

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [341]

I Contributed More for the Building of the Ark Than You... Insights into Tanchuma Vayakhel 8



Background to Our Story (What you need to know to better understand the story)

Exodus 25:10

¹⁰ "And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits *shall be* its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height.

I Chronicles 2: 42-55

⁴² The descendants of Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel *were* Mesha, his firstborn, who was the father of Ziph, and the sons of Mareshah the father of Hebron. ⁴³ The sons of Hebron *were* Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. ⁴⁴ Shema begot Raham the father of Jorkoam, and Rekem begot Shammai. ⁴⁵ And the son of Shammai *was* Maon, and Maon *was* the father of Beth Zur.

⁴⁶ Ephah, Caleb's concubine, bore Haran, Moza, and Gazez; and Haran begot Gazez. ⁴⁷ And the sons of Jahdai *were* Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph.

⁴⁸ Maachah, Caleb's concubine, bore Sheber and Tirhanah. ⁴⁹ She also bore Shaaph the father of Madmannah, Sheva the father of Machbenah and the father of Gibeon. And the daughter of Caleb *was* Achsah.

⁵⁰ These were the descendants of Caleb: The sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah, *were* Shobal the father of Kirjath Jearim, ⁵¹ Salma the father of Bethlehem, *and* Hareph the father of Beth Gader.

⁵² And Shobal the father of Kirjath Jearim had descendants: Haroeh, *and* half of the *families of* Manuhoth. ⁵³ The families of Kirjath Jearim *were* the Ithrites, the Puthites, the Shumathites, and the Mishraites. From these came the Zorathites and the Eshtaolites.

⁵⁴ The sons of Salma *were* Bethlehem, the Netophathites, Atroth Beth Joab, half of the Manahethites, and the Zorites.

⁵⁵ And the families of the scribes who dwelt at Jabez *were* the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, *and* the Suchathites. These *were* the Kenites who came from Hammath, the father of the house of Rahab.

Kenites

According to the Bible, the Kenites were a tribe in the ancient Levant. They settled in the towns and cities in the northeastern Negev in an area known as the "Negev of the Kenites" near Arad, and played an important role in the history of ancient Israel. One of the most recognized Kenites is Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, who was a shepherd and a priest in

the land of Midian (Judges 1:16). Certain groups of Kenites settled among the Israelite population, including the descendants of Moses's brother-in-law, although the Kenites descended from Rechab maintained a distinct, nomadic lifestyle for some time. Other well-known Kenites were Heber, husband of Jael, the Biblical heroine who killed General Sisera, and Rechab, the ancestor of the Rechabites.

Sisera

In the Bible, Sisera was the commander of the Canaanite army of King Jabin of Hazor. He is primarily known for his role in the Book of Judges as a powerful oppressor of the Israelites for 20 years.

Shemaiah and Abtalion

◆ AI Overview

Shemaiah and Abtalion (or Shmaya and Avtalyon) were renowned Jewish sages, Torah scholars, and leaders of the Sanhedrin during the early pre-Mishnaic era, specifically in the first half of the 1st century BCE. They formed the fourth of the zugot ("pairs") of scholars who led Jewish spiritual life.

The Men of the Great Assembly

◆ AI Overview

The Men of the Great Assembly, or Anshei Knesset HaGedolah, were a 120-member council of prophets, scribes, and sages who led the Jewish people during the early Second Temple era (c. 410–310 BCE). Founded by Ezra the Scribe, they aimed to strengthen Judaism, canonize the Hebrew Bible, and establish prayers and legal frameworks for communal life.

The Text: Tanchuma Vayakhel 8

אנו מוציין כשאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה לעשות את המשכן, אמר לו על כל דבר ודבר, ועשית. ועל הארון אמר, ועשו (שמות כה, י). למה, אלא שצוה הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשותו לכל ישראל, שלא יהא לאחד מהם פתחון פה על חבירו לומר, שאני נתתי הרבה בארון לפיכך אני לומד הרבה ואני יש לי בו יותר ממך ואתה לא נתת בארון כלום אלא מעט לפיכך אין לך חלק בתורה.

ולכך נמשלה התורה למים, שנאמר: הוי כל צמא לכו למים (ישעיה נה, א). כשם שאין אדם מתבטל לומר לחבירו השקני מים, כך לא יתבטל לומר לקטן ממנו למדני תורה, למדני דבר זה. וכשם שהמים כל הרוצה לשתות ישתה בלא מחיר, כך כל הרוצה ללמד תורה, לומד בלא מחיר ובלא כסף, שנאמר: לכו שברו בלוא כסף ובלוא מחיר (ישעיה נה, א).

ולמה נתנה התורה במדבר. לומר, מה המדבר מפקר לכל בני אדם, אף דברי תורה מפקרין לכל מי שירצה ללמד. שלא יהא אדם אומר, אני בן תורה ותורה נתונה לי ולאבותי ואתה ואבותיך לא הייתם בני תורה אלא אבותיך גרים היו, לכך כתיב: מורשה קהלת יעקב (דברים לג, ד), לכל מי שמתקלה בייעקב. אפלו הגרים שעוסקין בתורה, שקולים הם ככהן גדול, שנאמר: אשר יעשה אתם האדם וחי בהם אני ה' אלהיכם (ויקרא יח, ה), כהן ולוי וישראל לא נאמר אלא אדם. לפיכך תורה אחת ומשפט אחד יהיה וגו' (במדבר טו, טו)

ראה מה כתיב בבני יתרו, ומשפחות סופרים ישבי יעבץ תרעתים שמעתיים שוכתיים (דה"א ב, נה). תרעתים, שהיו יושבים בלשפת הגזית. שמעתיים, שהיו כל ישראל שומעים הלכה מפייהם. שוכתיים, שנסתוככו ברוח הקדש. ומי הם, המה הקינים הבאים מחמת אבי בית רכב (דה"א ב, נה), מבני קני חותן משה. ושמעניה ואבטליון בניו של סיסרא היו ולמדו תורה ברבים כאנשי כנסת הגדולה. כל כך למה. שהתורה נתנה לישראל. לפיכך כתיב: את הדברים האלה דבר ה' אל כל קהלכם (דברים ה, יט).

...We find that when the Holy One, blessed be he, told Moses to construct the Tabernacle, He described every detail to him, saying: *you shall do*, but with reference to the ark, He said: *[and they shall] make Me*. Why? The Holy One, blessed be He, commanded all the Israelites to make it, so that not one of them would be able to humiliate his fellow Israelite by saying: "I contributed more for the building of the ark than you, therefore I am more learned and have a greater right to it than you do. And since you contributed little to the ark, you will have no portion in the Torah."

That is why the Torah is likened to water, as it is said: *Ho, everyone who thirst, come to the waters* (Isaiah 55:1). Just as no one should be ashamed to say to his companion: "Give me a drink of water," no one should be ashamed to say to a person younger than himself: "Teach me Torah, instruct me in this matter." And just as one who desires to drink should be able to drink without cost, so all who desire to learn Torah should be able to learn without cost and without price, as it is said: *Yes, come without money and without price* (ibid.).

Why was the Torah given in the desert? To teach us that just as the desert is free to all men, so the words of the Torah are free to all who desire to learn them. Also, lest a man should say: "I am a student of the Torah that was given to me and my ancestors, while you and your ancestors are not students of the Torah; your ancestors were strangers"; hence it is written: *An inheritance of the congregation of Jacob* (Deuteronomy 33:4). This tells us that the Torah was an inheritance for all who associate themselves with Jacob.

Even outsiders who devote themselves to the Torah are equal to the high priest, as it is said: *Which if a man do, he shall live by them: I am the Lord* (Leviticus 18:5). It does not refer to priest or Levite or Israelite but merely to *man*. Thus, *One Torah and one ordinance shall be both for you and for the stranger that dwells with you* (Numbers 15:16).

Observe what is written concerning the sons of Jethro: *And the families of the scribes who dwelt at Jabez were the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and the Suchathites* (I Chronicles 2:55)


The name *Tirathites* (understood as derived from Aramaic *tar'a*, "gate") indicates that they sat at the gate to the inner chamber of the Temple; *Shimeathites* (which includes the letters of the word *shema*, "hear") implies that all the Israelites heard

the Torah from their lips; and *Succathites* (which includes the word *sukkah*, "covered by") suggests that they were enveloped by the Holy Spirit. Who were these? *These were the Kenites who came from Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab.* (ibid.). The father-in-law of Moses was a Kenite, and Shemaiah and Abtalion and the descendants of Sisera were also Kenites. They studied the Torah in public like the men of the Great Assembly. Why was that? Because the Torah was given to all Israel. Therefore, it is written: *These words that the Lord spoke unto all your assembly* (Deuteronomy 5:19).




Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Extra Bonus  Why did God command all the Israelites to make the ark, as opposed to one or two persons?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____


Extra Bonus  Why would some people be inclined to humiliate their fellow Israelites by saying: "I contributed more for the building of the ark than you, therefore I am more learned and have a greater right to it than you do. And since you contributed little to the ark, you will have no portion in the Torah"?


Answer 1 _____


Answer 2 _____


Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

 Our text compares the Torah with water to emphasize that it should be available to all. It also teaches that the Torah was given in the desert to teach us that "just as the desert is free to all men, so the words of the Torah are free to all who desire to learn them." Why is there the need to underline this idea over and over again?

 What does our story imply by adding "even outsiders who devote themselves to the Torah are equal to the high priest"?

Extra Bonus  "...and the descendants of Sisera were also Kenites. They studied the Torah in public like the men of the Great Assembly." Why is this line about the descendants of Sisera the perfect one to wrap up our story?

Extra Bonus  Who has a share in the Torah?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from This Text.

! The Torah belongs to everyone...who wishes to claim it!



Our text (not sure how much of a story it is), emphasizes repeatedly that the Torah cannot be acquired with wealth or with lineage. Like water, which is free for all, and like the desert that doesn't have owners, the Torah is available to anyone who wishes to hold fast to it. Rich and poor, Jews by birth and Jews by choice (even if they descend from evil people) can equally access the Torah and, with work and dedication, be counted among the greatest scholars of the Jewish people.