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## Stories with a Twist [65]

**"Did you go down to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should the Torah be for you?"**  
(Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88b-89a)



### Background to Our Story

#### Exodus 20:1-14 (The Ten Commandments)

1. *And God spoke all these words, saying,*
2. *I am the Lord your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*
3. *You shall have no other gods before me.*
4. *You shall not make for you any engraved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;*
5. *You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;*
6. *And showing mercy to thousands of those who love me, and keep my commandments.*
7. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*
8. *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*
9. *Six days shall you labor, and do all your work;*
10. *But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates;*
11. *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.*
12. *Honor your father and your mother; that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you.*
13. *You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
14. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is your neighbor's.*

## Psalms 8

1. To the chief Musician, according to the Gittit, A Psalm of David.
2. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth, who has set your glory above the heavens.
3. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have founded strength because of your enemies, that you might still the enemy and the avenger.
4. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have established;
5. What is man, that you are mindful of him? And the son of man, that you visit him?
6. For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor.
7. You made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet;
8. All sheep and oxen, and the beasts of the field;
9. The bird of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas.
10. O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### Prooftext, prooftexting

A prooftext is a verse or short passage from the Bible used by someone as part of his proof for a doctrinal belief he wishes to substantiate to others.

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88b-89a

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם, מה לילוד אשה בינינו? אמר להן: לקבל תורה בא. אמרו לפניו: חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לה תשע מאות ושבעים וארבעה דורות קודם שנגבר העולם, אמה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם? "מה אנוש פי תזכרנו וכן אדם פי תפקדנו ה' אדנינו מה אדיר שמך בכל הארץ אשר תנה הודך על השמים!"

אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: החזיר להן תשובה! אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, מתניירא אני שמא ישרפוני בהבל שבפיהם. אמר לו: אחוז בכסא כבודי, וחזור להן תשובה, שנאמר: "מאחז פני כסא פרשו עליו ענני". ואמר רבי נחום: מלמד שפירש שדי מזיו שכינתו ועננו עליו.

אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, תורה שאמה נותן לי מה פתיב בה – "אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים". אמר להן: למצרים נרדמתם, לפרעה השתעבדתם, תורה למה תהא לכם? שוב מה פתיב בה – "לא יהיה לה אלהים אחרים", בין הגוים אתם שרויין שעובדין עבודת גלולים? שוב מה פתיב בה "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו" כלום אתם עושים מלאכה שאתם צריכין שבות? שוב מה פתיב בה – "לא תשא", משא ומתן יש ביניכם? שוב מה פתיב בה – "כבוד את אביך ואת אמך" אב ואם יש לכם? שוב מה פתיב בה "לא תרצח" "לא תנאף" "לא תגנב" קנאה יש ביניכם, יצר הרע יש ביניכם?

מיד הודו לו להקדוש ברוך הוא, שנאמר: "ה' אדנינו מה אדיר שמך וגו'" ואילו "תנה הודך על השמים" – לא פתיב.

מיד פל אחד ואחד נעשה לו אוהב, ומסר לו דבר, שנאמר: "עלית למרום שבית שבי לקחת מתנות באדם", בשכר שקראוהו אדם לקחת מתנות. אף מלאך המות מסר לו דבר, שנאמר: "וימת את הקטרת וכפר על העם", ואומר: "ויצמד בין המתים ובין החיים וגו'", אי לאו דאמר ליה – מי הוה ידע?

And Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: When Moses ascended on High to receive the Torah, the ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, what is one born of a woman doing here among us?

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them: He came to receive the Torah.

The angels said before Him: The Torah is a hidden treasure that was concealed by you 974 generations before the creation of the world, and you seek to give it to flesh and blood? As it is stated: "*The word which He commanded to a thousand generations*" (Psalms 105:8). Since the Torah, the word of God, was given to the twenty-sixth generation after Adam, the first man, the remaining 974 generations must have preceded the creation of the world. "*What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You think of him?*" (Psalms 8:5). Rather, "*God our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth that Your majesty is placed above the heavens*" (Psalms 8:2). The rightful place of God's majesty, the Torah, is in the heavens.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Provide them with an answer as to why the Torah should be given to the people.

Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, I am afraid lest they burn me with the breath of their mouths. God said to him: Grasp My throne of glory for strength and protection, and provide them with an answer. And from where is this derived? As it is stated: "*He causes him to grasp the front of the throne, and spreads His cloud over it*" (Job 26:9), and Rabbi Naḥum said: This verse teaches that God spread the radiance of His presence and His cloud over Moses.

Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, the Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it? God said to him: "*I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of Egypt from the house of bondage*" (Exodus 20:2). Moses said to the angels: Did you descend to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should the Torah be yours?

Again Moses asked: What else is written in it? God said to him: "*You shall have no other gods before Me*" (Exodus 20:3). Moses said to the angels: Do you dwell among the nations who worship idols that you require this special warning?

Again Moses asked: What else is written in it? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: *"Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it"* (Exodus 20:8). Moses asked the angels: Do you perform labor that you require rest from it?

Again Moses asked: What else is written in it? *"Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"* (Exodus 20:7), meaning that it is prohibited to swear falsely. Moses asked the angels: Do you conduct business with one another that may lead you to swear falsely?

Again Moses asked: What else is written in it? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: *"Honor your father and your mother"* (Exodus 20:12). Moses asked the angels: Do you have a father or a mother that would render the commandment to honor them relevant to you?


Again Moses asked: What else is written in it? God said to him: *"You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal."* Moses asked the angels: Is there jealousy among you, or is there an evil inclination within you that would render these commandments relevant?

Immediately they agreed with the Holy One, Blessed be He, that He made the right decision to give the Torah to the people, and as it is stated: *"God our Lord, how glorious is Your name in all the earth"* (Psalms 8:10), while "that Your majesty is placed above the heavens" is not written because the angels agreed with God that it is appropriate to give the Torah to the people on earth.




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

### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**Bonus**  Why do the ministering angels ask God: "Master of the Universe, what is one born of woman doing amongst us?"

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

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

 What do the ministering angels mean by their question: "The Torah is a hidden treasure that was concealed by you 974 generations before the creation of the world, and you seek to give it to flesh and blood?"

**?** What prooftext do the ministering angels bring to show that the Torah belongs in the heavenly realms?

**Bonus ?** Why does God want Moses to give an answer to the ministering angels? Why doesn't He give them an answer?

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

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

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** How does Moses convince the ministering angels that the Torah belongs on earth?

**?** What prooftext do the ministering angels bring to show that they accepted Moses' claim?

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

- ! Know the difference between what you want and what you need!
- ! In the ideal world, solutions, breaks, opportunities, and benefits, should go to the ones who need them, not necessarily to the ones who want them!
- ! The Torah came down to earth with a mission, and you (we) are it.



When Moses ascends to heaven to receive the Torah, the angels, feeling and believing they have a proprietary connection with God, wish to discredit him and his worthiness.

With God's encouragement, Moses shows the angels that the Torah belongs to the ones who need it, not necessarily to the ones who want it. Human beings, unlike the angels, are far from perfect, which makes us the Torah's best legatees.

This story challenges us to learn the difference between what we want and what we need, and to strive to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us, where is most necessary.