

The Paradigm-Shift Torah

Now We Need a New Torah

Now like air to breathe
We need a new Torah.
Now, gasping for air and with choking throats
We need a new *Mishnah* and a new *Gemara*
And a new *Kabbalah* and new ascents of the soul*
And inside all the brokenness and the salt and the desolation, now
A new Hasidism and a new Zionism
And a new Rav Kook** and a new Brenner***
And a new Leah Goldberg**** and a new *Yehaveh Da'at******
And new art and new poetry
And new literature and new cinema
And new-old words*****
And new-ancient souls from the storehouse,
And a new love out of the terrible weeping.
For we were all washed away in the rivers of Re'im and Be'eri
And we have no mountain within us nor other tablets
And no Moses and no strength
And now everything
Is in our hands

* An experience described in [a letter](#) of Ba'al Shem Tov

עכשיו אנחנו צריכים תורה חדשה

עכשו כמו אויר לנשימה
אנחנו צריכים תורה חדשה.
עכשו בתוך האויר שנגמר והצואר
שנמחק
אנחנו צריכים משנה חדשה וגמרא
חדשה
וקבלה חדשה ועליות נשמה חדשות
ובתוך כל השבר והמלח והחרבה, עכשו
חסידות חדשה וציונות חדשה
והרב קוק חדש וברנר חדש
ולאה גולדברג חדשה ויחיה דעת חדש
ואמנות חדשה ושירה חדשה
וספרות חדשה וקולנוע חדש
ומלים חדתיו-עתיקין
ונשמות חדשות-עתיקות מהאוצר,
ואהבה חדשה מתוך הבכיה הנוראה.
כי נשטפנו כלנו בנהרות רעים ובארי
ואין בנו הר ואין עוד לוחות
ואין לנו משה ואין בנו כוחות
ובדינו עכשו הכל
נתן

Jeremiah 7 The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²Stand at the gate of the House of the LORD, and there proclaim this word:

Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD! ³Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: Mend your ways and your actions, and I will let you dwell in this place.

⁴Don't put your trust in illusions and say, "The Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD are these [buildings]."

⁵No, if you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one man and another; ⁶if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt—⁷then only will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time.

⁸See, you are relying on illusions that are of no avail. ⁹Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow other gods whom you have not experienced, ¹⁰and then come and stand before Me in this House which bears My name and say, "We are safe"?—[Safe] to do all these abhorrent things! ¹¹Do you consider this House, which bears My name, to be a den of thieves? As for Me, I have been watching—declares the LORD.

¹²Just go to My place at Shiloh, where I had established My name formerly, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. ¹³And now, because you do all these things—declares the LORD—and though I spoke to you persistently, you would not listen; and though I called to you, you would not respond—¹⁴therefore I will do to the House which bears My name, on which you rely, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, just what I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵And I will cast you out of My presence as I cast out your brothers, the whole brood of Ephraim.

²¹Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat! ²²For when I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice. ²³But this is what I commanded them: Do My bidding, that I may be

your God and you may be My people; walk only in the way that I enjoin upon you, that it may go well with you.²⁴ Yet they did not listen or give ear; they followed their own counsels, the willfulness of their evil hearts. They have gone backward, not forward,²⁵ from the day your fathers left the land of Egypt until today. And though I kept sending all My servants, the prophets, to them daily and persistently,²⁶ they would not listen to Me or give ear. They stiffened their necks, they acted worse than their fathers.

Jeremiah 29 This is the text of the letter which the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem... to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon—

⁴Thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. ⁶Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. ⁷And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper. ...

Talmud Gittin 56a-57a, excerpted [The Roman Emperor] sent Vespasian who came and besieged Jerusalem for three years.

...Abba Sikra, the head of the Zealots in Jerusalem was the son of the sister of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai [the head of the Rabbis]. [Rabban Yohanan] sent to him saying, "Come to visit me privately." When he came he said to him, "How long are you going to carry on in this way and kill all the people with starvation?" Abba Sikra replied: "What can I do? If I say a word to them [the Zealots], they will kill me." He said: "Devise some plan for me to escape. Perhaps I shall be able to save a little." He replied: "Pretend to be ill, and let everyone come to inquire about you. Bring something evil smelling and put it by you so that they will say you are dead. Let then your disciples get under your bed ... R. Eliezer went under the bier from one side and R. Joshua from the other. So they opened a city gate for him and he got out.

When [Rabban Yohanan] reached the Romans he said, "Peace to you, O King!" ... At this point a messenger came to [Vespasian] from Rome saying, "Arise! The Emperor is dead, and the notables of Rome have made you head [of State]." Vespasian said [to Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai]: "I am now going, and will send someone to take my place. Make a request of me and I will grant it." He said to him: "Give me Yavneh and its Scholars, and the family chain of Rabban Gamaliel..." R. Joseph, (or some say R. Akiba) applied to him the verse, "[God] turns wise men backward and makes their knowledge foolish." He ought to have said to him: "Release Jerusalem this time." But [R. Yohanan] thought that so much he would not grant, and so even a little would not be saved.

Mishna Avoth chapter 1 Prologue. All Israel have a portion in the world-to-come. As it is written: "Your people shall all be righteous, they shall possess the land forever; they are a shoot of My planting, the works of my hands in whom I shall be glorified." (Is 60:21)

Mishnah 1. Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They taught three things: Be patient in [the administration of] justice, rear many disciples and make a fence round the Torah.

Mishnah 2. Simeon the Righteous was one of the last of the Men of the Great Assembly. He taught: Upon three things, the world stands: Torah, [Avodah] worship, and [Gemilut Hasadim] the practice of kindness.

Talmud Menachot, 29b When Moses reached heaven, he found God occupied ornamenting the letters in which the Torah was written with little crown-like decorations. Moses inquired as to the significance of the crowns upon the letters. God answered him: "Generations from now, there shall live a man called Akiba ben Yosef, who will interpret a gigantic mountain of Halachot [laws] from every dot of these letters."

Moses said to God: "Let me see this man!" Suddenly, he found himself sitting in the eighth row of Rabbi Akiba's academy. He listened to the Rabbi and his disciples, but could not follow the discussion. He was greatly saddened. But just then, he heard one of the disciples question their master in regard to a certain point of law: "Where does this law come from?" He answered: "This is a Halacha given to Moses on Mt Sinai." And now Moses was content.

Moses then said: "You have a man like Akiba, and yet You give the Torah to Israel through me?" God

answered: "Be silent, so has it been decreed by Me."

Moses then said, "O Lord of the world, You have permitted me to behold this man's learning, let me see his reward." God said: "Go, return and see." Moses saw the body of the martyred Akiba. He called to God: "Is this the reward for such learning?" God replied: "Be silent, this is my decree."

Maimonides (1135-1204) PART 1, CHAPTER 1 “Image” (tzelem) and “likeness” (demut). People have thought that in the Hebrew language “image” denotes the shape and configuration of a thing. This led them to the doctrine of the corporeality of God [ie: God has a body], because of His saying: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). For they thought that God has a man's form, his shape and configuration, the doctrine of the corporeality of God was a necessary conclusion. They accordingly believed it and deemed that if they abandoned this belief, they would prove the Biblical text false, or that they would even make God to be nothing at all -- unless they thought that God was a body with a face and a hand, like them in shape and configuration. God is, in their view, much bigger and more resplendent than they themselves, and the matter of which God is composed is not flesh and blood. As they see it, this is as far as one can go in establishing the separateness of God from other things. ...

The Bible's phrase, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26), pointed to the specific form [of a human being], which is intellectual capability. ...Man possesses something unique, not found in anything else that exists under heaven, namely, intellectual capacity. In the exercise of this, no sense or part of the body, none of the extremities are used; and therefore this capability was likened to God's capability, which does not require an instrument. In reality [human intellect] is not like [God's intellect], but only appears so. It was because of the divine intellect joined with man, that it is said of the latter that he is "in the image of God and in His likeness" (Gen. 1:26), not that God, may He be exalted, is a body and possesses a shape.

Mishna Torah “Foundations of Faith,” chapter 7 It is [one] of the foundations of faith that God conveys prophecy to man. Prophecy is bestowed only upon a very wise sage of a strong character, who is never overcome by his natural inclinations in any regard. Instead, with his mind, he overcomes his natural inclinations at all times. He must [also] possess a very broad and accurate mental capacity. A person who is full of all these qualities and is physically sound [is fit for prophecy]...he will become holy. He will advance and separate himself from the masses who proceed in the darkness of the time. He must continue and diligently train himself not to have any thoughts whatsoever about fruitless things or the vanities and intrigues of the times. Instead, his mind should constantly be directed upward, bound to [God's] throne [of Glory, striving] to comprehend the holy and pure forms and gazing at the wisdom of the Holy One, blessed be He, in its entirety ...[After these preparations,] the divine spirit will immediately rest upon him. When the spirit rests upon him, his soul becomes intermingled with the angels...and he will be transformed into a different person and will understand with a knowledge different from what it was previously. He will rise above the level of other wise men, as [the prophet, Samuel] told Saul [I Samuel 10:6]: "[The spirit of God will descend upon you] and you shall prophesy with them. And you will be transformed into a different person."

R. Isaac Luria, 1534-72, Tzfat, Creation Myth (retold by Howard Schwartz)

At the beginning of time, God's presence filled the universe. When God decided to bring this world into being, to make room for creation, God first drew in God's breath, contracting and withdrawing from a hollow space within God. That contraction created darkness. And when God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), the light that came into being filled the darkness, and ten holy vessels came forth, each filled with primordial light.

In this way God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they all arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But the vessels were too fragile to contain such a powerful, divine light. They broke open, split asunder, and all the holy sparks were scattered like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else.

That is why we were created — to gather the sparks, no matter where they are hidden. God created the world so that the descendants of Jacob could gather and raise up the holy sparks. That is why there have been so many exiles— to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity. In this way the Jewish people will sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth.

When enough holy sparks have been gathered, the broken vessels will be restored, and *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally be complete. Therefore it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their soul. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov stated, "When the task of gathering the sparks nears completion, God will hasten the arrival of the final redemption by Himself collecting what remains of the holy sparks that went astray."

Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, "The Pittsburgh Platform" - 1885

1. We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended midst continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.

2. We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the one God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of divine Providence and Justice dealing with men in miraculous narratives.

3. We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.

4. We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

5. We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state....

Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) -- "The Jewish State" (1896)

We are a people -- one people. We have honestly endeavored everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities and to preserve the faith of our fathers. We are not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty in some places running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers, and often by those whose ancestors had not yet arrived in the land where Jews had already had experience of suffering. The majority decides who are the strangers; for this, as indeed every point which arises in the relations between nations, is a question of might. I do not here surrender any portion of our prescriptive right, when I make this statement merely in my own name as an individual. *In the world as it now is and for an indefinite period will probably remain, might precedes right.* It is useless, therefore, for us to be loyal patriot.... If we could only be left in peace. . . But I think we shall not be left in peace. For old prejudices against us still lie deep in the hearts of the people. . . Can we hope for better days, can we possess our souls in patience, can we wait in pious resignation till the princes and peoples of this earth are more mercifully disposed towards us? I say that we cannot hope for a change in the current of feeling. And why not?... *The nations in whose midst Jews live are all either covertly or openly Anti-Semitic.*

The whole plan is in its essence perfectly simple, ... Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves.

The creation of a new State is neither ridiculous nor impossible. We have in our day witnessed the process in connection with nations which were not largely members of the middle class, but poorer, less educated, and consequently weaker than ourselves. The Governments of all countries scourged by Anti-Semitism will be keenly interested in assisting us to obtain the sovereignty we want. ... Universal brotherhood is not even a beautiful dream. Antagonism is essential to man's greatest efforts. But the Jews, once settled in their own State, would probably have no more enemies.

“Mi Yemalel,” (Who Can Retell?) Menashe Ravina (Rabinowitz), (1899-1968, Poland, Germany, Israel)

<i>Mi yemalleil gevurot Yisra'el</i>	Who will retell the mighty deeds of Israel?
<i>Otan mi yimneh</i>	Who can count them?
<i>Hein bechol dor</i>	In every generation
<i>Yaqum ha-gibbor</i>	A hero arises
<i>Go'eil ha-'am</i>	Who saves the nation.
<i>Shma'! Ba-yamim ha-heim ba-zman ha-zeh!</i>	Listen! In those days, at this time of year,
<i>Makkabi moshia' u-fodeh!</i>	The Maccabee was a savior, a redeemer!
<i>U-vyameinu kol 'am Yisra'el</i>	And in our days, let all the nation Israel
<i>Yit'acheid yaqum ve-yigga'eil.</i>	Unite itself, rise up, and be saved.

Psalms 106:2 Who can tell the mighty acts of the LORD, proclaim all His praises?

Traditional Prayerbook Who is like You, Lord, among all that is worshiped? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders? (Ex 15:11)

Your children beheld Your sovereignty as You divided the sea before Moses.

"This is my God," they responded, declaring: The Lord shall reign throughout all time.

As it was taught by the prophet: "Thus was Jacob saved, and rescued from a power mightier than he." Praised are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel.

Richard Rubinstein, *After Auschwitz*, 1961

I believe the greatest single challenge to modern Judaism arises out of the question of God and the death camps. I am amazed at the silence of contemporary Jewish theologians on this most crucial and agonizing of all Jewish issues. How can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz?

Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate, omnipotent actor in the historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will.

The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, antihuman explosion in all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.

[Camus] refuses...to see man as inevitably and inescapably guilty before God. He accepts the tragedy, the inevitability, and the gratuitous absurdity of suffering, but he refuses to consent to its justice. He would rather live in an absurd, indifferent cosmos in which men suffer and die meaninglessly but still retain a measure of tragic integrity than see every last human event encased in a pitiless framework of meaning which deprives men of even the consolation that suffering, though inevitable, is not entirely merited or earned. ...

We concur with this choice of an absurd and ultimately tragic cosmos. We do so because we share with Camus a greater feeling for human solidarity than the Prophetic-Deuteronomic view of God and history can possibly allow. We part company only with his atheism. It is precisely because human existence is tragic, ultimately hopeless, and without meaning that we treasure our religious community. It is our community of ultimate concern. In it, we can and do share, in a depth and dimension which no secular institution can match, the existence Camus has so well described. We have turned away from the God of history to share the tragic fatalities of the God of nature.

Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History*, 1970 What does the Voice of Auschwitz command?

Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. A secularist Jew cannot make himself believe by a mere act of will, nor can he be commanded to do so ... And a religious Jew who has stayed with his God may be forced into new, possible revolutionary relationships with Him.

One possibility, however, is wholly unthinkable. A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *Jews & Judaism in the 21st Century*

How can we talk about God, again, after such an event [the Holocaust]? My answer is that you *can't* talk about God. You can only re-create the image of God. And if you can re-create the image of God, like you can re-create yourself, that is the statement of God's presence...After the Shoah, the Jewish people didn't talk about God. What they did was to recreate the image of God...

The next step for the Jewish people was to take power. ...I believe ... that God was saying, "I am not going to save you. This is *tzimtzum*, divine self-limitation. I'm asking *you* to stop the Holocaust. You are human, the partner in the covenant. Take responsibility."

Taking power is the fundamental transformation of our religion now. We can no longer be a religion that says, "God will save you." God's own message is that you have to take responsibility. If there was ever a time God was going to intervene miraculously, it was during the Holocaust. So if God didn't do so then, He must have intended for us to take responsibility....The Jewish people overwhelmingly understood that. That's why they arose and declared the State of Israel. Before the war, the majority of Reform and Orthodox were anti-Zionist. After the war, overwhelmingly, the Jewish people became Zionist, and understood that taking power is the only way you can live, the only way to combat genocide....The establishment of the State of Israel was the turning point for Jewish religion and Jewish history. It was the turning point for all of us. That affirmation, that taking of covenantal responsibility, that carrying out the great redemptive act states, in the face of the contradictory evidence of Auschwitz, that hope is not dead, that life is still stronger than death. This statement -- the building of Israel -- was done by all Jews.

Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, *The Triumph of Life* Divine *tzimtzum* and the maturation of the covenant supply the interpretive key to the history of Jewish religion, past and future. The interactive maturation in the second stage shows that the original intent of the covenant was pedagogical: that God brought Israel and, by implication, humanity, into a covenantal partnership relationship that would enable them to grow into even greater responsibility for their lives and for the outcomes of history. From the beginning, the goal of covenant has been to nurture human beings to fully become the image of God: to create, take charge of their fate, and participate in their own liberation. Like a loving parent, God seeks to give needed direction, personal inspiration, and just enough help to enable the full development of a moral, responsible human being. As we will see, the final maturation and full human assumption of responsibility for the covenant is occurring today, in the new era of Jewish history now unfolding. (p. 170)

In this moment [of Modernity] God becomes totally hidden, not to distance from humanity but to come closer yet again. This means becoming totally immanent, ever present, binding the outcome of God's vision totally to humanity. This movement reflects a judgment that humans are capable of grasping the plan and repairing the world at a much higher level than before. Henceforth, humans will execute the Divine interventions that rise to the level of miracles. God will be present and participating, but miracles will not represent changes of natural law by an "outside" or Divine mind. (p. 185)