

Stories with a Twist [77]



“Now, Who Am I that the Holy One, Blessed is He, Should have Given me the Torah?”

(Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 89a)

Background to Our Story

Satan



<http://www.wikipedia.org>

Satan, (Standard Hebrew Satan'el, English accuser), is a term that originates from the Abrahamic faiths, being traditionally applied to an angel in Judeo-Christian belief, and to a jinn in Islamic belief. Where Satan does appear in the Bible, he plays the role of the Accuser.

Satan has no power of independent action, but requires the permission of God, which he may not transgress. He cannot be regarded, therefore, as an opponent of the Deity; and the doctrine of monotheism is disturbed by his existence no more than by the presence of other beings before the face of God.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 89a

בשעה שירד משה מלפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, בא שטן ואמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, תורה היכן היא? אמר לו: נתתיך לארץ. הלא אצל ארץ, אמר לה: תורה היכן היא? אמרה לו: “אלהים הבין דרכה וגו’”. הלא אצל ים ואמר לו: “אין עמדי”. הלא אצל תהום, אמר לו: “אין בי”, שנאמר: “תהום אמר לא בי היא וים אמר אין עמדי, אבדון ומות אמרו באזנינו שמענו שמעה”. חזר ואמר לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבוננו של עולם, חיפשתי בכל הארץ ולא מצאתיה. אמר לו: לך אצל בן עמרם.

הלא אצל משה, אמר לו: תורה שנתן לך הקדוש ברוך הוא היכן היא? אמר לו: וכי מה אני שנתן לי הקדוש ברוך הוא תורה!? אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: משה, בדאי אתה!? אמר לפניו: רבוננו של עולם, תמודה גנוזה יש לך שאתה משתעשע בה בכל יום. אני אחזיק

טובה לעצמי?! אָמַר לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה: הוֹאִיל וּמִיֵּעֲטָת עֲצָמָהּ – תִּקְרָא עַל שְׁמִי,
שְׁנֹאֲמַר: "זָכְרוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי וְגו'".

When Moses descended from standing before the Holy One, Blessed be He, with the Torah, Satan came and said before Him: Master of the Universe, where is the Torah?

He [God] said to him: I have given it to the earth.

He [Satan] went to the earth, and said to it: Where is the Torah? It [the earth] said to him: I do not know, as only: "God understands its way, and He knows its place" (Job 28:23).

He [Satan] went to the sea and asked: Where is the Torah? And the sea said to him: "It is not with me." He went to the depths and asked: Where is the Torah? And the depths said to him: "It is not within me." And from where is it derived that the sea and the depths answered him this way? As it is stated: "The depth said: It is not within me, and the sea said: It is not with me" (Job 28:14). "Destruction and death said: We heard a rumor of it with our ears" (Job 28:22).

Satan returned and said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, I searched for the Torah throughout all the earth and did not find it.

He [God] said to him [to Satan]: Go to Moses, son of Amram.

He went to Moses and said to him: The Torah that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave you, where is it?

Moses said to him: And what am I that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have given me the Torah?

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, are you a liar? Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have a hidden treasure in which You delight every day, as it is stated: "And I was His delight every day, playing before Him at every moment" (Proverbs 8:30). Should I take credit for myself and say that You gave it to me?

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Since you belittled yourself, the Torah will be called by your name, as it is stated: "Remember the Torah of Moses My servant..." (Malachi 3:22).



Explaining the Story

What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

- ?** Why is Satan suddenly asking "where is the Torah?"
- ?** Do you think Satan knows where the Torah is? If yes, why? If not, why?
- ?** What did God imply by replying to Satan: "I gave it to the earth"?
- ?** Why does God send Satan to Moses?
- Bonus ?** Why is Moses called the son of Amram?
- ?** What did Moses imply by his reply to Satan: "And what am I that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have given me the Torah?"
- ?** Why would Satan be happy if proven that Moses is a liar?
- Bonus ?** How does Satan put Moses between a rock and a hard place by asking him: "The Torah that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave you, where is it?"
- ?** Is Moses a liar? What do you think?

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

- !** To whom does the Torah belong?



Our story is addressing a fundamental question: Where is the Torah? Or, in other words, To whom does the Torah belong?

Through God's ambiguous and Moses' evasive answers, and Satan's back and forth, trying to prove that Moses in particular and human beings are not worthy of the Torah, this story teaches us that the Torah belongs specifically to those who believe they don't have it. In other words, you can only acquire Torah (and wisdom, and knowledge), if you believe you don't have it. The moment you claim the Torah is with you, you fail the test and the Torah eludes you.