

# **The Torah**

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## **Identifying the Torah:**

When speaking of Torah we are specifically referring to the first five books of our scriptures. Namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Some have referenced to the rest of the TNK (“old testament”) as Torah as well. But we are specifically talking about the first five books.

Some also say that the Mishnah and Talmud (gamara) are also Torah. Again we are speaking only of the first five books. We will discuss the other “torahs” in a future essay.

## **Definition of Torah:**

Torah is a much mistranslated word among western society. This is largely due to Christendom's influence.

However the best definition is “to guide”, “teach” and “to hit the mark”. In short it is saying “a guide to righteousness”. Christianity for instance defines sin as “missing the mark”. Thus sin is opposite of Torah and Torah is opposite of sin. They are antonyms of each other. Thus Torah can be translated as “righteous guide”, “righteous instructions”, or “teachings of righteousness”. The very words of Torah is testimony to its eternal purpose and position as a covenant that cannot be replaced or usurped.

## **What is Torah's purpose:**

When reviewing the events of the giving of the 10 Words/Commandments we have to resign ourselves to a reality check. We were given the 10 Commandments not the Torah as a whole. Many have used this as a means to invalidate the rest of the Torah. Some have used it as a way to say that man wrote it. This is dangerous because we can easily dismiss the entire writing if we are not careful.

Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 give us the 10 Commandments or a header of the teachings that are revealed in the remainder of Torah. But even these two sets of Commandments do not match exactly. We have to ask why this is the case?

Let's think for a moment. The Torah for the most part is a story of the origins of creation and the Creator's role in sustaining and interacting with creation. This is not saying that the Torah is not describing actual events. But rather teaching us that there are lessons between the lines we have to be mindful of.

Thus man's interaction with the Creator and fellow man are defined. It is a book about the ways of G-d and His will for mankind. So we are not dealing with only a word for word guide for us. We are dealing with a thought for thought guide for us to implement into our thoughts, actions and into community as a whole. It is giving us wisdom and understanding of how G-d interacts with creation

and our purpose in it. It guides us to bringing G-d into the world through us. Many are so disconnected in terms of searching, caring, or interacting with G-d that they cannot “see” His interaction with creation. Torah is our way of becoming an instrument or physical interface to G-d. Thus we become G-d like so that everyone will be faced with or creator's love. Thus we can become the means to bring creation back to the Creator. We can lead them back. So they can reconnect with the Creator!

The Torah is not meant to be taken literally but rather in a plain sense, as a book to transform our minds. It is meant to become part of us. It is our bread of life we are to eat (study and implement). It is to be our joy and life like the blood (there is life in the blood) of a grape (wine).

### **Torah at a deeper level:**

Our sages tell us that it is a mistaken premise to think the Torah is a collection of stories and sayings. It is not wise to think it is just a parchment with words on it. It is not good to simply read the words and say, that's it.

Our sages have enlightened us to what we see and read is simply an outer garment. Just as a human is more than skin deep, so is the Torah more than words deep.

The Torah is to be understood to have wisdom embedded in it and it will not release that wisdom without deep thought, contemplation, and through great efforts. Just as we humans have layers of skin so too the Torah is revealed layer by layer. This requires it to be mined and dug into it as though one is looking for a gem amongst the tons of soil. This takes time and effort with a great emphasis on focused attention.

The words contained within Torah are only the beginning of a deeper adventure we are to take. We are to explore and look for patterns. Why are there ten plagues and Ten Commandments, what is significant and what is in common with ten? We are to look for relationships between passages that don't appear to have anything in common. We are to analyze passages for not only what they say but what they do not say. We are to look at how a passage is stated versus what other ways it could have been stated.

One may say that this is good but spiritualizing scriptures is not a good thing! This is a good observation and shows that logically we can go off the deep end. What keeps us back from going too far? The plain sense (not literal) and understanding of a passage is to retain it proper place as the overall anchor for a passage.

If one was to say that Israel has been replaced yet it is clear within Torah that never will the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be forsaken, then replacement cannot happen. If we were to “spiritualize” this concept and say that Israel is being replaced by spiritual seed/descendants we would have to look at the plain sense of the Torah. We find that the plain sense of the Torah is being usurped by such an explanation. As such the plain sense remains and such an idea of replacement is viewed as false and thrown out.

### **Torah in relations to everything else:**

Earlier on it was mentioned that the Torah is the first five books of our scriptures. This sets us up for a priority structure. The Torah takes precedence over the rest of scriptures, commentaries, philosophies, books, and teachings.

The Torah is meant to be the focal point of ones discernment. Nothing is more important in comparison. This may sound like we are creating an idol. But we are not looking to worship it as an idol. It is G-d's instructions for us and as such we have to view this as a gift of gifts. It is the ultimate text book for us. Our goal is to be one with G-d through our emotions, will, thought, and actions. We are looking to match our emotions, will, thought, and actions to His will (Deuteronomy 6:4 – 9) as defined in Torah. We are treating these as eternal words from our creator without replacement or anything superior.

So all that we read, or think, or do, are to be viewed through our understanding of Torah. Some may say that our “new scriptures are old scriptures revealed” and as such we have a greater revelation. This is not valid. In short it presumes that the Torah is replaceable - that its plain understandings can be changed by virtue of a “newer” revelation. This is spiritualizing and the very thing we are told not to do (Deuteronomy 13).

### **Torah as a constitution:**

This is a subject many are not aware of and will surprise others. The Torah is not a code of law. It is in fact a horrible code of law because it was not intended to be used in that manner. In a preceding section I mentioned that Torah is more than merely words. A code of law is very specific and very literal. It is meant to be that way to prevent misuse. This is why lawyers look for technicalities. They are focusing on the mechanics of the laws and there interrelations. If that is the case then it would make sense that it is not a literal code of law. Though there are some codes in it but in general there is not.

What Torah does is give us boundaries in which we are permitted to work within to create the code of laws. It gives us a range we can work within. Why do I say this?

When Israel was given the Torah, it is presumed by many that Torah did not pre-exist this point of time. Torah reveals G-d's ways, will, and man's desired state was being taught before Israel existed. Israel was given the task of preserving this heritage for all of mankind and as such it became a constitution for Israel. Israel is supposed to exemplify the application of Torah to the World.

Here is the interesting part. The Torah is not only for all of mankind but is to be a constitution for all. Because the Torah is a constitution it gives the ability for all of mankind and its culture the ability to express their uniqueness in a way that G-d made everyone. So we should not have cookie cutter communities throughout the world. Each community should be a unique expression of Torah but still in keeping within the will of G-d.

Is it not interesting in the TNK (Zech. 14:18) that nations will not receive rain if they do not go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Booths (Sukkot). Meaning even the nations will be obligated to perform the pilgrimage Feasts of the Torah. The nations will be reflecting Torah in their culture and ways. They will have to give up their gods and vain religions. They will keep all that is in keeping with Torah and thus have uniqueness in their expression of Torah.

Think of the Torah as a skeleton and code of law as the flesh on the bones. We are the ones to put the flesh on the bones but we cannot create anything contrary to what the bones need. We cannot create a third arm if they are no bones for it. We are as not to add to much code of law and make a fat unhealthy body. We are also not to have too little flesh that is anorexic and useless. Rather we are to create no more or less that is needed. It is to be a lean healthy body that is effective and flexible.

### **Torah and Perfection (Forgiveness):**

A major misconception of Torah is that it expects perfection. Actually it does not. Torah is not about perfection but rather righteousness. What does this mean?

Righteousness is a function of our pursuit of Torah and its application in our lives and community coupled with our desires. If we desire to carry out His will yet we fail or stumble we become a sinner. However sin in Hebrew means error. An error is unintentional not intentional.

The Torah handles unintentional and intentional sins differently. They both require a person to make restitution and seek forgiveness from the offended parties plus G-d.

But the Torah only prescribes offerings for unintentional sins. There are not offerings for intentional sins! All high handed sins are excluded from the offering system.

Please note that intentional sins are errors made that an individual refuses to accept responsibility for or it was done on purpose.

The offering is not where forgiveness is given but rather through repentance and reconciliation for damages. The presents of a Temple was never a requirement for forgiveness of sin, whether it was intentional or not.

### **Letter of the law kills:**

It is often said that the letter of the law kills as being a reference to Torah. This cannot be for a few reasons.

Firstly, the Torah is a guide with boundaries not a code of law as explained in a previous section. Meaning in a real sense “letter of the law” is not applicable. For it is man's responsibility to put the flesh (codes of law) on the bones of the Torah. The “letter of the law” would have to be speaking specifically of the codes of law that man has created not the Torah itself.

Secondly, this phrase expects perfection to be the end result of adherence. Perfection can only be accomplished if one knows precisely what he or she can and cannot do in detail. This is not a description of Torah. The Torah gives us a range to work within but not the specifics within those ranges to work with. That is up to us to develop.

Ever see a cooking show that present the ingredients to the challengers? They have full freedom to work with those ingredients and yet never do to cooks create the same dish! We are told what we can and cannot eat and mix, but we are not told how to create our meals. Thus the Torah is not a document of perfect living but rather about living in a right manner that is acceptable to G-d.

Thirdly, many teach that the Torah is impossible to keep yet Torah tells us the opposite (Deuteronomy 30:11-14). So we must ask is Torah or is man lying?

### **Torah for the individual:**

Torah has two mutual applications. It is not only for the community at large, but also for the individual.

Torah is meant to develop three relationships:

1. Between the Creator and the individual.
2. Between a man and his fellow man (this can also be community to community as well).
3. Between Creator and the community.

We, as individuals, are to seek out wisdom, understanding, and discernment from the Torah as individual as well as a community.

Within Torah there is very little separation or distinction between an individual and community.

We as individuals are to be working for the betterment of the community by bettering our selves. The community is not to just improve us. We are to be active in improving the community by us, as individuals, developing our relationship with the Creator on a personal level.

### **Conclusion:**

The Torah is more than mere words. It is more than skin deep. There is a spirit behind it that needs to be captured through study and contemplation. When this is done we are endowed by wisdom, understanding, and discernment.

The Torah enables us to be emissaries for our creator. Through us we can become witnesses to the world of who our Creator is.

The Torah is our premiere document of our faith for our personal walk and communal walk.

Everything else evolves around it.