

SINAI REVELATION & THE MYTHIC JOURNEY: GUIDELINES FOR LIFE IN TRANSITION

1. SHAVUOT IN BIBLICAL TRADITION

Three times a year you shall keep a feast unto me. You shall keep FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD - PESACH; you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, in the time appointed in the month Aviv; for in it you came out from Egypt; and none shall appear before me empty; And the FEAST OF HARVEST -SUKKOT, the first fruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field; and the FEAST OF THE INGATHERING- HAG HABIKKURIM which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labors from the field. (Ex. 23:14-16)

Seven weeks shall you count; begin to number the seven weeks from such time as you begin to put the sickle to the grain. And you shall keep the Feast of Weeks - Shavuor to the Lord your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give according as the Lord your God has blessed you. (Deut. 16:9-11)

2. REVELATION OF TORAH AT MOUNT SINAI

In the third month, after the people of Israel went out of the land of Egypt...they came into the WILDERNESS OF SINAI... On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire... (Ex. 19:1, 16-17)

3. SHAVUOT IN SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD AND IN MISHNAIC TRADITION

From where do we know that one is responsible [for his *bikkurim*] until he brings them to the temple Mount? Because it says: "The first of the first-fruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God" (Ex. 23:19) this teaches that he is responsible until he brings them to the Temple Mount. MISHNA BIKKURIM 1:9

4. FUNCTION OF MIDRASH — MOSES IN THE YESHIVA OF RABBI AKIVA

"When Moses reached Heaven, he asked God: "What will become of my Torah?" Immediately God transported Moses into the Academy of Rabbi Akiva. He saw a house full of students, sitting at the feet of a master who was explaining the secrets and mysteries of the Torah. Moses heard their discussions, but he could not follow them, he did not understand what was being talked about, and he was quite upset. Then he heard one of the students asking Rabbi Akiva, "From where do you know this, Rebbe?" And Rabbi Akiva replied: "What I have told has already been explained to Moses, the son of Amram on Mount Sinai." Menahot,29B

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (a third century rabbi) taught: "Torah, Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah - indeed even the comments some bright student will one day make to his teacher - were already given to Moses on Mount Sinai." (Midrash Tanhuma, II, 58b)

5. TORAH AS PRE-EXISTENT

“Seven things were created before the world. What were they? The Torah, Gehenna, Gan Eden, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, Teshuva and the Messiah’s name.” [*Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer* 3]

“When the Holy Blessed One, decided to create the world, **He looked at the Torah, at each and every word and fashioned the world accordingly. For all the words and deeds of all the worlds are contained in the Torah**, and so the Holy Blessed One, looked at it when creating the world. It is not that the Torah itself created the world, but that G!d, looking at the Torah, created the world... [*Zohar*, Exodus 161a]

...the Israelites of that generation were on a [very high spiritual level]. The Torah had been written on high, and their souls had heard it even before coming into the world. Thus, *all that the Lord has spoken*” - **to our souls, before we came into the world -- “we will do.”** In addition, we will now hear God’s word again, in this world, in order to subject our bodies to it as well. [Joseph Karo, *Maggid Meisharim*, published Amsterdam, 1708].

6. WE WERE ALL AT SINAI

After they journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai, and encamped [Hebrew - *va’yihanu* (plural)] in the wilderness; Israel encamped [Hebrew - *va’yihan* (singular)] there in front of the mountain. (Ex. 19:2)

Israel encamped there in front of the mountain” - since **all the souls of Israel to the end of time were present there**, and it is well known that all souls derive from a single source, therefore it is not fitting to speak of souls in the plural. Thus the singular is used, for Torah is not speaking merely of the physical bodies that were there but of all the souls.[Moshe Prisco, *Yadav Shel Moshe*, 18th-19th century Turkey]

“...all future souls came to Sinai to receive their portion” [Aaron HaKohen of Ragusa, Zekan Aharon, Croatia, 16th- 17th century]

“the Torah has 600,000 interpretations, corresponding to the 600,000 souls [of the Israelites who stood at Sinai] each of whom received one interpretation as his portion.” [Isaiah Horowitz, *Shnei Lohot Habrit*, Prague, 16-17th century]

Rabbi Mendele of Kotzk would say: Each person should try to imagine the Sinai event. Rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzhansk said: “Not only do I remember the Sinai Event, but I remember who was standing next to me” [Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, *Emet Ve’emunah*, Poland 18th-19th century].

7. HEALING NECESSARY BEFORE RECEIVING OF TORAH

“Why was the Torah not given as soon as they left Egypt? It is to be likened to a prince who has not fully from an illness. His father said: ‘We will give him three months to recover fully, and then I will take him to the rabbi’s house to study Torah.’ In the same way, when Israel went out of Egypt, there were among them **those who had been disabled by enslavement**. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘I will wait until they are healed and then I will give them the Torah.’ [*Tanhumah*, Yitro; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 3]

Does engaging in the study of Torah bring healing to the body, and if so, should the Torah not have been given immediately in order to help them recover? In fact, their sickness was such that they did not recognize the disablement that had been caused by their enslavement in Egypt, that place of defilement. The blessed Lord waited three months for them to come to their senses and recognize their disability. Having seen their impairment, they could then be healed by the holiness of the Torah... [Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, Amud Ha'Emet, Poland 18th-19th century]

8. TORAH IN THE WILDERNESS

In the third month, when the people of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. Ex. 19:1

“Why was the Torah given in the wilderness? To teach you that, if you do not set yourself free, like the wilderness [of all worldly bonds], you do not deserve the Torah.” [*Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, Bahodesh Hashelishi]

9. PREPARATION FOR REVELATION

Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai. Ex. 19:11

“Let them be ready for the third day” -- but it does not say what they were to prepare for... The *preparation alone was half the act of receiving the Torah*; it was itself Torah. This is the meaning of the words of the Haggadah, “Had He brought us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough for us.” [Siah Safrei Kodesh, compilation of writings of Hasidic masters, Lodz, 1927-1928.]

10. IMAGES OF THE SINAI REVELATION - ASCENT OR DESCENT

Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount trembled greatly. 19 And when the voice of the shofar sounded long, and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice. [Ex. 19:18-19]

“*And Moses went up to G!d*” [Ex. 19:3] - the Sages taught: When Moses went up on high, a cloud came down to him, and Moses did not know whether to climb onto it or to take hold of it. The cloud then opened its mouth, and Moses went inside, and **he was able to ride through the heavens and he was able to ride through it the way one walks on the earth...**” [*Pesikta Rabbati*]

“*Moses led the people towards God*” -- Rabbi Yossi said: “*The Lord came from Sinai*” [Deut. 33:2] means He was revealed on Sinai; but I say it means **he came down from Sinai to greet his children joyfully**. This resembles the case of a bridegroom who went out to meet his bride. From the station of the one who goes out to greet, one can infer the station of the one who is greeted. That is why it says, “*Moses led the people towards God*”. [Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai].

“*The Lord came down.*” ...when a person wishes to speak of things belonging to the upper realm, he must bring them down to the human level, speaking of them in human terms. [Hayyim ben Moshe ibn Attar, *Or Hahayyim*, Morocco, Palestine, 18th century].

11. GIVING OF TORAH/ RECEIVING OF TORAH?

Why is it called the Occasion of the Giving of Our Torah and not the Occasion of the Receiving of Our Torah? The Giving of the Torah took place in the month of Sivan, but the receiving of the Torah takes place every day. Rabbi Menahem of Kotzk said further: the Giving of the Torah was the same for everyone, but the receiving of the Torah is different for each person according to his ability to understand. [Menahem Mendel of Kotsk, *Emet Ve'emunah*, Poland 18th-19th century].

12. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Why are the Ten Commandments addressed in the singular? To teach us that every Jew should say, "It was for me that the Ten Commandments were given, and I am obligated to fulfill them," rather than that he should say, "The Torah can just as well be fulfilled by other people." [Midrash Lekah Tov]

13. WHOLE SYSTEMS TRANSITIONS

"Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke" - The word *ashan* (smoke) is an acronym for *olam-shannah-nefesh*. Just as the world (*olam*) is a whole unit, so is the year (*shannah*), and so is the soul (*nefesh*). The world is a vessel [in space], the year [a vessel] in time, the soul [a vessel] in the human being. At the time of the receiving of the Torah, all three came together. That is what is meant by "Mount Sinai was all in smoke."; as soon as they came to Mount Sinai, it was "*all in smoke*," for the three joined together, and thus Israel could receive the Torah. [Aharon of Karlin, *Beit Aharon*, Lithuania, 19th century]

14. TRUSTING YOUR VISION

"You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens." - All the people of Israel were witness to things they had seen with their own eyes, the signs and great wonders, beginning with the Ten Plagues and extending through the giving of the Torah. Thus the Holy Blessed One reminded them of what "you yourselves saw," both at the beginning and at the end. Earlier in the passage describing the conditions of the covenant, He began by saying, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians" [Exod. 19:4, and now He tells them, "You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens" - for My glory rested on Mount Sinai, but My speech was from heaven." [Rabbenu Bahya, Spain 13th century]

