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## Stories with a Twist

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### Truly, these are Good Guarantors! Insights into Song of Songs Rabbah 1:4



## Background to Our Story

### Song of Songs Rabbah

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org> The Jewish Virtual Library is an online encyclopedia published by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. It is a website covering topics about US-Israel relations, Jewish history, Israel, the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and Judaism.

Song of Songs Rabbah, aggadic Midrash on the Song of Songs, the product of Palestinian *amoraim*. It is an exegetical Midrash which expounds the Song of Songs consecutively, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and sometimes even word by word. The work was apparently redacted in Erez Israel about the middle of the sixth century C.E.

### The Text: Song of Songs Rabbah 4:1

אמר רבי מאיר בשעה שעמדו ישראל לפני הר סיני לקבל התורה, אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא אלעיקי אני נותן לכם את התורה, אלא הביאו לי ערבים טובים שתשמרוה, ואני נותנה לכם. אמרו לפניו רבונו של עולם, אבותינו ערבים לנו. אמר להם אבותיכם צריכין ערבים, למה הדבר דומה לאחד שהלך ללוות מן המלך, אמר לו הבא לי ערב ואני מלוה אותך, הלך והביא לו ערב אחד, אמר לו ערבך צריך ערב, הלך והביא לו ערב שני, ואמר לו ערבך צריך ערב, כיון שהביא לו ערב שלישי אמר תדע כי מפני זה אני מלוה לך. כך בשעה שעמדו ישראל לקבל התורה אמר להם אני נותן לכם תורת הביאו לי ערבים טובים שתשמרוה ואתננה לכם, אמרו אבותינו עורבים אותנו, אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא אבותיכם יש לי עליהם, אברהם יש לי עליו, שאמר (בראשית טו, ח:) במה אדע. יצחק יש לי עליו, שהיה אוהב לעשו ואני שנאתיו, שנאמר (מלאכי א, ג:) ואת עשו שנאתי. יעקב שאמר (ישעיה מ, כז:) נסתרה דרכי מה'. אלא הביאו לי ערבים טובים, ואני נותנה לכם. אמרו לפניו רבונו של עולם נביאינו ערבין לנו. אמר להם יש לי עליהם, שנאמר (ירמיה ב, ח:) והרעים פשעו בי וגו', וכתוב (יחזקאל יג, ד:) כשעלים בחרבות נביאיך ישראל היו, אלא הביאו לי ערבים טובים ואתננה לכם, אמרו הרי בנינו עורבים אותנו. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הא נדאי

עַרְבִים טוֹבִים, עַל זֵדֵיהֶם אֶתְנֶנָּה לָכֶם, הֲדָא הוּא דְכַתִּיב (תהלים ח, ג): מִפִּי עוֹלָלִים וַיִּנְקִים יִסְדֶּתָּ עֵץ, וְאִין עֵץ  
אֵלָא תוֹרָה, שְׁנַאֲמַר (תהלים כט, יא): ה' עֵץ לְעֵמּוֹ יִתֵּן.

Rabbi Meir said: When Israel stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: I swear to you, I shall give you the Torah! However, bring me good guarantors that you will keep it, and then I will give it to you!

They [the Children of Israel] replied: Sovereign of the Universe, our ancestors will be our guarantors.

He [the Holy One, blessed be He] said to them: Your ancestors themselves require guarantors. They were like a man who went to borrow from the king, and to whom the king said: Bring me a guarantor and I will lend you. He [the man] went and brought him a guarantor, at which point the king said: Your guarantor himself requires a guarantor. He [the man] went and brought a second guarantor. The king said to him: Your second guarantor also requires a guarantor. When he [the man] brought him [the king] a third guarantor, he [the king] said to him [to the man]: Know that for the sake of this man I lend you.

So when Israel stood ready to receive the Torah, He [The Holy One, blessed be He] said to them: I will give you My Torah, but bring Me good guarantors that you will keep it and then I will give it to you.

They [the Children of Israel] said: Our ancestors are our guarantors.

God said to them: I find faults in your ancestors. I can find fault with Abraham because he said (*Genesis 15:8*): *How can I know that I will inherit it?* With Isaac I can find fault because he loved Esau though I hated him, as it says (*Malachi 1:3*), *But Esau I have hated*. With Jacob I can find fault, who said (*Isaiah 40:27*): *My way is hidden from the Lord*.

Bring Me therefore good guarantors and I will give it [the Torah] to you.

They [the Children of Israel] then said: Sovereign of the Universe, our prophets will be our guarantors.

He [the Holy One, blessed be He] replied: I find faults in them [the Prophets], as it says (*Jeremiah 2:8*), *And the shepherds transgressed against Me*, and it is also written (*Ezekiel 13:4*), *Your prophets have been like foxes in ruins*.

Still, bring Me good guarantors and I will give it [the Torah] to you.

They [the Children of Israel] said: Our children shall be our guarantors.

To which God replied: Truly, these are good guarantors; for their sake I will give it [the Torah] to you. Therefore, it is written (*Psalms 8:3*): *Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have found strength*. And strength refers to the Torah, as it says (*Psalms 29:2*), *The Lord will give strength unto his people*.



**Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)**

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why did God require guarantors in order to give the Torah to Israel?

**?** Why did the Children of Israel offer the ancestors and prophets as guarantors?

**Bonus ?** Why didn't God accept the ancestors and prophets as guarantors?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why did God insist that the Children of Israel bring Him good guarantors after rejecting the previous ones?

**?** Why did the Children of Israel offer their children as guarantors?

**Bonus ?** Why did God accept the children as good guarantors?

### **“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

- ! The only way to keep the Torah is by making sure it doesn't die with you.
- ! At the end of the day, the only guarantee for a job well done, is a job well done!
- ! Your past successes don't necessarily guarantee your future ones!

## EPILOGUE



Maybe you heard of this unique definition of “who is a Jew”: “A Jew is not someone whose grandfather was a Jew but someone whose grandson would be a Jew. The above classic story is usually taught in the context of the importance of Jewish education. God wants our children to be guarantors, not our ancestors. In other words, the proof of success as Jewish parents and educators is in our ability to pass the torch on to the next generations.

Our story, however, can be applied to every aspect of life. An impressive CV –the history of our past successes- may get us the position we are applying for, but it won't guarantee that our job will be a good one. At the end of the day, the only guarantee for a job well done is a job well done (or your money back, which means the dissolution of the transaction).