

Revelation

a resource for Tikkun Leyl Shavuot

An invitation to learn

The tradition of studying together on Tikkun Leyl Shavuot – the eve of Shavuot – epitomises the Jewish passion for and commitment to communal learning. The model of Chavruta – exploring Jewish texts with a partner or a group – creates a space for reflection, growth, participation, diversity and tolerance. Through this resource we hope to bring together the tradition of Tikkun Leyl Shavuot and the model of Chavruta to supplement your learning event.

These pages contain six sources which address the theme of ‘Revelation’ – exploring the relationship between truth and meaning, God and scripture, and the defining event of the giving of Torah at Mount Horeb (also known as Sinai). Each source consists of either one or two texts, plus some discussion questions to get the conversation flowing. We have also included two additional passages: a prayer on entering a place of study and a closing reflection.

It is not necessary to explore every text, nor to answer every question. You may wish to study with a partner or in a group (or both) and the session may last for twenty minutes or for hours on end ... the decisions are yours! However you choose to learn or teach the material, we hope that you will find it both stimulating and illuminating.

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Prayer on entering
a place of study

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ
ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
שְׁתָּאִיר עֵינַי בְּמַאֲזֵר תּוֹרָתְךָ
וְתַצִּילֵנִי מִכָּל מְכַשׁוֹל וְטָעוֹת ...
כִּי ה' יִתֵּן חֲכָמָה
מִפִּיּו דַעַת וְתְבוּנָה

May it be Your will

God, my God, and the God
of my ancestors,

that you guide my eyes with
the light of Your Torah

and save me from stumbling
and making mistakes ...

For God gives wisdom

and from God's mouth
come knowledge and
understanding.

SEE FOR YOURSELF

Exodus 20:15–19

¹⁵Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁶and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” ¹⁷Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” ¹⁸The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. ¹⁹And the Lord said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.’”

Translation: English Standard Version

שמות כ':ט"ו-י"ט

¹⁵וְכָל-הָעָם רָאוּ אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת-הַלְפִידִם וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת-הַהָר
עֹשֵׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק: ¹⁶וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר-אַתָּה
עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל-יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן-נָמוּת: ¹⁷וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-
הָעָם אַל-תִּירְאוּ כִּי לִבְעִבּוֹר נִסּוֹת אֶתְכֶם בָּא הָאֱלֹהִים וּבַעֲבוּר תִּהְיֶה
יְרֵאתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבַלְתִּי תַחֲטְאוּ: ¹⁸וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם מֵרָחֵק וּמֹשֶׁה נִגַּשׁ
אֶל-הָעֶרְפֶּל אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים: ¹⁹וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל-
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם כִּי מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם:

Points to consider

How do you understand the idea that the Israelites see, rather than hear, the revelation?

What is being revealed?

Is it God's instruction, God's self, or something else?

TORAH FROM HEAVEN

Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1

These have no share in the World to Come: One who says ... that the Torah is not from Heaven ...

Maimonides, Introduction to Perek Helek (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10)

The eighth principle is that Torah is from Heaven. We are to believe that the entire Torah was given into the hands of Moses, and that it is all from the mouth of God. That is to say that God transmitted it to him by means of a process allegorically called “speech”. Only Moses, who received it, knows how it was transmitted. He was like a scribe who writes down all that is said to him – all the dates, stories, and commandments ...

He [who has no share in the World to Come] is one who believes that all of the Torah is from the mouth of God, except for one verse which was not said by God but rather by Moses’ own mouth. This person has scorned the word of God ... Rather, every single utterance from the Torah contains wisdom and wonder for one who understand them.

משנה סנהדרין י"א

ואלו שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא, האומר ... אין תורה מן השמים ...

רמב"ם, הקדמה לפרק חלק (סנהדרין י')

היסוד השמיני היות התורה מן השמים. והוא שנגאמין כי כל התורה הזאת הנתונה על ידי משה רבנו עליו השלום, שהיא כולה מפי הגבורה. כלומר, שהגיעה אליו כולה מאת השם יתברך, בענין שנקרא על דרך השאלה “דיבור”. ואין ידוע היאך הגיע, אלא היה משה עליו השלום שהגיע לו, וכי הוא היה כמו סופר, שקוראים לו והוא כותב כל מאורעות הימים, הסיפורים והמצוות ...

הוא המאמין שכל התורה מפי הגבורה, חוץ מן הפסוק הזה, שלא אמרו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא משה מפי עצמו. וזה “כי דבר ה' בזה” ... אלא: כל דיבור ודיבור מן התורה יש בהן חכמות ופלאים למי שמבין אותם.

Points to consider

Are all interpretations of Torah valid?
Are they all authentic? Are they all true?
Is Torah from heaven? What difference does it make?

AND HE ADDED NO MORE

Deuteronomy 5:19

These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

Translation: English Standard Version

דברים ה:יט

את-הדברים האלה דבר ה' אל-כל-קהלכם בקר מתוך האש הענן והערפל קול גדול ולא יסף ויכתבם על-שני לוח אבנים ויתנם אלי:

Rashi's Commentary

And He added no more: We translate: “and it did not end”, since His voice is strong and endures forever. Another interpretation: “*And He added no more*” – nothing was added to what was revealed in that event.

רש"י שם

ולא יסף: מתרגמין “ולא פסק” כי קולו חזק וקיים לעולם. דבר אחר, “ולא יסף”, לא הוסיף להראות באותו פמבי:

Points to consider

How does writing something down affect the way in which we understand it?

Is interpretation an exercise in creating meaning or in revealing meaning?

Martin Buber, Tales of Hasidim

The rabbi of Kotzk was asked: “Why is Shavuot called ‘the time the Torah was given’ rather than the time we received the Torah?” He answered: “The giving took place on one day, but the receiving takes place at all times.”

A SOFT MURMURING SOUND

1 Kings 19:9–14

⁹There [at the mountain of God at Horeb] he went into a cave, and there he spent the night. Then the word of the Lord came to him. He said to him, “Why are you here, Elijah?” ¹⁰He replied, “I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life.” ¹¹“Come out,” He called, “and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And lo, the Lord passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting the mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind – an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake – fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire – a soft murmuring sound. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his mantle about his face and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice addressed him: “Why are you here, Elijah?” ¹⁴He answered, “I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down your altars, and have put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life.”

Translation: JPS, 1999

Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*

The phenomena of nature constitute, as it were, the background music, the orchestral harbinger of and accompaniment to the momentous divine activity, but they are essentially unrelated to it. The function of the detailed, elaborate, and animated descriptions of the upheavals of nature is to convey in human terms something of the ultimately inexpressible, ineffable impact of the awesome and mysterious manifestation of the Divine Presence.

מלכים א י"ט:ט"ו-י"ד

⁹ויבא־שם אֶל־הַמְעָרָה וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם וְהִנֵּה דְבַר־ה' אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מִה־לָּךְ פֶּה אֵלֶיָּהוּ: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר קִנְאֵת קִנְאֵתִי לֵה' אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת כִּי־עֲזָבוּ בְרִיתְךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִזְבְּחֵיךָ הָרְסוּ וְאֶת־נְבִיאֶיךָ הָרְגוּ בַּחֶרֶב וְאֹתָר אֲנִי לְבָדִי וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ: ¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר צֵא וְעַמְדַת בְּהַר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהִנֵּה ה' עֹבֵר וְרוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה וְחֶזֶק מְפָרֵק הָרִים וּמִשְׁבַּר סְלָעִים לִפְנֵי ה' לֹא בְרוּחַ יְהוָה וְאֶחָר הָרוּחַ רָעַשׁ לֹא בְרָעַשׁ ה': ¹²וְאַחַר הָרָעַשׁ אֵשׁ לֹא בָאֵשׁ ה' וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה: ¹³וַיְהִי כִשְׁמַע אֵלֶיָּהוּ וַיִּלְט פָּנָיו בְּאֲדָרְתוֹ וַיֵּצֵא וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הַמְעָרָה וְהִנֵּה אֵלָיו קוֹל וַיֹּאמֶר מִה־לָּךְ פֶּה אֵלֶיָּהוּ: ¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר קִנְאֵת קִנְאֵתִי לֵה' אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת כִּי־עֲזָבוּ בְרִיתְךָ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מִזְבְּחֵיךָ הָרְסוּ וְאֶת־נְבִיאֶיךָ הָרְגוּ בַּחֶרֶב וְאֹתָר אֲנִי לְבָדִי וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָּהּ:

Points to consider

Why does Elijah experience God in the soft murmuring sound rather than the wind, earthquake or fire?

This episode also occurs at Mount Horeb. How is it similar to the revelation in Exodus? How is it different?

HEAR, O ISRAEL

Deuteronomy 5:1–4

¹Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the laws and rules that I proclaim to you this day! Study them and observe them faithfully! ²The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.

³It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today. ⁴Face to face the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire.

Translation: JPS, 1999

דברים ה:א-ד

¹וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַחֻקִּים וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹבֵר בְּאָזְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם וְלִמְדַתֶּם אֹתָם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹתָם: ²ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּרַת עִמָּנוּ בְרִית בְּחֶרֶב: ³לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כָּרַת ה' אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת כִּי אֲתָנוּ אֲנַחְנוּ אֵלֶּה פֶה הַיּוֹם כָּלְנוּ חַיִּים: ⁴פָּנִים בְּפָנִים דִּבֶּר ה' עִמָּכֶם בְּהַר מְתוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:

Points to consider

How do we understand the idea that God appeared to “every one of us who is here today”?

In what ways do we still experience revelation today?

SEVENTY VOICES

Exodus Rabbah 5:9

Rabbi Yohanan said: “When God’s voice came forth, it split into seventy voices in seventy languages, in order that all of the nations would hear it ...” How did the voice go forth? [It came] to every Israelite according to their strength – to the elders, to the young men, to the minors, to the children, to the women,

each according to their strength; even to Moses according to his strength, as it is said, “*Moses spoke, and God answered him with a voice*” (Exodus 19:19) – with a voice that Moses could bear.

Khalil Gibran, The Prophet

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold

Points to consider

Can one truth be expressed in seventy ways? Can one utterance express seventy truths?

Does the pursuit of God’s truth unite or divide us?

שמות רבה ה'ט'
אמר רבי יוחנן: "היה הקול יוצא ונחלק לשבעים קולות לשבעים לשון, כדי שישמעו כל האומות... "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" (שמות יט:ט), בקול שהיה יכול לסובלו.

of your own mind. The astronomer may speak to you of his understanding of space, but he cannot give you his understanding. The musician may sing to you of the rhythm which is in all space, but he cannot give you the ear which arrests the rhythm nor the voice that echoes it. And he who is versed in the science of numbers can tell of the regions of weight and measure, but he cannot conduct you thither. For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man. And even as each one of you stands alone in God’s knowledge, so must each one of you be alone in his knowledge of God and in his understanding of the earth.

Closing reflection

Mari son of Rabbi Huna said: אמר מרי בר רב הונא:
When saying goodbye to a friend, a לא יפטר אדם
person should always be מחברו אלא
in the middle of studying מתוך דבר הלכה,
some aspect of Torah with them. שמתוך
In that way their friend כך זוכרו.
will remember them for it.

Talmud, Eruvin 64a

Limmud is an international community of Jewish learning founded in the UK in 1980.

Almost every week, there will be a Limmud activity or event somewhere in the world. These are organised by independent grassroots groups following shared values which include choice, diversity and volunteerism. Groups, volunteers, participants, presenters and supporters connect through the Limmud experience and by collaborations such as this Tikkun Leyl Shavuot project.

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Limmud promises that wherever you find yourself, Limmud can take you one step further on your Jewish journey.

Find out for yourself and get involved at limmud.org or limmudinternational.org

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