

Talmud Tour

Berachot 5a

Link to Standard Talmud edition Berachot 5a

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Berachot 5a – the Nature of Torah

ואמר רבי לוי בר חמא, אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש, מאי דכתיב "ואתנה לה את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר כתבתי להורתם". "לחת" — אלו עשרת הדברות, "תורה" — זה מקרא, "והמצוה" — זו משנה, "אשר כתבתי" — אלו נביאים וכתובים, "להורתם" — תלמוד, מלמד שכולם נתנו למשה מסיני.

And Rabbi Levi bar Ḥama said that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: G-d said to Moses, “Ascend to me on the mountain and be there, **and I will give you the stone tablets and the Torah and the mitzva that I have written that you may teach them**”

(Exodus 24:12), meaning that G-d revealed to Moses not only the Written Torah, but all of Torah, as it would be transmitted through the generations.

The “tablets” are the ten commandments that were written on the tablets of the Covenant,

the “Torah” is the five books of Moses.

The “mitzva” is the Mishna, which includes explanations for the mitzvot and how they are to be performed.

“That I have written” refers to the Prophets and Writings, written with divine inspiration.

“That you may teach them” refers to the Talmud, which

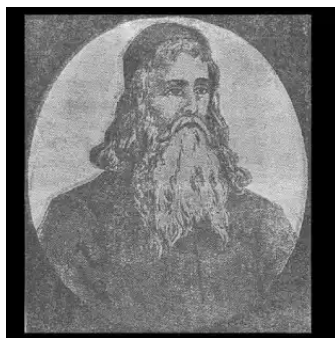
explains the Mishna.

These explanations are the foundation for the rulings of practical *halakha*. This verse **teaches** that **all** aspects of Torah **were given to Moses from Sinai**.

Rashi: "זה מקרא"- This is Chumash. Which is a Mitzvah to read from the Torah. "זו משנה"- That one should be engaged in Mishnah

"זה גמרא"- The reasoning behind the Mishnayos - from there comes out [Halachic] rulings. However, one who learns [Halachic] rulings straight from Mishnah is called a "destroyer of the world" (Sotah 22a)

Why is this passage about the Torah suddenly introduced in the middle of the discussion about the Shema? One might say because having quoted earlier one teaching by Rabbi Levi bar Chama in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, the Talmud now adds another. But the Maharsha says that at this point, at the very beginning of the Talmud, which is focused on written and oral Torah and their explanation, the Talmud wants to make clear to us what Torah is.



Rabbi Shmuel Edels, known as Maharsha (1555-1631), born in Cracow, ran a Yeshiva in Posen (Poznan), Poland, funded by his mother-in-law, Edel Lifshitz. In gratitude he adopted her name as his surname. He wrote two extensive commentaries on the Talmud – one on the Halachic aspect, the other about Aggada. These are printed together at the back of the full edition of the Talmud. When studying Talmud in the traditional way, people study Rashi's commentary and then Tosafot on the page. Many then look at the Maharsha.

This vitally important theme is found elsewhere as well.

Thus see the Jerusalem Talmud, Peah ch.2 Halachah 4:

רבי יהושע בן לוי אָמַר עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַלֵּיהֶם כָּל דְּבָרִים הַדְּבָרִים מִקְרָא מִשְׁנָה תִּלְמוּד וְאַגְדָּה.
אָפִילוּ מֵהַ שְׁתַּלְמִיד וְנִתְיָק עֲתִיד לְהוֹרוֹת לְפָנָי רַבּוֹ כְּבָר נֶאֱמַר לְמַתְּשָׁה בְּסִינִי. מֵה טַעַם יֵשׁ דְּבָר
שְׂיֵאמַר רָאָה זֶה חֻדָּשׁ הוּא. מִשִּׁיבוּ חֲבִירוֹ וְאוֹמַר לוֹ כְּבָר הָיָה לְעוֹלָמִים.

Rebbi Joshua ben Levi said: On them, and on them; all, like all;
words, the words; Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah. Even
what a competent student will discover before his teacher was said
to Moses on Sinai. What is the reason? (Ecclesiastes.1.10)

יֵשׁ דְּבָר שְׂיֵאמַר רָאָה־זֶה חֻדָּשׁ הוּא כְּבָר הָיָה לְעוֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנָיו:

“There is something about which one would say, look, this is new!”
His colleague will answer, “it already has been forever.”

Explanation of the Biblical verse: The reference is to
Deuteronomy.9.10":

וַיִּתֵּן ה' אֵלַי אֶת־שְׁנֵי לוחֹת הַאֲבָנִים כְּתוּבִים בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים וְעַלֵּיהֶם כָּכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־
ה' עִמָּכֶם בְּהַר מִתּוֹרַת הָאֵשׁ בְּיוֹם הַקִּהְיָה:

“The Eternal gave to me the two stone tablets, written by the
Divine Finger, *and on them like all the* words that the Eternal spoke
to you on the mountain at the day of assembly.” The three
italicized expressions are all unnecessary for the understanding of
the sentence; these are interpreted as referring to the three
divisions of oral law contained in the complete Torah.

This concept is stressed in Chassidic teaching. The Torah, in all its
details, including the most recent commentaries, is all from
Hashem. All was given by Hashem to Moshe (see also below
Menachot 29b) and all was the supernal Torah, long before the
creation of the universe, the delight of Hashem. See Likkutei
Torah, Bemidbar, 17d ff discussing the verse from Proverbs 8:4

וְאֶהְיֶה אֶצְלוֹ אֱמוּנָה וְאֶהְיֶה שְׂעִשׂוּעִים יוֹם וָיּוֹם מִשְׂחֻקָּתָ לְפָנָיו כָּכָל־עֵת:

I was with Him as a confidant, A source of delight every day,
Rejoicing before Him at all times..

Paraphrasing: *amon* means suckling, the Torah is like food for the infant and for the person. Like eating bread, we eat and our minds mature and gain knowledge; delight means the joy we get from studying Torah, and also the delight of the Divine.

Tanya ch.4 by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (c.1800) speaks of the nature of Torah:

Therefore has the Torah has been compared to water, for just as water descends from a higher to a lower level, so has the Torah descended from its place of glory, which is His blessed will and wisdom; [for] the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one and the same and no thought can apprehend Him at all. Thence [the Torah] has progressively descended through hidden stages, stage after stage, with the descent of the worlds, until it clothed itself in corporeal substances and in things of this world, comprising almost all of the commandments of the Torah, their laws, and in the combinations of material letters, written with ink in a book, namely, the 24 volumes of the Torah, Prophets and Hagiographa; all this in order that every thought should be able to apprehend them, and even the faculties of speech and action, which are on a lower level than thought, should be able to apprehend them and be clothed in them.

Tanya chapter 5 explains that when a person understands a halachah in the Torah, their mind envelops that teaching, within which is the Divine; and that teaching envelops their mind. It is a 'remarkable unity which has no comparison' elsewhere.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, called Ramban (Nachmanides), lived in 13th cent. Barcelona. Here is his description of the spiritual nature of Torah, from the Introduction to his commentary on the Torah:

וְהַטַּעַם לְכַתִּיבַת הַתּוֹרָה בְּלִשׁוֹן זֶה – מִפְּנֵי שְׂקֻדָּמָה לְבְרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם, אֵין צְרִיךְ לֹאמַר לְלִדְתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁבָּא לָנוּ בַּקְּבָלָה, שֶׁהִיְתָה כְּתוּבָה בְּאֵשׁ שְׁחֹרָה עַל גְּבִי אֵשׁ לְבִנְיָהּ. הִנֵּה מֹשֶׁה כְּסוֹפֵר הַמַּעֲשִׂיִּים מִסֵּפֶר קְדָמוֹן וְכוּתֵב, וְלִכֵּן כְּתֹב סֵתֵם. אָבֵל זֶה אֲמַת וּבְרוּר הוּא שֶׁכֵּל הַתּוֹרָה מִתְחַלֵּת סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית עַד 'לְעֵינַי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל' נֶאֱמָרָה מִפִּי שֶׁל הַקָּב"ה לְאַזְנֵינוּ שֶׁל

מִלְשָׁה, כְּעֵגֶזְזוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְהֵלֹךְ: "מִפִּי יִקְרָא אֵלַי אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, וְאֲנִי כֹתֵב עַל הַסֵּפֶר בְּדִיּוֹ".

The reason for the Torah being written in this form [namely, the third person] is that it preceded the creation of the world, and, needless to say, it preceded the birth of Moses our teacher. It has been transmitted to us by tradition that it [the Torah] was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire. Thus Moses was like a scribe who copies from an ancient book, and therefore he wrote anonymously. However, it is true and clear that the entire Torah — from the beginning of Genesis to *in the sight of all Israel* [the last words in Deuteronomy] — reached the ear of Moses from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, just as it is said elsewhere, *He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book.* Jeremiah 36:18. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, is explaining the manner in which he wrote down his master's prophecies: he [Jeremiah] pronounced all these words, etc.

The following is from the Rambam's Commentary on the Mishnah, Introduction to Sanhedrin chapter 10, the full expression of the 13 Principles of Faith. (Translation from the Hebrew from the original Arabic, in Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, 420-421, edited in the light of Rabbi Yosef Kapach's new Hebrew translation from the Judeo Arabic.)

The Eighth Fundamental Principle is that the Torah is from Heaven. We are to believe that the whole Torah in our hands today is that which was given to Moses, and it is all entirely from G-d. That means it came to him from G-d in a way which is metaphorically called "G-d's Word". We do not know exactly how it reached him, but only that Moses acted like a scribe taking dictation. He wrote down the chronologies and the stories and the commandments, for which reason he is called 'Lawgiver' (מְחַוֵּק מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם Num.21:18).

There is no distinction between a verse of Scripture like 'The sons of Ham were Cush and Mitzraim' (Gen. 10:6), or 'his wife's name

was Mehetabel and his concubine was Timna" (Gen. 36:39 ,12)' and one like 'I am the Lord your G-d' (Ex. 20:2), or 'Hear, o Israel the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One' (Deut. 6:4). All came from G-d, and all are the Torah of G-d, perfect, pure, holy and true.

Anyone who says Moses wrote some passages on his own is regarded by our sages as a heretic, because he tries to distinguish the 'kernel' from the 'shell' in the Torah. Such a person claims that some historical passages or stories are trivial inventions of Moses and not Divine Revelation. But the sages said that if one accepts as Revelation the whole Torah with the exception of even one verse, claiming it was composed by Moses himself and not G-d, he is [expressing an heretical view].

Every letter and word of Torah is full of wisdom and wonders for one who understands it. It is beyond human understanding. It is broader than the earth and wider than the sea. Each person should follow David, anointed of the G-d of Jacob, who prayed: "Open my eyes that I may behold wonders out of Your Torah" (Ps. 119:18).

The accepted explanation of the Torah is also the Word of G-d. The sukkah we build today, or the lulav, shofar, fringes, phylacteries, etc. we use, replicate exactly those G-d commanded Moses, which Moses transmitted to us. This fundamental principle is taught by the verse 'And Moses said, Thus shall you know that G-d sent me to do all these things, and that they are not products of my own mind' (Num. 16:28).

The Ninth Fundamental Principle is that Torah is not superseded. The Torah of Moses will not be superseded, and there will not come another teaching from G-d which will replace it. The Torah should not be added to, nor subtracted from, neither in its written text nor in its [oral] explanation, as Deut 13:1 says 'do not add to it nor take away from it.'

Another passage shows us Moshe seeing/hearing future teachers: Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 23:5 tells us that Moshe saw 'each generation and its teachers, each generation and its judges.. its leaders..its sinners... its Tzaddikim..' מה כל מה שהיה ועתיד להיות הראה לו... כל דור ודור ודורשיו דור דור ושופטיו דור דור ומנהיגיו דור דור ופושעיו דור דור וצדיקיו.. שנא'..ויאמר ה' אליו זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי "לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לאמר לזרעך אתננה הראיתך בעיניך

This is seen also in Menachot 29b

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות אמר לפניו רבש"ע מי מעכב על ידך אמר לו אדם אחד יש שעתיד להיות בסוף כמה דורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעתיד לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות

§ **Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: When Moses ascended on High, he found the Holy One, Blessed be He, sitting and tying crowns on the letters of the Torah. Moses said before G-d: Master of the Universe, who is preventing You from giving the Torah without these additions? G-d said to him: There is a man who is destined to be born after several generations, and Akiva ben Yosef is his name; he is destined to derive from each and every thorn of these crowns mounds upon mounds of *halakhot*. It is for his sake that the crowns must be added to the letters of the Torah.**

אמר לפניו רבש"ע הראהו לי אמר לו חזור לאחורך הלך וישב בסוף שמונה שורות ולא היה יודע מה הן אומרים תשש כחו כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד אמרו לו תלמידיו רבי מנין לך אמר להן הלכה למשה מסיני נתיישרה דעתו

Moses said before God: Master of the Universe, show him to me. G-d said to him: Return behind you. Moses went and sat at the end of the eighth row in Rabbi Akiva's study hall and did not understand what they were saying. Moses' strength waned, as he thought his Torah knowledge was deficient. When Rabbi Akiva arrived at the discussion of one matter, his students said to him: My teacher, from where do you derive this? Rabbi Akiva said to them: It is a *halakha* transmitted to Moses from

Sinai. When Moses heard this, **his mind was put at ease**, as this too was part of the Torah that he was to receive.

חזר ובא לפני הקב"ה אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה ע"י אמר לו שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם הראיתני תורתו הראני שכרו אמר לו חזור [לאחורך] חזר לאחוריו ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין אמר לפניו רבש"ע זו תורה וזו שכרה א"ל שתוק כך עלה במחשבה לפני

Moses **returned and came before the Holy One, Blessed be He**, and **said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have a man as great as this and yet You still choose to give the Torah through me. Why? God said to him: Be silent; this intention arose before Me.** Moses **said before God: Master of the Universe, You have shown me Rabbi Akiva's Torah, now show me his reward.** God **said to him: Return** to where you were. Moses **went back** and **saw that they were weighing Rabbi Akiva's flesh in a butcher shop [bemakkulin]**, as Rabbi Akiva was tortured to death by the Romans. Moses **said before Him: Master of the Universe, this is Torah and this is its reward?** God **said to him: Be silent; this intention arose before Me.**

The following passage, from Bava Metzia 85a-b, speaks of the need to make a blessing when studying Torah. Chassidic teachings explain that this means remembering that the Torah is given by G-d, and being aware of G-d, the author, when one studies Torah.

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: מאי דכתיב "מי האיש החכם ויבן את זאת ואשר דבר פי ה' אליו ויגדה על מה אבדה הארץ", דבר זה

§ The Gemara discusses the topic of the acquisition of Torah knowledge. **Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "Who is the wise man, that he may understand this? And who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken, that he may declare it? Why has the land been lost** and laid waste like a wilderness, so that none passes through?" (Jeremiah 9:11). **This matter**, i.e., the question: Why has the land been lost, 85b

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים וְלֹא פִירְשׁוּהוּ, אָמְרוּ נְבִיאִים וְלֹא פִירְשׁוּהוּ, עַד שֶׁפִירְשׁוּ הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעֶצְמוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֹּאמֶר ה' עַל עֲזָבְכֶם אֶת תּוֹרַתִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיכֶם". אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: שְׁלֹא בִּרְכוּ בַתּוֹרָה תַחֲיִלָּה.

was stated by the Sages, i.e., the wise man mentioned in the verse, **and yet they could not explain it. It was stated by the prophets**, i.e., those to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken, **and yet they could not explain it, until the Holy One, Blessed be He, Himself explained it, as it is stated** in the next verse: **“And the Lord says: Because they have forsaken My Torah which I set before them”** (Jeremiah 9:12). **Rav Yehuda says that Rav says:** This does not mean **that** the Jewish people ceased Torah study altogether; rather, **they did not recite a blessing on the Torah prior** to its study.

Chassidic teachings explain this means they studied and discussed the Torah but did not think of the infinite Divine, Whose wisdom and commands are embodied in the Torah.

A further passage about the Torah links it specifically to Purim.

Shabbat 88a – How Purim established the Torah...

“וַיִּתְעַבְבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הַהָר,” אָמַר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַר חֲמָא בַר חַסָּא: מִלְמַד שֶׁכַּפָּה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עָלֵיהֶם אֶת הַהָר כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם: אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוּטָב, וְאִם לֹא — שֶׁמֶתְהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם. אָמַר רַב אַחָא בַר יַעֲקֹב: מִכָּאן מוֹדְעָא רַבָּה לְאוּרֵיִתָּא. אָמַר רַבָּא: אַף עַל פִּי כּוֹן הַדּוֹר קְבִלוּהָ בִימֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ, דְּכָתִיב: “קִיְמוּ וְקַבְּלוּ הַיְהוּדִים” — קִיְמוּ מַה שֶׁקִּיְבְּלוּ בְּבָר.

The Gemara cites additional homiletic interpretations on the topic of the revelation at Sinai. The Torah says, “And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; **and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount**” (Exodus 19:17). **Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said:** the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain, and the verse **teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above** the Jews **like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Aḥa bar Ya’akov said: From here there is a substantial caveat to** the obligation to fulfill

the **Torah**. The Jewish people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding. **Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written:** “The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them” (Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews **ordained what they had already taken upon themselves** through coercion at Sinai.

Chassidic teachings explain this is because of the self-sacrifice of the Jews at the time of Haman, which connected them to the highest levels of the Divine. Through this they were able to ordain or ‘establish’ the Torah.

To recap, here is the brief passage from Berachot 5a with which we began, and starting from this we have had a ‘tour’ of Talmud teachings about...Torah.

ואמר רבי לוי בר חמא, אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש, מאי דכתיב "ואתנה לה את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר פתתיה להורתם". "לחת" — אלו עשרת הדברות, "תורה" — זה מקרא, "והמצוה" — זו משנה, "אשר פתתיה" — אלו נביאים וכתובים, "להורתם" — זה תלמוד, מלמד שכולם נתנו למשה מסיני.

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This now leads us to the next topic on this page of Berachot – discussing the protective power of Torah, and (when we do not overtly see this) the nature of suffering.

Berachot 5a – the protective power of the Shema and of Torah

ואמר רבי יצחק: כל הקורא קריאת שמע על מטתו — מזיקין בדיליו הימנו. שנאמר: "ובני רשף יגביהו עוף", ואין "עוף" אלא תורה, שנאמר: "התעף עיניך בו ואיננו". ואין "רשף" אלא מזיקין, שנאמר: "מזי רעב ורחמי רשף וקטב מרירי".

And Rabbi Yitzhak said: Anyone who recites *Shema* upon his bed, demons stay away from him. This is alluded to, as it is stated: “But man is born into trouble, and the sparks [*reshaf*] fly [*uf*] upward” (Job 5:7). The verse is explained: The word fly [*uf*] means **nothing other than Torah**, as Torah is difficult to grasp

and easy to lose, like something that floats away, **as it is stated: “Will you set your eyes upon it? It is gone; for riches certainly make themselves wings, like an eagle that flies into the heavens”** (Proverbs 23:5). The word “**sparks**” means **nothing other than demons, as it is stated: “Wasting of hunger, and the devouring of the sparks [reshef] and bitter destruction [ketev meriri], and the teeth of beasts I will send upon them, with the venom of crawling things of the dust”** (Deuteronomy 32:24). Here we see *reshef* listed along with *ketev meriri*, both of which are understood by the Sages to be names of demons.

אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: כל העוסק בתורה — יסורין בדילין הימנו, שנאמר: “וכגן רשף נגביהו עוף”. ואין “עוף” אלא תורה, שנאמר “התעף עיניך בו ואיננו”, ואין “רשף” אלא יסורין, שנאמר: “מזי רעב ולחמי רשף”.

Regarding this unclear verse, **Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: If one engages in Torah study, suffering stays away from him, as it is stated: “And the sparks fly upward.”** And **fly** means **nothing other than Torah, as it is stated: “Will you set your eyes upon it? It is gone; and sparks means nothing other than suffering, as it is stated: “Wasting of hunger, and the devouring of the sparks,”** equating devouring sparks with wasting hunger, as both are types of suffering. From here, we derive that through Torah, fly, one is able to distance himself, upward, from suffering, sparks.

This begins a discussion of suffering... This issue is illuminated in a very profound way in Tanya ch.26.

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