

Revelatory Experience

1. The Space Between

“Chazal tell us that the letters engraved in the Tablets of the Covenant consisted of empty spaces cut completely through the slabs of stone!¹ The “space between” is Reality: in the aseres hadibros this is reflected in the letters consisting of carved-out spaces. In our lives, it means that Reality is found in “the space between” finite and Infinite, between my self-expression and the absolute will of Hashem.”²

2. The rabbis go so far to wonder, on a practical level, how the Torah could be written in heaven³:

On what was the primordial Torah written? On parchment? But the animals had not been created yet, so how could one use their skins for parchment? Maybe on gold or silver? But the metals had not been created, refined, or unearthed! Maybe on wooden tablets? But the trees had not yet been created! So what was it written on? It was written with black fire on white fire and wrapped around the right arm of the Holy One, as it is written: “On God’s right arm, the fiery law.”⁴

3. Based on a verse in Proverbs⁵: “You see it, then it is gone,” Rabbi Akiva argued that “When a person learns a chapter and forgets it, it returns to heaven.⁶” This fascinating approach implies that there is a dynamic ongoing experience between heaven and earth in our studying. We learn and Torah is revealed to us. We forget our learning and the Torah goes back up to heaven. We relearn, or remember, and the flow between heaven and earth, between Divine consciousness and human consciousness continues dynamically.

¹ BT, Shabbat 104

² Batya Gallant, *Stages of Spiritual Growth*, page 150

³ Midrash Konen, Beit Hamidrash II p. 23

⁴ Deuteronomy 33:2

⁵ Proverbs 23:5

⁶ Midrash Hagadol on Exodus 3:22. Also see Midrash on Proverbs 23:1.

4. Unique Human Experience:

“All are the words of the living G-d, as if they had all been received from on high and from the mouth of Moses, although it may have never come from Moses' mouth in the form of two opposing views of the same subject...The kabbalists gave a reason for this: it is because all souls were present at Mount Sinai and received the Torah through forty-nine separate channels...those being the sounds that they heard and also saw. All Israel 'saw the sounds' – these were the interpretations that diverged through each channel, with everyone seeing through their own channel, according to their power...so that one perceived complete impurity and another perceived complete purity, and yet a third perceived a middle position between these two. All are true...they are all words of the living G-d.”⁷

“Both these and these are the words of the living G-d. and the halakhah agrees with the school of Hillel.”⁸

From the Prophets to the Rabbis

1. “On the day that the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and give over to the Sages.”

2. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 12a תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף יב עמוד א

R Avdimi from Chaifa said: from the day that the 1st Temple was destroyed, the power of prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the sages. Is it really true that no sage was previously a prophet? He meant: Although prophecy was taken from the prophets (who were not sages) when the

אמר רבי אבדימי דמן חיפה: מיום שחרב בית המקדש, ניטלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה לחכמים. אטו חכם לאו נביא הוא? הכי קאמר: אע"פ שניטלה מן הנביאים, מן החכמים לא ניטלה. אמר אמימר: וחכם עדיף מנביא, שנאמר:

⁷ Rabbi Shlomo Luria: Yam shel Shlomo, preface

⁸ BT, Eruvin 13b

temple was destroyed, it was not taken from the sages. Ameimar said: **A sage is even greater than a prophet**, as it says, "And a prophet has a heart of wisdom." Which is being compared to the other? We compare the lesser to the greater!

+תהלים צ'+ ונביא לבב חכמה, מי נתלה במי? הוי אומר: קטן נתלה בגדול.

"There are times when the annulment of something in the Torah strengthens its foundation,"⁹

"The Sages have the power to uproot something from the Torah."¹⁰

"It is time to act for God by annulling the Torah."¹¹

3. Tanur shel Aknai¹²

<p>It has been taught: On that day Rabbi Eliezer brought forward every imaginable argument, but they did not accept them. Said he to them: "If the halachah agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it!" Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place — others affirm, four hundred cubits. "No proof can be brought from a carob-tree," they [the Sages] retorted. Again, he said to them: "If the halachah agrees with me, let the stream of water prove it!" Whereupon the stream of water flowed backwards — "No proof can be brought from a stream of water," they rejoined.</p> <p>Again, he urged: "If the halachah agrees with me, let the walls of the schoolhouse prove</p>	<p>תנא: באותו היום השיב רבי אליעזר כל תשובות שבעולם ולא קיבלו הימנו. אמר להם: אם הלכה כמותי - חרוב זה יוכיח. נעקר חרוב ממקומו מאה אמה, ואמרי לה: ארבע מאות אמה: אמרו לו: אין מביאין ראיה מן החרוב. חזר ואמר להם: אם הלכה כמותי - אמת המים יוכיחו. חזרו אמת המים לאחוריהם. אמרו לו: אין מביאין ראיה מאמת המים.</p> <p>חזר ואמר להם: אם הלכה כמותי - כותלי בית המדרש יוכיחו. הטו</p>
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⁹ BT Menahot 99b

¹⁰ BT Berakhot 16a (Tosafot s.v. ve'hotem), BT Nazir 43b (Tosafot s.v. ve-hai), BT Yevamot 89b (Tosafot s.v. ve-khevan)

¹¹ Mishnah Berakhot 9:5

¹² BT, Bava Metziah 59b

it," whereupon the walls inclined to fall. But Rabbi Yehoshua rebuked them, saying: "When scholars are engaged in a halachic dispute, what have you to interfere?" Hence, they did not fall, in honor of Rabbi Yehoshua, nor did they stand upright, in honor of Rabbi Eliezer; and they are still standing inclined. Again, he said to them: "If the halachah agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!" Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: "Why do you dispute with Rabbi Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the halachah agrees with him!" But Rabbi Yehoshua arose and exclaimed: (Devarim 30:12) "[The Torah] is not in heaven." What did he mean by this? — Said Rabbi Yirmiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because You have long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, (Shemot 23:2) "A case must be decided on the basis of the majority."

Rabbi Nathan met Elijah (the Prophet) and asked him: "What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do in that hour?" — He replied, "He laughed [with joy], saying, 'My children have defeated Me, My children have defeated Me'."

כותלי בית המדרש ליפול. גער בהם רבי יהושע, אמר להם: אם תלמידי חכמים מנצחים זה את זה בהלכה - אתם מה טיבכם? לא נפלו מפני כבודו של רבי יהושע, ולא זקפו מפני כבודו של רבי אליעזר, ועדיין מטין ועומדין. חזר ואמר להם: אם הלכה כמותי - מן השמים יוכיחו. יצאתה בת קול ואמרה: מה לכם אצל רבי אליעזר שהלכה כמותו בכל מקום! עמד רבי יהושע על רגליו ואמר: לא בשמים היא. - מאי (דברים ל:יב) לא בשמים היא? - אמר רבי ירמיה: שכבר נתנה תורה מהר סיני. אין אנו משגיחין בבת קול, שכבר כתבת בהר סיני בתורה (שמות כג:ב) אחרי רבים להטות.

אשכחיה רבי נתן לאליהו, אמר ליה: מאי עביד קודשא בריך הוא בההיא שעתא? - אמר ליה: קא חייך ואמר נצחוני בני, נצחוני בני.

Ongoing Revelation

1. The Shlah HaKadosh¹³: "In the blessing over the Torah, we say 'who gives the Torah.' In truth, God already gave it, but God still is giving it, with no cessation."¹⁴
2. "There is no generation without its Moses"¹⁵

"After he (Moses) left this world, the faithful shepherd shone through the 600,000 souls of Israel."¹⁶

"Moses' influence extends through all generations, to every righteous person."¹⁷

"Moses' light sparkles in the Sages of every generation to assist them in the direction of the truth...the spark of Moses' soul is now in you, to direct you to the truth."¹⁸

Revelation Today?

1. "Every single day a heavenly voice emanates from Mount Horeb...!"¹⁹

2. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler²⁰: "Each Shavuot ... we spiritually arrive at that same point of sanctity experienced by our ancestors at Mount Sinai. It is once again, in a real sense, "The time of the Giving of our Torah," and we are invited to accept it anew, as they did 3,300 years ago.

On Shavuot we have to work in order to receive the Torah. We have to struggle to acquire it in our hearts. We have to appreciate

¹³ RabbiYeshayahu ben Avraham Horowitz

¹⁴ Shnei Luhot Haberit, 25a

¹⁵ Genesis Rabbah 56:9

¹⁶ Zohar, Ra'ya Mehemna, Pinhas, 216b

¹⁷ Tikkunei Zohar, 469, 112a

¹⁸ BT Shabbat 101b, Kissei Melekh, on Tikkunei Zohar (Lemberg, 1864), 2a.

¹⁹ Pirkei Avot 6:2

²⁰ Strive for Truth, Vol. IV, p. 49

its truths as unchangeable verities ... the nation still harbored lingering doubts ... Only when they heard God's voice at Sinai was doubt replaced by absolute certainty. So too, when we learn Torah today and especially at Shavuot time, we can, if we wish, still hear that same voice."

3. Rabbi David Hartman²¹: "Sinai permanently exposes the Jewish people to prophetic aspirations and judgments....Sinai requires of the Jew that he believe in the possibility of integrating the moral seriousness of the prophet with the realism and political judgment of the statesman. Politics and morality were united when Israel was born as a nation at Sinai...The prophets taught us that the state has only instrumental value for the purpose of embodying the covenantal demands of Judaism. When nationalism becomes an absolute value for Jews, and political and military judgments are not related to the larger spiritual and moral purpose of our national renaissance, we can no longer claim to continue the Judaic tradition."
4. Rabbi Yochanan said: When God's voice came forth at Mount Sinai, it divided itself into 70 human languages, so that the whole world might understand it. All at Mount Sinai, young [men] and old, women, children, and infants heard the voice of God according to their ability to understand. Moses, too, understood only according to his capacity, as it is said²², "Moses spoke, and God answered him with a voice." With a voice that Moses could hear.²³

²¹ A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices within Judaism, p. 259-266

²² Exodus 19:19

²³ Shemot Rabbah 5:9

Prophecy Today?

Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 12b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף יב עמוד

ב

R Yochanan Said: From the day that the Holy Temple was destroyed, the power of prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the mentally ill and to children.

א"ר יוחנן: מיום שחרב בית המקדש, ניטלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה לשוטים ולתינוקות.

In the Messianic Era

1. "The commandments will be nullified in the age to come."²⁴
2. Rabbi Yakov Yosef of Polonnoye: "In the future...the commandments will reside in spirituality...and it is to this that the Talmud referred when it said that they would be nullified in the future...that commandments will no longer have a physical form, but rather a spiritual one."²⁵
3. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov: "After this final exile will come the true revelation of the Torah."²⁶

²⁴ BT, Niddah 61b. Also see there the Tosafot s.v. amar Raf Yosef. Also see BT, Ketubot 111b and the Tosafot there.

²⁵ Toledot Yaakov Yosef, Preface

²⁶ Likkut Etzot Ha-Meshulash, "Awe and Service," p. 116

Wouldn't Reason & Natural Morality be enough?

"If we had not received the Torah we would have learned modesty from watching a cat, honesty from the ant, and fidelity from the dove."²⁷

Post-Modernity

Rav Shagar: "To me, the creative act reveals the divine through the human. All truths may be the product of human conditioning, but such conditioning constitutes the medium through which the divine manifests in the world. That is why the pluralist believer does not shy away from using the revelation metaphor; though he knows there are varying and conflicting revelations, the contradictions do not paralyze him. He is willing to concede that truth is a human construct, because he knows that human constructs are true creations, manifestations of God in a world that is 'filled with G-d's Glory,' not an empty, meaningless game."²⁸

²⁷ BT, Eruvin 100b

²⁸ Faith Shattered and Restored "Justice and Ethics in a Postmodern world," p. 116