

As we prepare to receive Torah anew this Shavuot I invite you to consider this selection of Biblical, Rabbinic, Hasidic and Contemporary sources on Revelation and the Sinai Experience. As you do you might ask yourself:

•Was the Sinai Revelation propositional? *If so were its revealed words limited to the Ten Commandments, the entire Pentateuch or did they encompass even contemporary Jewish law and lore? •If the last, are all Torah study and teaching acts of sacred retrieval or a mysterious result of continuing revelation? [IIA2 below "great voice doesn't cease"]*

• However, if Revelation is the ineffable encounter between humanity and "the Holy" [which itself has multiple meanings] with Torah as its record as transcribed in Israel's sacred history, to what extent does Torah embody the human and to what extent the "divine"? **•In** turn, what then are the claims Torah might make on your life as an individual and as part of the Jewish People, which encompasses past, present and future?

• In that vein, what is the revelatory interplay between the individual and the community? *Our tradition teaches that Torah descended through 600,000 separate channels, equal to the mythical sum of all Israelite souls, and is addressed personally to each of us. It simultaneously asserts that Torah is our shared heritage, given publicly to the entire community; the Ten Commandments begin with Anochi, "I," but crescendo with words of ethical responsibility interdependence, v'khol asher l'rei•ekha, "...and all that pertains to your fellow."*

I The Torah's Account (Exodus 19:1-20:1 abridged)

א בחדש השלישי, לצאת בני-ישראל, מארץ מצרים--ביום הזה, באו מדבר סיני. ב ויסעו מרפידים, ויבאו מדבר סיני, ויחנו, במדבר; ויחן-שם ישראל, נגד החר. ג ומשה עלה, אל-האלהים; ויקרא אליו י-ה-ו-ה, מן-החר לאמר, כה תאמר לבית יעקב, ותגיד לבני ישראל. ד אתם ראיתם, אשר עשיתי למצרים; ואשא אתכם על-כנפי נשרים, ואבא אתכם אלי. ה ועתה, אם-שמוע תשמעו בקלי, ושמרתם, את-בריתי--והייתם לי סגלה מכל-העמים, כי-לי כל-הארץ. ו ואתם תהיו-לי ממלכת כהנים, וגוי קדוש: אלה, הדברים, אשר תדבר, אל-בני ישראל... ט ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקר, ויהי קלת וברקים וענן כבד על-החר, וקל שפר, חזק מאד; ויחרד כל-העם, אשר במחנה. יז ויצא משה את-העם לקראת האלהים, מן-המחנה; ויתעצבו, בתחתית החר. יח והר סיני, עשן כלו, מפני אשר ירד עליו י-ה-ו-ה, באש; ויעל עשנו כעשן הכבשן, ויחרד כל-החר מאד. יט ויהי קול השפר, הולך וחזק מאד; משה ידבר, והאלהים יענו בקול... א וידבר אלהים, את כל-הדברים האלה לאמר ב אנכי י-ה-ו-ה אלהיך...

1. In the third month after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, this same day they came to the wilderness of Sinai... 2 and there Israel encamped before the mountain. 3 And Moses went up unto God, and YHWH called to him from the mountain, saying: "Thus shalt you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Me. 5 Now therefore, if you indeed hearken to My voice, and keep My covenant, then you shall be My treasure among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine 6 and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.'... 16 And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. 18 Now mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly 19 And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice (alt. thunder)... 1 And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 I am YHWH, your God...

II. How Much of Torah Was Revealed at Sinai?

A. All Jewish Learning Ever?

1 Berakhot 5a:

ואמר רבי לוי בר חמא, אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש, מאי דכתיב "ואתנה לך את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר כתבתי להורתם". "לחת" — אלו עשרת הדברות, "תורה" — זה מקרא, "והמצוה"

— זו משנה, "אשר כתבתי" — אלו נביאים וכתובים, "להורתם" — זה תלמוד, מלמד שפולס נתנו למשה מסיני

And Rabbi Levi bar Hama in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: God 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 God 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.

2 Shemot Rabbah 28:6

דבר אחר, וידבר א-להים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אמר רבי יצחק, מה שהנביאים עתידים להתנבאות בכל דור ודור קבלו מהר דסיני כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עמד היום ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום...אלו הנשמות העתידות להבראות... ולא כל הנביאים בלבד קבלו מסיני נבואתן, אלא אף החכמים העומדים בכל דור ודור כל אחד ואחד קבל את שלו מסיני, וכן הוא אומר ה' אל כל קהלכם. קול גדול ולא יסף

Another explanation: "And God said all of these things, saying" - Rabbi Yitzchak said, What the prophets were to prophesy in the future in each generation, they received from Mount Sinai. As Moshe said to Israel (Deuteronomy 29:14), "But with those here with us standing today and with those not here with us today...these are the souls that will be created in the future... And it was not only of the prophets who receive their prophecy from Sinai, but also the sages who arise in each generation - each of them received what was his from Sinai. And so [too] it states (Deuteronomy 5:19), "These things did YHWH speak to your entire congregation, [...] a great voice and it did not cease":

B. The Ten Utterances Alone?

Exodus 34:28

ויהי-שם עס-ה-ה-נה, ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה--לחם לא אכל, ומים לא שתה; ויכתב על-הלחת, את דברי הברית--עשרת, הדברים.

And he was there with the YHWH forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten utterances

C. Only the First Two?

Makkot 23b-24a

דרש רבי שמלאי שש מאות ושלש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה שלש מאות וששים וחמש לאוין כמנין ימות החמה ומאתים וארבעים ושמונה עשה כנגד איבריו של אדם אמר רב המנונא מאי קרא (דברים לג, ד) תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה תורה בגימטריא שית מאה וחד (תרי"א) סרי הוי אנכי ולא יהיה לך מפי הגבורה שמענום תרי"ג

Rabbi Simlai taught: There were **613 mitzvot** stated to Moses in the Torah, consisting of **365 prohibitions corresponding to the number of days in the solar year**, and **248 positive mitzvot corresponding to the number of a person's limbs**. **Rav Hamnuna said:** What is the verse that alludes to this? It is written: **"Moses commanded to us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob"** (Deuteronomy 33:4). The word **Torah**, in terms of its numerical value [*gimatriyya*], is **611, the number of mitzvot that were received and taught by Moses our teacher**. In addition, there are two mitzvot: **"I am YHWH your God"** and: **"You shall have no other gods"** (Exodus 20:2, 3), **the first two of the Ten Commandments**, that **we heard from the mouth of the Almighty**, for a total of 613.

D. The "All-Pregnant" Silence?"

Zera' Kodesh 2:40a

It was possible that we heard from the mouth of the Blessed Holy One, only the letter *Aleph** of "anokhi"-, the first letter of the first word ("I") of the First Commandment. **Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropshitz** (d. 1827)

*The silent Aleph (א) signifies the position of the mouth and larynx just before any sound is uttered

E. A Contemporary View

“How I Understand Revelation” E Dorff. *Knowing God* (Jason Aronson, 1992) p.99-100

My own view is based on a keen awareness that I do not know what happened at Sinai. God may have spoken in Hebrew words there, more or less as we have them recorded in the Torah, or Moses may have been inspired by God to articulate the divine message in his own words but in a given way, or the Torah may represent how our ancestors put their experiences with God into words. I affirm at least the last of those alternatives, and I remain open to the possibility of either of the former but not convinced of either of them. It is for this reason that I have titled this chapter "Knowing God through Words of the Divine," intentionally playing on the ambiguity of the word "of," so that "of the Divine" may refer to God's actual words but at least designates our words about God ... These considerations lead me to the following position:

1. Human moral, intellectual, and aesthetic faculties distinguish human beings from other animals, in degree if not in kind. As such, these capabilities are a touch of the divine within humanity in the root sense of "divine" as power, for they enable human beings to know, feel, and do things that other animals cannot.
2. The structure of the world is an objective base that sets a limit to possible alternatives in thought and even more so in practice. The world's design can and should serve as a criterion for the evaluation of any philosophic vision or moral code. Murder, for example, can become the norm for humanity only on pain of extinction of the human species, and wanton use of atomic weapons carries the same price. I hold that the world was divinely created, then, at least in the sense that its creation involves powers beyond our control. I therefore would be willing to say that God informed us about divinity and the world and gave us the Law in an indirect way by creating the world in such a way that certain formulations of thought and practice fit the pattern of creation better than others **Elliot N Dorff** (b. 1943)

III. The Personal and the Communal.

A Each [Listening] Individual

Shemot Rabbah 5:9

בוא וראה היאך הקול יוצא, אצל כל ישראל כל אחד ואחד לפי כחו, הזקנים לפי כחו, הבחורים לפי כחו, והקטנים לפי כחו, והיונקים לפי כחו, והנשים לפי כחו, ואף משה לפי כחו, שנאמר משה ידבר והאלהים יענו בקול, בקול שהיה יכול לסובלו.
קול ה' בפתח, בכחו לא נאמר אלא וכן בפתח, בכחו של כל אחד ואחד

Come and see how the voice would go out among all of Israel - each and every one according to their strengths: the elders according to theirs; the young according to theirs; the infants and sucklings according to theirs; even Moshe according to his strength, as it is stated (Exodus 19:19), "Moshe would speak and God would answer him with a voice" - with a voice that He could withstand. And so [too,] it states (Psalms 29:4), "The voice of YHWH is in strength" - it is not stated, "in God's strength," but rather "in strength"; in the strength of each [listening] individual

B. The Communal Check

“How I Understand Revelation” E, Dorff. *Knowing God* (Jason Aronson, 1992) p.99-100

3. I would aver, however, that the specific content of our theological ideas and codes of practice is of human creation and hence subject to error and change. For me, revelation occurs in events that human beings interpret to be revelatory of truths or norms of conduct. Thus, any event could be a source of revelation, although some may be more impressively so than others. I would want to stress that within Judaism, it is the Jewish community of the past and the present that decides which events are revelatory and what the content and implications of that revelation are. This communal check prevents revelation from being simply the figment of one person's imagination, and it preserves the tradition's insistence that revelation must be affirmed by the rabbis of each era so that there will not be multiple Torahs.,