְּהָ הִרְאֵתָ לְדַעַת, כִּי ה' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים; אֵין עוֹד מִלְּבָדוֹ.

Ask now after the early days that came before you, from the day that G-d created man upon the earth, and from one end of the heavens to the other; has there ever been the likes of this great thing, or has anything like it been heard?

Have a people heard the voice of G-d speaking from within the fire, as you have heard, and lived?

Or has G-d endeavored to take for Himself a nation from the bowels of a nation, with trials, with signs, with miracles, with battle, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great awesome deeds; as all that G-d your G-d has done for you in Egypt before your eyes?

You were shown to know that G-d is the L-rd; there is none else besides Him.



A Unique Event

Kuzari, 4:11

Moses, our first leader, was not like [the founders of other religions]. He brought the entire people to stand at Mount Sinai, for them to see with their own eyes, each in accordance with their ability, the revelation that he saw. . . . As the verse states (Exodus 24:10), "They saw the G-d of Israel." . . . They all could affirm to each other what they saw and heard. This removed from the heart of the nation the terrible suspicion: Perhaps all of this is just the claim of a few individuals that prophecy came to them? For it is not possible to create a conspiracy in full sight of the masses.

The Shema

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד.

וְאַהֲבַת אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ
וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ.
וּשְׁנַנְתָּם לְבְנֶיךָ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָם בְּשַׁבְּתְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ
וּבְלִקְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ.

וְקִשְׁרְתָם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפוֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ.

וְכַתְּבָתֶם עַל מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ.

Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one.

You shall love G-d your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart. Teach them to your children, and speak of them when you sit in your home and when you travel on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

Bind them as a sign on your arm, and they shall be *tefilin* between your eyes.

Write them on the doorposts of your home and on your gates.



Heart, Soul, and Might

Mishnah, Berachot 9:5

"With all your heart"—with both your inclinations: with your good inclination, and your evil inclination.

"With all your soul"—even if He takes your life.

"With all your might (*me'od*)"—with all your money. Another meaning of the phrase "with all your *me'od*": With each and every measure (*midah*) that G-d metes out (*moded*) to you, be exceedingly-exceedingly (*me'od me'od*) grateful (*modeh*) to Him.

Also see Text 11 in Lesson 2

Nathan's Rebuke of King David

II SAMUEL 11:27-12:13

וַיֵּרַע הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה דָּוִד בְּעֵינֵי ה'!
 וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' אֶת נָתָן אֶל דָּוִד, וַיְבֵא אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ:
 שְׁנֵי אַנְשִׁים הָיוּ בְּעִיר אַחַת, אֶחָד עֹשִׂיר וְאֶחָד רָאשׁ. לְעֹשִׂיר
 הָיָה צֹאן וּבָקָר רַבְּבָה מְאֹד. וְלָרֶשׁ אִין כֶּל, כִּי אִם כֶּבֶשֶׂה
 אַחַת קִטְנָה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה וַיַּחֲמֶהָ, וַתִּגְדַּל עִמּוֹ וְעִם בְּנָיו וַיַּחְדּוּ;
 מִפֶּתוֹ תֹאכַל וּמִכֶּסֶף תִּשְׁתֶּה וּבְחִיקוֹ תִשְׁכַּב, וַתְּהִי לוֹ כַּבֵּת.
 וַיְבֵא הַלֵּךְ לְאִישׁ הָעֹשִׂיר; וַיַּחְמֹל לְקַחַת מִצֹּאֲנוֹ
 וּמִבָּקָרוֹ לְעִשׂוֹת לְאֶרֶץ הַבָּא לוֹ, וַיִּקַּח אֶת כֶּבֶשֶׂת
 הָאִישׁ הָרֹאשׁ וַיַּעֲשֶׂהָ לְאִישׁ הַבָּא אֵלָיו.
 וַיַּחֲר אַף דָּוִד בְּאִישׁ מְאֹד; וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל נָתָן: "חֵי ה', כִּי בֶן
 מָוֶת הָאִישׁ הָעֹשֶׂה זֹאת! וְאֵת הַכֶּבֶשֶׂה יִשְׁלַם אַרְבַּעַתִּים,
 עֲקֵב אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה, וְעַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא חָמַל."
 וַיֹּאמֶר נָתָן אֶל דָּוִד: "אַתָּה הָאִישׁ!"...
 וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל נָתָן, "חֲטָאתִי לֵה'."

The thing that David had done was bad in the eyes of G-d. And G-d sent Nathan to David, and he came to him and said to him:

There were two men in one city, one rich and one poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds. The poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb that he had bought and reared, and it grew up together with him and his sons; of his bread it would eat and from his cup it would drink, and in his bosom it would lie, and it was to him like a daughter.

There came a wayfarer to the rich man; and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd to prepare for the guest that had come to him, so he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man that had come to him.

David's rage was exceedingly enflamed at the man, and he said to Nathan: "As G-d lives, the man who has done this deserves to die! And the ewe lamb he shall repay fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

And Nathan said to David: "You are the man!" . . .

Said David to Nathan, "I have sinned against G-d."

The Future Redemption

ISAIAH 2:1-4

הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר תָּזֶה יִשְׁעִיהוּ בֶן
 אֲמוֹץ עַל יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם:
 וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים, נִבּוֹן יְהִיָּה
 הַר בֵּית ה' בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים וְנִשְׂאָ
 מִגְבְּעוֹת; וְנִהְרֹו אֵלָיו כָּל הַגּוֹיִם.
 וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ: לָכוּ וְנִעְלֶה
 אֶל הַר ה', אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב; וִירֵנו
 מִדְרָכָיו וְנִלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֵיתָיו. כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן
 תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וְדְבַר ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם.
 וְשִׁפְט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם, וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים
 רַבִּים. וְכִתְתוּ חַרְבוֹתֵם לְאֵתִים
 וַחֲנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֹרוֹת. לֹא יִשָּׂא גוֹי
 אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב, וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.

The word that Isaiah, son of Amoz, prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mount of the house of G-d will be established atop the mountains and be exalted above the hills; and all nations will stream to it.

Many nations will go, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of G-d, to the house of the G-d of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths." For from Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of G-d from Jerusalem.

[Mashiach] will judge between nations, and reprove many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword upon nation, neither will they learn war anymore.

The Messiah

ISAIAH 11:1-9

וַיֵּצֵא חֹטֵר מִגֹּזֵעַ יֵשׁוּעַ; וְנֹצֵר מִשְּׁרֵשָׁיו יִפְרֹחַ.
 וְנִחַח עָלָיו רוּחַ ה'; רוּחַ חֵכְמָה וּבִינָה, רוּחַ עֲצָה וּגְבוּרָה, רוּחַ דַּעַת וַיִּרְאֵת ה'.
 וְהָרִיחוּ בִּירְאֵת ה'; וְלֹא לְמִרְאָה עֵינָיו יִשְׁפּוּט, וְלֹא לְמִשְׁמַע אָזְנָיו יִכְיֹחַ.
 וְשָׁפֵט בְּצַדֵּק דְּלִים, וְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמִישׁוֹר לְעֵנֵי אֲרָץ; וְהִכָּה
 אֲרָץ בְּשִׁבְט פִּי, וּבְרוּחַ שְׁפָתָיו יָמִית רָשָׁע.
 וְהָיָה צֶדֶק אֲזוֹר מִתְּנָיו; וְהֶאֱמוּנָה אֲזוֹר חֲלָצָיו.
 וְגַר זֶאֵב עִם כֶּבֶשׂ, וְנֹמֵר עִם גְּדִי יִרְבֹּץ; וְעִגְל וּכְפִיר
 וּמִרְיָא יִחַדּוּ, וְנֹעַר קִטָּן נִהַג בָּם.
 וּפְרָה וְדָב תִּרְעִינָה, יִחַדּוּ יִרְבְּצוּ יִלְדִּיהֶן; וְאַרְיֵה כְּבָקָר יֹאכַל תְּבֵן.
 וְשִׁעִשְׁע יִזְנֹק עַל חֵר פֶּתֶן; וְעַל מְאוֹרֵת צַפְעוֹנִי גָמוּל יָדוּ הָדָה.
 לֹא יִרְעוּ וְלֹא יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכֹל הָר קִדְשִׁי; כִּי מִלְאָה
 הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת ה' פְּמִים לִים מִכֹּסִּים.

A shoot shall come forth from the stem of Jesse; and a twig shall sprout from his roots.

The spirit of G-d will rest upon him; a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowledge and fear of G-d.

He will be animated by the fear of G-d; and neither with the sight of his eyes shall he judge, nor with the hearing of his ears shall he chastise.

He will judge the poor with equity, and decide with justice for the lowly of the land; he will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall put the wicked to death.

Righteousness will be the girdle of his loins, and faith the girdle of his waist.

The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie with the kid; a calf and a lion cub and a fatling together, and a small child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear will graze, together will their children lie; the lion, like cattle, will eat straw.

A suckling child will play on the cobra's hole, and on the lair of an adder a weaned child shall stretch forth its hand.

They shall neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain; for the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as waters cover the sea.



The Wolf and the Lamb

Rabbi David Kimchi ("Radak"),
commentary to Isaiah 11:6

There are those who explain the meaning of this verse as follows: In the days of Mashiach, the nature of the animals will change, reverting back to what it was in the beginning of Creation and in Noah's ark, before they became predators.

Others explain that this is all an analogy—that the wolf, the leopard, the bear, and the lion represent the wicked people who persecute and rob, and behave toward the weak as predators toward their prey; while the lamb, the cow, the calf, and the kid represent the humble of the world. The prophet is saying that in the days of Mashiach, there will be peace in the world, and no person will harm their fellow.

The Prophecy of the Dry Bones

EZEKIEL 37:1-14

הִיָּתָה עָלַי יַד ה', וַיּוֹצֵאֵנִי בְרוּחַ ה' וַיְנִיחֵנִי
בְּתוֹךְ הַבְּקָעָה; וְהִיא מְלֵאָה עֲצָמוֹת.

וְהֵעֵבִירֵנִי עֲלֵיהֶם סָבִיב סָבִיב; וְהִנֵּה רַבּוֹת
מְאֹד עַל פְּנֵי הַבְּקָעָה, וְהִנֵּה יְבֻשׁוֹת מְאֹד.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי: "בֶּן אָדָם, הֲתַחְיֶינָה הָעֲצָמוֹת
הָאֵלֶּה?" וַאֲמַר, "אֲדַנְיָ ה' אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ."

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי: "הֲנִבְאָ עַל הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה; וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵיהֶם: הָעֲצָמוֹת הַיְבֻשׁוֹת, שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר ה'."

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדַנְיָ ה' לָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה:
הִנֵּה אֲנִי מְבִיא בְכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם.

וְנָתַתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם גְּדִים, וְהֵעֲלֵתִי עֲלֵיכֶם בָּשָׂר, וְקָרַמְתִּי
עֲלֵיכֶם עוֹר, וְנָתַתִּי בְכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם; וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה'."

וַנִּבְאֲתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי; וַיְהִי קוֹל כְּהִנְבָּאִי,
וְהִנֵּה רֵעַשׁ, וַתִּקְרְבוּ עֲצָמוֹת, עֶצֶם אֶל עֶצְמוֹ.

וַרְאִיתִי, וְהִנֵּה עֲלֵיהֶם גְּדִים, וּבָשָׂר עָלֵהֶם, וַיִּקְרַם
עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹר מִלְּמַעְלָה; וְרוּחַ אִין בָּהֶם.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי: "הֲנִבְאָ אֶל הָרוּחַ; הֲנִבְאָ בֶן אָדָם
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל הָרוּחַ, כֹּה אָמַר אֲדַנְיָ ה': מֵאָרְבַּע
רוּחוֹת בָּאֵי הָרוּחַ, וּפָחִי בְּהַרוּגִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיְחִיּוּ."

וְהִנִּבְאֲתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי; וַתִּבּוֹא בָהֶם הָרוּחַ וַיְחִיּוּ,
וַיַּעֲמְדוּ עַל רַגְלֵיהֶם, חִיל גָּדוֹל מְאֹד מְאֹד.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי: "בֶּן אָדָם! הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה
כֹּל בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה; הִנֵּה אֲמָרִים: יָבֹשׁוּ
עֲצָמוֹתֵינוּ וְאֶבְדָּה תִקְוֹתֵנוּ, נִגְזְרָנוּ לָנוּ.

לָכֵן הִנִּבְאָ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם: כֹּה אָמַר אֲדַנְיָ ה':
הִנֵּה אֲנִי פֹתַח אֶת קַבְרוֹתֵיכֶם, וְהֵעֲלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם
מִקַּבְרוֹתֵיכֶם, עַמִּי; וְהִבְאֵתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל אֲדַמְתּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה'; בְּפִתְחִי אֶת קַבְרוֹתֵיכֶם,
וּבְהֵעֲלוֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מִקַּבְרוֹתֵיכֶם עַמִּי.

וְנָתַתִּי רוּחִי בְכֶם וְחַיִּיתֶם, וְהִנַּחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם עַל אֲדַמְתְּכֶם;
וַיִּדְעַתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה' דְּבַרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי." נָאִם ה'.

The hand of G-d was upon me, and He carried me out in the spirit of G-d, and He set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones.

He made me pass by them round and round; and behold, there were very many in the open valley, and behold, they were exceedingly dry.

And He said to me: "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I said, "O L-rd G-d, You know."

And He said to me: "Prophecy unto these bones. Say to them: Dry bones! Hear the word of G-d.

"So said the L-rd G-d to these bones: Behold, I will bring spirit into you and you will live.

"I will lay sinews upon you, and I will bring up flesh upon you, and I will cover you with skin, and I will put breath in you, and you will live; and you will know that I am G-d."

I prophesied as I was commanded; as I prophesied there was a sound, and behold a commotion, and the bones came together, a bone to its bone.

I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no spirit in them.

And He said to me: "Prophecy to the spirit; prophecy, O son of man, and say to the spirit: So says the L-rd G-d: From the four winds come, O spirit, and breathe into these slain ones that they should live."

I prophesied as He commanded me; and spirit entered into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, a very great army, exceedingly so.

And He said to me: "Son of man! These bones, they are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off from ourselves.'

What Does G-d Want?

MICAH 6:6-8

“Therefore, prophesy and say unto them: So says the L-rd G-d: My people, behold, I will open your graves, and I will raise you up from your graves; and I will bring you to the soil of Israel.

“And you will know that I am G-d; when I open your graves, and when I raise you from your graves, My people.

“I will put My spirit into you and you will live, and I will set you down on your own soil; and you will know that I, G-d, have spoken it and done it. So says G-d.”

בְּמִוֶּה אֶקְדֵּם ה', אִכְפֹּף לְאֱלֹהֵי מְרוֹם?
הֲאֶקְדָּמוֹנוּ בְּעוֹלוֹת בַּעֲגָלִים בְּנֵי שִׁנָּה?
הֲיִרְצֶה ה' בְּאַלְפֵי אֵילִים, בְּרִבְבוֹת נְחָלֵי שָׁמֶן?
הֲאֵתֵן בְּכוֹרֵי פִשְׁעֵי, פְּרִי בִטְנֵי חַטָּאת נֶפֶשׁ?
הֲגִיד לְךָ אָדָם מִה טוֹב, וּמִוֶּה ה' דֹּרֵשׁ כְּמוֹךָ:
כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט, וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד,
וְהִצַּנֵּעַ לְכַת עִם אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

With what shall I come before G-d, bow before the most-high G-d? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves?

Will G-d be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriad streams of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has told you, O man, what is good, and what G-d seeks of you: But to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk modestly with your G-d.

The Path of Torah

PSALMS 1

אֲשֶׁר־יֵאָמֵר אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִלֵּךְ בְּעֵצַת רְשָׁעִים,
 וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד, וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב.
 כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' הִפְצוּ, וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה.
 וְהָיָה כַּעֵץ שֶׁתּוֹלַע עַל פְּלָגֵי מַיִם; אֲשֶׁר פְּרִיּוֹ יִתֵּן
 בְּעֵתוֹ, וְעֵלְהוֹ לֹא יִבּוֹל, וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה יִצְלִיחַ.
 לֹא כֵן הַרְשָׁעִים; כִּי אִם כַּמּוֹץ אֲשֶׁר תִּדְפְּנוּ רוּחַ.
 עַל כֵּן לֹא יִקְמוּ רְשָׁעִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט, וְחַטָּאִים בְּעֵדַת צְדִיקִים.
 כִּי יוֹדַע ה' דֶּרֶךְ צְדִיקִים; וְדֶרֶךְ רְשָׁעִים תֵּאבֵד.

Fortunate is the person who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who stood not in the path of sinners, who did not sit in the company of scorners.

But only in G-d's Torah is his desire; and in his Torah he deliberates day and night.

He shall be as a tree replanted upon rivulets of water; which gives its fruit in its season, and its leaves do not wilt, and all that it does prospers.

Not so the wicked; they are like chaff driven off by the wind.

Therefore, the wicked shall not stand up in judgment, and the sinners in the community of the righteous.

For G-d knows the way of the righteous; and the way of the wicked shall be lost.



Six Truths about the Torah

Talmud, Avodah Zarah 19a-b

Rabbi [Yehudah Hanasi] said: A person can only learn Torah in the area that their heart desires. As it is written, "But only in G-d's Torah is his desire."

Rava said: At first, the Torah is called by G-d's name, but afterward, it is called by the name of the person [who studies it]. As it is written, "... in G-d's Torah is his desire, and in his Torah he deliberates day and night."

Rava also said: A person should first learn [the basic meaning of] Torah, and after that, they should study [the underlying reasoning]. As it is written, "in G-d's Torah," and after that, "and in his Torah he deliberates."

"He shall be as a tree replanted upon rivulets of water." In the study house of Rabbi Yana'i, they said: As a replanted tree, rather than a planted tree. A person who learns only from one teacher does not see success....

"Upon rivulets of water." Rabbi Tanchum ben Chanila'i said: A person should divide their years [of learning] into three parts: one-third in Scripture, one-third in Mishnah, and one-third in Talmud.

"Which brings forth its fruit in its season, [and its leaves do not wilt]." Said Rava: If [the student of Torah] produces fruit [i.e., their learning results in action], their leaves will not wither; but if not, then for both student and teacher, it is as the verse continues, "Not so the wicked, [who are as chaff driven by the wind]."

Also see: Lesson 1, Texts 9 and 15.

G-d Is My Shepherd

PSALMS 23

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: ה' רֵעִי לֹא אֶחְסֵר.
 בְּנֵאֻת דָּשָׂא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי; עַל מֵי מִנְחֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי.
 וַפְּשִׁי יִשׁוּבֵב; יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי צְדָק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ.
 גַּם כִּי אֶלֶף בְּגִיא צַלְמוֹת לֹא אֵירָא רָע, כִּי אַתָּה
 עִמּוֹדִי; שִׁבְטֶךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ הִמָּה יִנְחֹמֵנִי.
 תַּעֲרֶךָ לִפְנֵי שִׁלְחֹן נֹגֵד צִרְיָי;
 דִּשְׁנֶת בְּשֶׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי, כּוֹסֵי רוּיָהּ.
 אֵךְ טוֹב וַחֲסֵד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּי,
 וְשִׁבְתִּי בְּבַיִת ה' לְאָרְךָ יָמִים.

A song of David: G-d is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul; He leads me on paths of righteousness for the sake of His name.

Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You set a table before me in the presence of my adversaries; You anointed my head with oil, my cup runs over.

May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of G-d for length of days.

The Song of Nature

PSALMS 104

בְּרָכִי נַפְשִׁי אֶת ה'.
 ה' אֱלֹהֵי גְדֹלֶת מֹאֵד; הוֹד וְהָדָר לְבִשְׁתּוֹ.
 עֵטָה אֹר כִּשְׁלֹמֹה; נוֹטָה שָׁמַיִם כִּפְרִיעָה.
 הַמְקַרָּה בְּמַיִם עֲלִיּוֹתָיו, הַשֶּׁשׁ עֵבִים
 רְכִּיבוּ; הַמְהַלֵּךְ עַל כַּנְפֵי רוּחַ.
 עֲשֵׂה מִלְאֲכָיו רוּחֹת; מִשְׁרָתוֹ אֵשׁ לְהַטּוֹ.
 יָסַד אֶרֶץ עַל כַּמְוִנָּה; בַּל תִּמוּט עוֹלָם וְעַד.
 תַּהוֹם כָּלבוֹשׁ כְּסִיתוֹ; עַל הַרִים יַעֲמִדוּ מַיִם.
 מִן גְּעֵרְתֶךָ יְנוֹסוּן; מִן קוֹל רַעְמֶךָ יִחְפְּזוּן.
 יַעֲלוּ הַרִים יִרְדּוּ בְקַעֲוֹת; אֵל מִקּוֹם זֶה יִסְדֹּת לָהֶם.
 גְּבוּל שָׁמֹת בַּל יַעֲבֹרוּן; בַּל יִשׁוּבוּן לְכַסּוֹת הָאָרֶץ.
 הַמְשַׁלַּח מַעֲנִיָּים בְּנַחְלָיִים; בֵּין הַרִים יִהְלִכוּן.
 יִשְׁקוּ כָּל חַיְתוֹ שִׁדְיָי; יִשְׁבְּרוּ פְּרָאִים צְמָאָם.
 עֲלִיָּהֶם עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁכּוּן; מִבְּיַעַפְאִים יִתְנוּ קוֹל.
 מִשְׁקָה הַרִים מַעֲלִיּוֹתָיו; מִפְּרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיֶךָ תִּשְׁבַּע הָאָרֶץ.
 מִצְמִיחַ חֲצִיר לְבַהֲמָה, וְעֵשֶׂב לְעִבְדַּת
 הָאָדָם; לְהוֹצִיא לָחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.
 וַיַּיִן יִשְׂמַח לִבֵּב אָנוּשׁ, לְהַצְהִיל פְּנִים
 מִשְׁמָן; וְלָחֶם לִבֵּב אָנוּשׁ יִסְעַד.
 יִשְׁבְּעוּ עֲצֵי ה'; אֶרֶץ לִבְנוֹן אֲשֶׁר נָטַע.
 אֲשֶׁר שָׁם צִפְרִים יִקְנְנוּ; חֲסִידָה בְרוֹשִׁים בֵּיתָהּ.
 הַרִים הַגְּבוּהִים לִיעֲלִיָּים; סִלְעִים מִחֶסֶה לְשִׁפְנִים.
 עֲשֵׂה יָרַח לְמוֹעֲדִים; שָׁמֶשׁ יָדַע מִבּוֹאוֹ.
 תִּשְׁתַּחֲשֹׁף וַיְהִי לִילָה; בּוֹ תִרְמֹשׁ כָּל חַיְתוֹ יַעֲר.
 הַכְּפִירִים שֹׁאֲגִים לְטָרֶף; וְלִבְקֶשׁ מֹאֵל אֶכְלֶם.
 תִּזְרַח הַשָּׁמֶשׁ יִאֲסֹפוּן; וְאֵל מַעֲוֹנֹתֶם יִרְבְּצוּן.
 יִצֵּא אָדָם לַפְּעִלּוֹ; וְלַעֲבֹדְתוֹ עֲדֵי עָרֵב.
 מָה רַבּוּ מַעֲשֵׂיֶיךָ ה', כָּלֶם בְּחִכְמָה עֲשִׂיתָ; מִלְּאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנָה.
 זֶה הֵימָּה גְדוֹל וְרַחֵב יָדָיִם, שֶׁם רָמַשׁ וְאִין מִסְפָּר;
 חַיּוֹת קִטְנוֹת עִם גְּדֹלוֹת.

שם אֲנִיּוֹת יִהְלֶכְנוּ; לִוְיָתָן זֶה יִצְרֹת לְשַׁחֵק בּוֹ.
 כָּלֶם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁבְּרוּן; לָתֵת אֶכְלָם בְּעֵתוֹ.
 תִּתֵּן לָהֶם יִלְקֻטוּן; תִּפְתַּח יָדְךָ יִשְׂבְּעוּן טוֹב.
 תִּסְתִּיר פְּנֵיךָ יִבְהַלּוּן, תִּסַּף רוּחַם יִגְוֹעוּן; וְאֶל עֲפָרָם יִשׁוּבוּן.
 תִּשְׁלַח רִיחֶךָ יִבְרָאוּן; וּתְחַדֵּשׁ פְּנֵי אֲדָמָה.
 יְהִי כְבוֹד ה' לְעוֹלָם; יִשְׂמַח ה' בְּמַעֲשָׂיו.
 הַמְבִיט לְאֲרֶץ וַתִּרְעַד; יִגַע בְּהָרִים וַיִּעֲשֶׂנוּ.
 אֲשִׁירָה לָהּ בְּחַיִּי; אֲזַמְרָה לְאֵלֶיךָ בְּעוֹדִי.
 יִעַרְבַּ עָלָיו שִׁיחִי; אֲנִכִּי אֲשֻׁמַּח בָּהּ!
 תִּמְנו חֲטָאִים מִן הָאָרֶץ, וְדָשְׁעִים עוֹד
 אֵינָם, בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת ה'; הִלְלוּ יְיָ.

My soul, bless G-d!

My L-rd G-d, You are verily great; with splendor and beauty You have clothed Yourself.

Who dons light like a robe; who spreads the heavens like a tapestry.

Who roofs His lofts with water, who makes clouds His chariot; who traverses upon wings of wind.

He makes the winds His messengers; flaming fire His ministers.

He set the earth upon its foundations; lest it ever falter.

You covered the watery depths like a garment; above the mountains are stood the waters.

From Your shout they flee; from the sound of Your thunder they rush off.

They climb the mountains, they descend the valleys; to this place You established for them.

You set a boundary for them that they may not cross; lest they return to cover the earth.

Who sends forth wellsprings along the riverbeds; between the mountains they traverse.

They water every beast of the field; the wild ones quench their thirst.

Upon them the birds of heaven dwell; from between the branches they give voice.

He waters the mountains from His lofts; from the fruit of Your works is the earth satiated.

He grows fodder for cattle, and herbage to be worked by man; to bring forth bread from the earth.

And wine that will gladden the heart of the human, oil to brighten the face; and bread that sustains the human heart.

The trees of G-d are satiated; the cedars of Lebanon which He planted.

There birds do nest; the stork makes her home in the cypresses.

The high mountains are for the gazelles; the rocks shelter the badgers.

He made the moon to mark times; the sun knows its setting.

You set darkness and night becomes; in it do crawl all beasts of the forest.

The lions roar for prey; to request their food from G-d.

The sun shines and they gather in; and lie down unto their dens.

Man goes forth to their doings; to their labors until evening.

How manifold are Your works, O G-d! You made them all with wisdom; the world is filled with Your possessions.

This sea is great and wide, there are creeping things without number; beasts small and large.

There the ships go; You formed this leviathan with which to sport.

They all look to You with hope; to give their food in its time.

You give them and they gather it; You open Your hand and they are sated with goodness.

You hide Your countenance and they are frightened, You gather in their spirit and they perish; and return to their dust.

You send forth Your spirit and they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.

The glory of G-d shall be forever; G-d shall rejoice in His works.

Who looks upon the earth and it quakes; He touches the mountains and they smoke.

I shall sing to G-d while I am alive; I shall make songs to my G-d as long as I exist.

May my speech be pleasing to Him; I shall rejoice in G-d.

May sins cease from the earth and the wicked be no more; my soul shall bless G-d. Praise G-d!

Guardian of Israel

PSALMS 121

שיר למעלות: אשא עיני אל ההרים, מאין יבא עזרי.
 עזרי מעם ה', עשה שמים וארץ.
 אל יתן למוט רגלך; אל ינום שמרך.
 הנה לא ינום ולא יישן שומר ישראל.
 ה' שמרך; ה' צלך על יד מינך.
 יומם השמש לא יכבה וירח בלילה.
 ה' ישמרך מכל רע; ישמר את נפשך.
 ה' ישמר צאתך ובואך, מעתה ועד עולם.

A song of ascents: I raise my eyes to the mountains; from
 where will come my help?

My help is from G-d, maker of heaven and earth.

He will not allow your foot to falter; your guardian will not
 slumber.

Behold, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

G-d is your guardian; G-d is your shadow, at your right hand.

The sun shall not smite you by day; nor the moon at night.

G-d will guard you from all evil; He will guard your soul.

G-d will guard your goings and your comings, from now and
 to eternity.

Selected Sayings from the Book of Proverbs

בְּכֹל דְרָכָיו דַּעְהוּ

Know Him in all your ways. (3:6)

לֵךְ אֶל נְמוֹלָה עֲצֵל רְאֵה דְרָכֶיהָ וְחָכָם

Go to the ant, you sluggard;
see her ways and become wise. (6:6)

אַל תּוֹכַח לֵץ פֶּן יִשְׁנֹאֲךָ הוֹכַח לְחָכָם וַיֵּאֱהָבֶךָ

Reprove not a scorner lest they hate you;
reprove a wise person and they will love you. (9:8)

וְעַל כָּל פְּשָׁעִים תִּכְסֶה אֱהָבָה

Love covers all sins. (10:12)

בְּרִבְתָּהּ ה' הִיא תַעֲשִׂיר וְלֹא יוֹסֵף עֲצָב עִמָּהּ

The blessing of G-d will bring riches,
and toil will add nothing to it. (10:22)

כַּעֲבוּר סוּפָה וְאִין רָשָׁע וְצַדִּיק יְסוּד עוֹלָם

When the whirlwind passes, the wicked
person is no more; but the righteous person
is the foundation of the world. (10:25)

תִּמְתּוּ יִשְׂרָיִם תִּנְחָם וְסִלְףּ בּוֹגְדִים יִשְׂדָּם

The innocence of the honest guides them;
the treacherous are robbed by their
own contortions. (11:3)

לֹא יוֹעִיל הוֹן בְּיוֹם עֲבָרָה; וְצַדִּיקָה תִצְלֵל מִמּוֹת

Riches will not avail on the day of wrath;
but charity will save from death. (11:4)

בְּכֹל עֲצָב יִהְיֶה מוֹתֵר

In every distress will be a gain. (14:23)

וְרָקֵב עֲצָמוֹת קִנְיָהּ

Jealousy rots the bones. (14:30)

מִעֲנָה רַךְ יִשִּׁיב חֲמָה

A gentle reply turns away wrath. (15:1)

כֹּל פֶּעַל ה' לְמַעַנְהוּ, וְגַם רָשָׁע לְיוֹם רָעָה

G-d made everything for His sake,
also the wicked for the day of evil. (16:4)

בְּרִצּוֹת ה' דְרָכָיו אִישׁ גַּם אוֹיְבָיו יִשְׁלָם אֹתוֹ

When a person's ways please G-d, also
their enemies will make peace with them. (16:7)

לֵב אָדָם יַחֲשֵׁב דְרָכּוֹ וְה' יְכִין צִעָדוֹ

A person's heart plans their way,
but G-d prepares their steps. (16:9)

לִפְנֵי שֹׁבֵר גָּאוֹן, וְלִפְנֵי כַשְׁלוֹן גְּבַה רּוּחַ

Before ruin comes pride,
and before stumbling a haughty spirit. (16:18)

טוֹב פֶּת חֲרָבָה וְשִׁלוֹה בָהּ, מִבֵּית מֶלֶא זְבָחֵי רִיב

Better a piece of dry bread and tranquility
with it, than a house full of meat of strife. (17:1)

גַּם אֹיִל מִחֲרִישׁ חָכָם יִחְשָׁב

Even a fool, when they keep silent,
is considered wise. (17:28)

נֵר הַ נְשָׁמַת אָדָם

The soul of man is a lamp of G-d. (20:27)

חֲנֹךְ לְנַעַר עַל פִּי דְרָכָו גַם כִּי יִזְקִין לֹא יִסּוּר מִמּוֹנָה

Educate the child according to their way,
so that also when they grow old they
will not turn away from it. (22:6)

אַל תִּסַּג גְּבוּל עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ

Do not remove an ancient boundary
that your forefathers set. (22:28)

בְּנֶפֶל אוֹיְבֶךָ אַל תִּשְׂמַח וּבִכְשָׁלוֹ אַל יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ.
פֶּן יִרְאֶה ה' וְרַע בְּעֵינָיו וְהִשִּׁיב מִעַלְיוֹ אָפוֹ.

When your enemy falls, do not rejoice,
and when they stumble, let your heart not exult;
lest G-d see and be displeased, and turn
His wrath from them [onto you]. (24:17–18)

כְּבוֹד אֱלֹקִים הִסְתֵּר דָּבָר

The glory of G-d is to conceal a matter. (25:2)

רִיבֶךָ רִיב אֶת רֵעֶךָ וְסוּד אַחֵר אַל תִּגַּל

Have your quarrel with your friend,
but do not divulge another's secret. (25:9)

אַל תַּעַן כֶּסֶל כְּאוֹלָתוֹ פֶּן תִּשְׁוֶה לוֹ גַם אַתָּה

Do not answer a fool according to their folly,
lest you too become like them. (26:4)

בְּאִפְסֵ עֲצִים תִּכְבֶּה אֵשׁ וּבְאִין נִרְגָן יִשְׁתַּק מִדּוֹן

Without wood the fire goes out;
so without a grumbler the quarrel quiets down. (26:20)

כִּרְהֵ שַׁחַת בָּהּ יִפֹּל וְגִלְלֵ אָבִן אֶלָּיו תִּשׁוּב

One who digs a pit will fall into it;
one who rolls a stone, it will come back to them. (26:27)

אַל תִּתְהַלַּל בְּיוֹם מֹחֵר כִּי לֹא תִדְעֵ מַה יִּלְד יוֹם

Do not boast for tomorrow,
for you do not know what the day will bear. (27:1)

יִהְלַךְ זָר וְלֹא פִיךָ

Let a stranger praise you, not your own mouth. (27:2)

טוֹבָה תּוֹכַחַת מִגְלָה מֵאַהֲבָה מִסְתֵּרֶת

Better open rebuke than concealed love. (27:5)

בְּאִין חֲזוֹן יִפְרַע עַם

Where there is no vision, a people perish. (29:18)

The Knock

SONG OF SONGS 5:2-6

אני ישנה ולבי ער. קול דודי דופק: פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי
יונתי תמותי, שראשי נמלא טל קוצותי רסיסי לילה.

פשטתי את כתנתי איכה אלבשנה?
רחצתי את רגלי איכה אטנפם?

דודי שלח ידו מן החר ומעי הכו עליו.

קמתי אני לפתח לדודי; ידי נטפו מור
ואצבעתי מור עבר על כפות המנעול.

פתחתי אני לדודי דודי חמוק עבר; נפשי יצאה בדברו;
בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו, קראתיו ולא ענני.

I am asleep, but my heart is awake. The sound of my lover knocking: Open for me, my sister, my friend, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is full of dew, my locks with the drops of the night.

I have taken off my shirt, how can I put it on? I have washed my feet, how can I soil them?

My beloved withdrew his hand from the latch, and my insides stirred over him.

I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with flowing myrrh, upon the handles of the lock.

I opened for my beloved, but my beloved had eluded and was gone. My soul went out when he spoke; I sought him, but I did not find him; I called him, but he did not answer me.



Our Wakeful Heart

Shir Hashirim Rabah, 5:2

"I am asleep but my heart is awake"—The community of Israel says to G-d: Although I am asleep regarding the *mitzvot*, my heart is awake to acts of kindness. Although I am asleep regarding the Holy Temple, my heart is awake to our synagogues and study halls. Although I am asleep regarding the end of the exile, my heart is awake to the redemption.

The Moabite Convert

RUTH 1:1-18

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים שֶׁפֶטׁ הַשְּׁפֹטִים, וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ; וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית
 לְחֵם יְהוּדָה לְגֹר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב, הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו.
 וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ, וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֹמִי, וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו מַחְלוֹן
 וְכִלְיוֹן, אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לְחֵם יְהוּדָה; וַיָּבֹאוּ שָׂדֵי מוֹאָב וַיְהִיו שָׁם.
 וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נְעֹמִי; וַתִּשָּׂאָר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ.
 וַיִּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מוֹאֲבִיּוֹת, שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָּה,
 וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רוּת; וַיָּשִׁבוּ שָׁם כַּעֲשֶׂר שָׁנִים.
 וַיָּמוּתוּ גַם שְׁנֵיהֶם, מַחְלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן; וַתִּשָּׂאָר
 הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמְאִישָׁהּ.
 וַתָּקָם הִיא וְכִלְתִּיהָ, וַתָּשֶׁב מִשָּׂדֵי מוֹאָב; כִּי שָׁמְעָה
 בְּשָׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת עַמּוֹ לְתֵת לָהֶם לְחֵם.
 וַתֵּצֵא מִן הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה שָׁמָּה, וּשְׁתֵּי כִלְתֵּיהָ
 עִמָּהּ; וַתֵּלְכֶנָּה בְּדֶרֶךְ לְשׁוּב אֶל אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה.
 וַתֹּאמֶר נְעֹמִי לְשְׁתֵּי כִלְתֵּיהָ, "לִכְנֶה שְׁבֹנָה אִשָּׁה לְבֵית
 אִמָּהּ; יַעַשׂ ה' עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד, כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי.
 יִתֵּן ה' לָכֶם וּמִצָּאוֹ-מִנוּחָה, אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה";
 וַתִּשָּׂק לָהֶן, וַתִּשָּׂאנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּיָנָה.
 וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה לָּהֶן, "כִּי אַתֶּן נָשׁוּב לְעַמֶּךָ."
 וַתֹּאמֶר נְעֹמִי, "שְׁבֹנָה בְּנָתִי, לָמָּה תִּלְכְּנָה עִמָּי?
 הֲעוֹד לִי בָנִים בְּמַעַי, וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְאִנְשִׁים?
 שְׁבֹנָה בְּנָתִי לָכֵן, כִּי זָקַנְתִּי מֵהַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ; כִּי אִמְרַתִּי יֵשׁ
 לִי תִקְוָה? גַּם הָיִיתִי הַלֵּילָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם יְלָדְתִי בָּנִים. הֲלֹהוּ
 תִשְׁבְּרֶנָּה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ? הֲלֹהוּ תִעַגְּנָה לְבִלְתִּי הָיוֹת
 לְאִישׁ? אֵל בְּנָתִי כִי מוֹר לִי מֵאֵד מִכֶּם, כִּי יֵצְאָה בִּי יָד ה'."
 וַתִּשְׁנֶה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכְּיָנָה עוֹד; וַתִּשָּׂק עֹרְפָּה
 לְחַמּוֹתָהּ, וְרוּת דָּבְקָה בָּהּ.
 וַתֹּאמֶר, "הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבַמְתֶּךָ אֶל עַמָּה וְאֶל
 אֱלֹהֶיהָ; שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבַמְתֶּךָ."
 וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת, "אֵל תִּפְגְּעֵי בִי לְעֻזְבֶּךָ לְשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַי; כִּי אֵל אֲשֶׁר
 תִּלְכִּי אֵלָּה, וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיִנִי אֱלֹהִי, עִמָּךְ עִמִּי, וְאֶלְקֶיךָ אֶלְקֵי.
 כַּאֲשֶׁר תִּמְוֹתֵי אֲמוֹתַי, וְשֵׁם אֲקַבְּרֶךָ; כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה ה'
 לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף, כִּי הַפְּנוֹת יִפְרִיד בִּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ."
 וַתֵּרָא כִּי מִתְאַמְצָת הִיא לְלַכֵּת אֶתָּה; וַתַּחְדֵּל לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ.

It was in the days when the judges judged, that there was a famine in the land; and a man went from Bethlehem of Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons' names were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah; and they came to the fields of Moab and remained there.

And Naomi's husband Elimelech died; and she was left with her two sons.

And they married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other named Ruth; and they dwelt there for about ten years.

And both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left bereft of her two children and of her husband.

She arose with her daughters-in-law, and returned from the fields of Moab; for she had heard in the field of Moab that G-d had remembered His people to give them bread.

She went forth from the place where she had been, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the road to return to the land of Judah.

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go and return, each woman to her mother's house; may G-d do kindness with you, as you have done with the dead and with me.

"May G-d grant you that you find rest, each woman in her husband's house"; and she kissed them, and they raised their voices and wept.

They said to her: "But we will return with you to your people."

And Naomi said, "Return, my daughters, why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they should be your husbands?"

“Return, my daughters, go, for I have become too old to marry. Could I say that I have hope? Even if I had a husband tonight, and even if I bore sons. Would you wait for them until they grew up? Would you tie yourselves down for them and not marry? No, my daughters, for it is much more bitter for me than for you, as the hand of G-d has gone forth against me.”

And they raised their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth cleaved to her.

And she said: “Here your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her god; return after your sister-in-law.”

And Ruth said, “Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you; for wherever you go I will go, and wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people are my people, and your G-d is my G-d.

“Where you die I shall die, and there I will be buried; so may G-d do to me and so may He continue, if anything but death shall separate between me and you.”

And she saw that she was determined to go with her; and she stopped speaking to her.



Accepting a Convert

Ruth Rabah, 2:16

Three times Naomi says to Ruth, “Return,” for three times we dissuade a convert from converting. But if they persist, we accept them. . . . We reject with the left hand, and draw near with the right.

Talmud, Yevamot 47a

We were taught: When a person comes to us to convert to Judaism, we say to them: “Why do you wish to convert? Don't you know that these days the Jewish people are anguished, persecuted, suppressed, and despised, and many troubles befall them?” If they say, “I know, I am unworthy, and nevertheless I desire it,” we accept them immediately. . . . As the verse states, “She saw that she was determined to go with her; and she stopped speaking to her.”

Times and Seasons

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

לכל זמן; וְעַת לְכָל חֶפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.
 עֵת לִלְדֹת וְעֵת לָמוּת; עֵת לִטְעַת וְעֵת לֵעֲקוֹר נְטוּעַ.
 עֵת לְהַרוֹג וְעֵת לְרַפּוֹא, עֵת לְפָרוֹץ וְעֵת לְבַנוֹת.
 עֵת לְבַכּוֹת וְעֵת לְשַׁחֵק, עֵת סָפוּד וְעֵת רִקּוּד.
 עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים;
 עֵת לְחַבּוֹק וְעֵת לְרַחֵק מִחֶבֶק.
 עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד, עֵת לְשִׁמּוֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ.
 עֵת לְקַרֹּעַ וְעֵת לְתַפּוֹר, עֵת לְחַשׂוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר.
 עֵת לְאַהֲבָה וְעֵת לְשִׂנְאָה, עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שְׁלוֹם.

To every thing there is a season; a time to every purpose under the heavens:

A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

A time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break and a time to build.

A time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.

A time to search and a time to lose, a time to keep and a time to cast away.

A time to rend and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

The Ten Commandments

DERIVED MITZVOT

TABLET 1 BETWEEN US AND G-D

- Love and awe of G-d
- Prayer
- The service in the Holy Temple
- The signs and reminders of our relationship with G-d: *tefilin*, *mezuzah*, *tzitzit*, etc.

1

I AM G-D YOUR G-D

- All prohibitions of idolatry and idolatrous practices
- The laws of ritual purity

2

**DO NOT HAVE
ANY OTHER GODS
BEFORE ME**

- Laws of prophecy
- The sanctification of G-d's name
- Blasphemy, false oaths, and the fulfillment of vows
- Not to curse or insult a fellow

3

**DO NOT TAKE THE
NAME OF G-D IN VAIN**

- The festivals
- The Sabbatical and Jubilee years

4

**REMEMBER THE
DAY OF SHABBAT TO
SANCTIFY IT**

- Procreation
- Circumcision
- Mourning relatives
- Laws of inheritance
- Charity and aiding a fellow in need
- Gifts to *kohanim* and Levites

5

**HONOR YOUR FATHER
AND YOUR MOTHER**

TABLET 2 A PERSON AND THEIR FELLOW

DERIVED MITZVOT

6

DO NOT MURDER

- Mitzvot governing preservation of life
- The judging of capital cases
- Laws of warfare

7

**DO NOT COMMIT
ADULTERY**

- Laws of marriage and divorce
- Forbidden relations

8

DO NOT STEAL

- All financial and property laws

9

**DO NOT BEAR FALSE
WITNESS UNTO
YOUR FELLOW**

- Laws pertaining to the hearing of evidence and the proper execution of justice
- Prohibitions against slander, defamation, and gossip

10

**DO NOT COVET . . .
ANYTHING THAT IS
YOUR FELLOW'S**

- Love your fellow as yourself
- Laws pertaining to diet and dress

PARALLEL COMMANDMENTS

1/6

The human soul is “literally a part of G-d above.” Without belief in G-d, there is ultimately no respect for the sanctity of human life; without respect for the sanctity of human life, there is no true belief in G-d.

2/7

Our relationship with G-d is a marriage, and human marriage reflects its Divine analog. The loyalty that G-d expects from us is no less than that which we expect from our spouse. Conversely, love between a man and a woman will attain its fullest potential when it is true to its Divine essence.

3/8

G-d allocates to every individual his or her “portion in the world”—the resources they require to fulfill their mission in life. Violating the property rights of one’s fellow is an act that debases G-d’s own ownership of His creation.

4/9

By observing the Shabbat, we testify to G-d’s creation of the world. To violate the Shabbat is to make a lie of this testimony.

5/10

Both these commandments indicate an inherent synonymy of the two tablets. On the face of it, the 5th commandment would seem to belong with the “between a person and their fellow” precepts, while the 10th Commandment, an act performed in the heart, appears to be wholly a matter “between us and G-d.” Yet honoring those who brought us into the world with the distinctly Divine power of creation acknowledges the G-dly in the human being; and the precept “Do not covet” acknowledges that our spiritual transgressions also impact a fellow’s life.

Major Biblical Commentaries

1070
RASHI

Commentary by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105) of Troyes, France. Foremost of the biblical elucidators, Rashi's commentary on Torah is a first point of reference for schoolchild and scholar alike. Drawn almost entirely from Talmudic and Midrashic sources, under Rashi's pen these are blended, rephrased, and edited into a lucid, internally consistent commentary, addressing virtually every question and ambiguity arising from the text. By Rashi's own attestation, "I come only to explain the plain meaning of the text, and to present those Midrashim that aid its understanding."



1200
RADAK

Rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235) was a primary authority on biblical Hebrew. In addition to his philological works, Kimchi wrote commentaries on many of the biblical books,



including all the books of the Prophets and the book of Psalms.

1291
BECHAYEI

Commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Bechayei (or Bachya) ben Asher (1255–1340, Spain) that is a synthesis of elucidation, allegory, homilies, and mysticism.



1494
AKEIDAT YITZCHAK

("Binding of Isaac") Philosophical and mystical essays in order of the weekly Torah portions by Rabbi Yitzchak Arama (1420–1494) of Spain.



100
ONKELOS

Aramaic translation of the Bible authored by Onkelos (c. 35–120 CE), a prominent Roman nobleman (and nephew of the Roman emperor Titus) who converted to Judaism. The Talmud attests that Onkelos's translation incorporates the authentic interpretation of the Torah as received in the Sinaitic tradition.



1156
IBN EZRA

Classic commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (1092–1167). Born in Tudela in northern Spain, the wanderings of his turbulent life brought him to France, Italy, England, and the Middle East. Ibn Ezra employs grammatical and lexical analysis to support a rigorous *peshat* (plain meaning of the verse) approach to biblical elucidation, and draws on explanations given by earlier philologists and commentators, many of whom are known only from his work. Ibn Ezra also wrote works of poetry, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and other topics.



1264
NACHMANIDES

Classic commentary on the Torah, intermingled with agadic and mystical interpretations, by Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194–1270). Toward the end of his life, Nachmanides left his native Spain and settled in the Holy Land, where he revived the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Nachmanides also authored a commentary on the Talmud and works of Halachah and Musar.

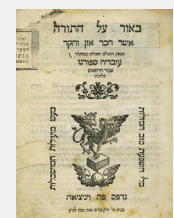


1321
RALBAG

Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1288–1344) of France, also known by the acronym "Ralbag" and by the patronymic "Gersonides," was a philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and inventor. His commentary on Tanach defines word meanings, explains the narrative, and lists dozens of philosophical, ethical, and Halachic conclusions derived from each chapter.

1550
SEFORNO

Popular commentary by Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno (1475–1550), who lived in Rome and Bologna, Italy. While in Rome, Seforno taught Hebrew to the German humanist Johann Reuchlin, who later put this knowledge to use in defending German Jewry against religious attacks.



1500
ABARBANEL

Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (1437–1508) was a scholar, philosopher, statesman, and financier who served as treasurer to several monarchs in Portugal and Spain. Following the infamous Edict of Expulsion in 1492, he settled in Italy. Abarbanel authored a series of commentaries on the Tanach, and numerous other important Torah works.



1732
ME'AM LO'EZ

Encyclopedic biblical commentary covering all areas of Jewish life, originally written in Ladino. Begun by Rabbi Yaakov Culi (1689–1732), chief rabbinical magistrate of Constantinople, with other prominent rabbis of Turkey completing the remaining volumes after his passing.



1860
NETZIV

Commentary on the Torah entitled *Haamek Davar* ("Delve into the Matter") by Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (1817–1893), head of the yeshiva in Volozhin, Russia. Netziv also authored commentaries on the Halachic Midrashim, Talmud, and *She'iltot*.



1593
ALSHICH
Homiletical commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Moshe Alshich (c. 1508–1593) of Safed, Israel.

1742
OHR HACHAYIM
Commentary on the Torah combining *peshat*, homiletics, and mysticism by Rabbi Chaim ibn Atar (1696–1743) of Morocco and Israel.



1400

1500

1600

1700

1800

1900



1780
METZUDOT
A pair of commentaries on the "Prophets" section of Tanach and most of the "Writings" section by Rabbi David Altschuler (18th century, Prague). *Metzudat David* explains the plain sense of the text, and *Metzudat Tzion* explains the meaning of difficult words. The commentary was assembled and completed by Altschuler's son, Rabbi Yechiel Hillel.



1868
MALBIM
Commentary on the entire Tanach by Rabbi Meir Leibush Wisser (1809–1879), who served as rabbi in a number of prestigious communities across Europe. Malbim's commentary endeavors to explain the precise meaning of every word and synonym of the biblical text, while also introducing philosophical and mystical perspectives on the narrative.



1601
KELI YAKAR
A popular commentary containing many philosophical and psychological insights by Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntshitz (1550–1619), who lived in Lublin, Lvov, and Prague.



1774
CHIDA
Commentaries by Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (1724–1806) of Jerusalem. Chida traveled extensively throughout Europe and North Africa, and was a noted bibliophile and a prolific writer in many areas of Torah.



1875
BEN ISH CHAI
Series of lectures on the weekly Torah portion with mystical discussions and practical Halachah by Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1834–1909).