



SoulSpa 3.17 • P. Yitro
February 7, 2026 • 20 Shevat 5786

ברוך אתה יהוה
אלהינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצוותיו
וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה:

Barukh Atah Adonai
eloheinu melekh ha'olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, YHVH, our God,
eternal sovereign, who sanctified us
in God's *mitzvot* and commanded us
to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

Preparation, suspense
Ritual purity

COVENANT
Exodus 19:10-19, 20:1

BIG THING ABOUT TO HAPPEN: RITUAL
"WEIGHT" = CREATING A PEOPLE
KETUBAH • MYSTICAL TRANSFORMATION

ויאמר יהוה אל משה לך אל העם
וקדשם היום ומחר וכבסו שמלתם:

10. YHVH said to Moshe, "Go to the nation and sanctify them:
today and tomorrow, they will wash their clothes. ... or, is it trauma?
... "THEOPHANY"

והיו נכנים ליום השלישי כי ביום
השלישי ירד יהוה לעיני כל העם
על הר סיני:

11. "They will be ready for the **third** day, for on the third day
YHVH will descend before all the nation on Mount Sinai.

והגבלת את העם סביב לאמר
השמרו לכם עלות בהר ונגע בקצהו
כל הנגע בהר מות יומת:

12. "Set encompassing bounds for the nation, saying, 'Caution!
Do not ascend the mountain or touch its border: all who touch
the mountain will be **deaded**.' • no Torah evidence anyone was deaded: austerity?
• couldn't be touched = ritual purity

לא תגע בו יד כִּי־סְקוֹל יִסְקַל או־יָרֵה
יָרֵה אִם־בְּהֵמָה אִם־אִישׁ לֹא יַחֲיֶה
בְּמַשָּׁךְ הַיָּבֵל הַמָּה יַעֲלוּ בָהֶר:

13. "**No hand will touch them**, for they will be **stoned or shot**:
animal or human, it will not live: **at the jubilee long-blast**, they
will ascend the mountain."

BREATH → SOUND / FLOW

וירד משה מן ההר אל העם ויקדש
את העם וכבסו שמלתם:

14. Moshe descended the mountain to the nation and sanctified
the nation; **they washed their clothes**. "Before ecstasy, the laundry?"

ויאמר אל העם היו נכנים לשלשת
ימים אל תגשו אל אשה:
Moshe said this; not quite God (?)

15. He said to the nation, "Be ready on the **third** day: **do not
approach a woman**." Do not approach a ... man? Preparation.
Physical abstention – bring energy *in*
Physical peak experience → spiritual peak experience

ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקר ויהי
קולת וברקים וענן כבד על ההר וקול
שפך חזק מאד ויחרד כל העם אשר
במחנה:

16. On the **third** day, at break of morning, there was **thunder**, and
lightning, and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and a very loud
blast of the shofar; and all the nation in the camp trembled.

ויוצא משה את העם לקראת
האלהים מן המחנה ויתנבחו
בתחית ההר:

17. Moshe led the people to greet God out from the camp, and
they stood themselves at the base of the mountain.

והר סיני עשן כלו מפני אשר ירד עליו
יהוה באש ונעל עשנו כעשן הכבשן
ויחרד כל ההר מאד:

18. And Mount Sinai was entirely smoke because YHVH
descended on it in fire; the smoke rose like smoke of a kiln, and
the whole mountain trembled greatly.

ויהי קול השפך הולך וחזק מאד
משה ידבר והאלהים יענו בקול:

19. The voice of the *shofar* continuously grew louder; Moshe
spoke, and God answered him in a voice.... God spoke creation into being
10 LET THERE BE
10 COMMANDMENTS

וידבר אלהים את כל הדברים האלה
לאמר:

1. God **spoke** all these words, saying: ...

GENDERING REVELATION?

Rashi, Ex. 19:15

אל תגשו אל אשה. כל ג' ימים הללו
כדי שיהיו הנשים טובלות ליום
השלישי ותהיינה טהורות לקבל
תורה, שאם ישמשו תוך ג' ימים
שמא תפלט האשה שכבת זרע
לאחר טבילתה ותחזר ותטמא.

Do not approach a woman – All these three days, so women could [do *mikveh*] on the third day and be *tahor* to receive Torah – lest [they] “use” [women] during the three days, a woman “sleep with seed” after immersing, and return to being *tamei*.

Steinsaltz, Ex. 19:15

ויאמר אל העם כחלק מתהליך
ההתקדשות: **היו נכנים לשלש
ימים, אל תגשו אל אשה.** הימנעו
מיחסי מין כדי להתרכז, להתייחד
ולהתכונן לקראת המאורע.

[Moshe] said to the nation – As part of your sanctification process, *be ready on the third day; do not approach a woman.* Refrain from sexual relations so as **to center, unify and prepare your selves to call [forward] the event.**

The Women's Torah Commentary

Moses' command before the revelation at Sinai not to go near a woman (19:15) and the grammatically masculine language of the laws have prompted questions about the extent to which women were included in the covenant between God and Israel...

MIDRASH ME!

This text cries out “*darsheini*” (“Interpret me!”) and so invites readers—ancient as well as modern—to grapple with revelation. The entire history of interpretation of our sacred texts, from the Mishnah to modern feminist midrash, is empowered by Moses' audacious transformation of God's words. Exodus 19:9–15 subverts omniscient external authority and hands authority to the reader. This troubling passage empowers all of us to read, interpret, and find meaning in this parashah and its contradictions...

Shemot Rabbah 28:2

כה תאמר לבית יעקב, אלו הנשים
א"ל אמר להם ראשי דברים שהם
יכולות לשמע, ותגיד לבני ישראל,
אלו האנשים, א"ל אמר להם
דקדוקי דברים שהם יכולים
לשמע.

Thus say to the Children of Yaakov (Ex. 19:3) – These are the women. [God] said to him: “Say to them major principles that they can hear.” *And tell to the Children of Israel* – These are the men. [God] said to him: “Say to them detailed principles that they can hear.”

דבר אחר, למה לנשים תחלה, שהן
מזדרזות במצוות.

Another thing: Why to the women first? Because they are enthusiastic about [doing] *mitzvot*.

דבר אחר, כדי שיהו מנהיגות את
בניהן לתורה.

Another thing: so they will guide their children to Torah.

אמר רבי תחליפא דקיסרין, אמר
הקב"ה כשבראתי את העולם, לא
צויתי אלא לאדם הראשון, ואחר
כך נצטווית חוה ועברה וקלקלה את
העולם עכשיו אם איני קורא לנשים
תחלה, הן מבטלות את התורה....

R. Tah^llifa of Caesarea said: The Holy Blessed One said: When I created the world, I commanded only the First Adam. Then Havah was commanded, transgressed and cursed the world. Now, if I do not summon the women first, they will nullify the Torah.”

Ellen Frankel, The Five Books of Miriam

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Before unveiling the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, God instructs Moses to tell the people to prepare themselves by entering into a state of purity for three days. But when Moshe relays God's instructions to the people, he embellishes them, adding his own warning: "Do not go near a woman" (Ex. 19:15). What's he up to – and why does God let him get away with it?

HULDAH THE PREACHER ANSWERS: Throughout the four books of the Bible in which Moses is the main character – Exodus through Deuteronomy – God constantly instructs him to convey messages to the people. And as with any game of telephone, sometimes something gets lost or garbled in translation.

WILY REBECCA DISAGREES: No, in conveying God's message to the people, Moses deliberately changes the audience addressed. God's original instruction – "Be ready for the third day" (Ex. 19:15) – includes all the people. Moses, however, addresses himself only to the men: "do not go near a woman." In commanding the people to purify themselves for three days, God is asking them to mark a distinction between the profane realm of the everyday and the sacred realm of Revelation; Moses, however, redivides the two realms differently: for him, the profane realm includes all the people, the sacred only men. To enter the latter realm, as Moses sees it, requires isolation from women.

LILITH THE REBEL CONCURS: In giving Moses these instructions God entrusts him with a sacred task: to safeguard the people from death, which threatens them if they come too close to holiness or approach it improperly prepared. But Moses violates this trust by adding his own interpretation. And it's not the only time he does this. In fact, this habit of literary license ultimately costs him his passport to the Promised Land.

Daniel Nevins, "Expanding the Circle of Revelation"

While it is common to portray women as kind or merciful, and men as strong or judgmental, the medieval Kabbalah reversed this pattern. In the [Zohar \(Yitro 79b\)](#) the feminine aspect of God (*Shekhinah*) is associated with judgment, while the masculine aspect of God (*Tiferet*) is associated with mercy. As Daniel Matt writes in his Zohar commentary, "[A]t Sinai, each group was addressed accordingly" (Vol. IV, 432). Are women Jews? Yes, and they were first to hear the divine word, infused either with gentleness or strength, according to the Midrash or Kabbalah.

**BEYOND GENDER-INCLUSION,
WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO US NOW?**

SO, ABOUT THAT MOUNTAIN

Exodus 19:17

וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לִקְרַאת
הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְנַצְּבוּ
בְּתַחְתֵּית הַהָר:

Moshe led the people to greet God out from the camp, and they stood themselves at the base of the mountain.

Rashi, Ex. 19:17

בְּתַחְתֵּית הַהָר. לְפִי פְּשׁוּטוֹ בְּרַגְלֵי
הָהָר; וּמִדְּרָשׁוֹ שֶׁנִּתְלַשׁ הָהָר
מִמְּקוֹמוֹ וְנִכְפְּהָ עֲלֵיהֶם כְּגִיגִית:

At the base [=In the bottom] *of the mountain* – Its *pshat*: at the foot of the mountain. Its *midrash*: the mountain was plucked from its place and arched over them like a roof.

B.T. Shabbat 88a

וַיִּתְנַצְּבוּ בְּתַחְתֵּית הָהָר - אָמַר רַב
אֲבִדִּימִי בַר חָמָא בַר חָסָא: מְלַמֵּד
שֶׁכְּפָה הַקֶּבֶץ עָלֵיהֶם אֶת הָהָר
כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם: אִם אַתֶּם
מְסַבְּבִים הַתּוֹרָה מוּטָב, וְאִם לֹא
שָׁם תְּהֵא קְבוּרַתְכֶם. אָמַר רַב־אֲבִי:
מִכָּאן מוֹדְעָא רַבָּה לְאוּרְיִיתָא. אָמַר
רַבָּא: אִף עַל פִּי כּוֹ הַדּוֹר סְבִלוּהָ
בְּיָמֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ.

They stood themselves in the bottom of the mountain – R. Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: "The Holy Blessed One arched the mountain over them like a roof and said to them: 'If you accept Torah, excellent; and if not, there will be your grave.'" Rav Aha bar Ya'akov said: "From here, there is a great caveat to Torah!" Rava said: "Nevertheless, their acceptance of her was confirmed in the days of Ahashverosh."

HESTER PANIM
(concealed faces)

Esther 9:24-28

כִּי הָמוּן בְּרֵחַ הַמִּדְּתָא הָאֲגָגִי צָרַר כָּל־
הַיְהוּדִים חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְהוּדִים לְאַבְדֵם
וְהַפֵּל פּוֹר הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל לְהָמָם
וּלְאַבְדֵם: וּבְבֹאָהּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אָמַר
עִם־הַסֵּפֶר יָשׁוּב מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ הַרְעָה
אֲשֶׁר־חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְהוּדִים עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ
וַתִּלּוּ אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו עַל־הָעֵץ:
עַל־כֵּן קָרְאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים
עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוּר עַל־כֵּן עַל־כֵּל־דְּבָרֵי
הָאֲגֵרָת הַזֹּאת וּמֵה־רָאוּ עַל־כֵּךְ
וּמֵה הַגִּיעַ אֲלֵיהֶם: קִיְּמוּ וְקַבְּלוּ
הַיְהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַל־זָרְעָם וְעַל
כָּל־הַנִּלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר
לְהִיּוֹת עֲשִׂים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
כְּתֻבָּם וְכִזְמָנָם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה:
וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים וְנִעֲשִׂים
בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה
מִדִּינָה וּמִדִּינָה וְעִיר וְעִיר וַיְמִי
הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ
הַיְהוּדִים וְזָכָרָם לֹא־יִסּוּף מִזָּרְעָם:

Because Haman son of Hamdata the Agagite, tormenter of all the Jews, plotted to destroy the Jews, and cast *pur* – that is, the lot – to crush and exterminate them. But when [Esther] came before the king, he commanded: "With this decree, let the evil plot, which [Haman] devised against the Jews, recoil on his own head!" So they hanged [Haman] and his sons on the ^{kabbalah: tree of life} tree. For that reason these days were named Purim, after the *pur*. Thus, on all the instructions in this decree, and what they experienced by it and what befell them, **the Jews raised and received on themselves and on their descendants and all who might accompany them** to observe these two days as written, in their time from year to year, never to disappear. These days will be remembered and observed from generation to generation, by each family, in every land and in every city, so these days of Purim will never pass from amidst the Jews, and their memory will never end among their descendants.

Exodus 19:18

וְהָרַם סִינַי עָשָׂן כְּלוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד
עָלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עָשָׂנוּ כְּעָשָׂן
הַכֹּבֵּשׂוֹן וַיַּחֲרַד כָּל־הָהָר מְאֹד:

And Mount Sinai was entirely smoke, because YHVH descended on it in fire; the smoke rose like smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

Onkelos, Ex. 19:18

וְטוֹרָא דְסִינַי תִּנּוּן כְּלֵה מִן קָדָם
דְּאַתְגְּלִי עֲלוּהֵי יְהוָה בְּאַשְׁתָּא
וְסִלִּיק תִּנְנָה כְּתִנְנָא דְאַתְוֹנָא וְזַע
כָּל טוֹרָא לְחָדָא:

The entire Mount Sinai was enveloped in smoke, for YHVH **revealed by descent** onto it in fire. Its smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace and the entire mountain trembled.

Sefer Yetzirah 6:1

עשן כולו - ראיה לדבר עדים
נאמנים: עולם שנה נפש.

Entirely smoke - Evidence of a matter of faithful witness:
world [=space], change [=time], soul.

Judith Plaskow, The Women's Torah Commentary

[First], there is no revelation without interpretation.... Second, the process of interpretation is ongoing.... Third, insofar as the task of interpretation is continuing, it now lies with us. ...We have the privilege and the burden of recovering the divine words reverberating behind the silences in the text.

Proverbs 1:8

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ וְאַל-תִּטַּשׁ
תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ:

Hear, my son, the *mussar* of your father, and do not forsake the Torah of your mother.

Reb Zalman on "The Torah of Your Mother," Shavuot 5770 / 2010

"Hear, my son, the *mussar* (self-improvement teachings) of your father, but don't forget the Torah of your mother." (Proverbs 1:8-9) That was his big theme, though he divagated from it and then returned repeatedly, each time turning it over to show a new facet of what it might mean....

When I heard the phrase "the Torah of our mother," I immediately thought of how over the last few decades we've been adding women's voices to the tradition: female halakhists, female midrashists, the perspectives and stories of Jewish women which were for so long absent from the recorded tradition. But Reb Zalman meant something deeper than just this. He talked about masculine consciousness, which is punctive (formed of points on a line), and feminine consciousness which takes slow change into account. (All of us can have both of these.) ... (i.e. these aren't "gender essentialist")

In this era we need that kind of feminine consciousness and awareness of how our community's spiritual needs have shifted as we have changed and grown. We need the Torah of our mother.

- Torah that comes "down from on high"
- Torah that emerges from amidst, within.

Reb Zalman spoke about ... Torah that comes down like rain (this is wordplay, since "Torah" is related to the word for driving rainfall), and Torah that rises up like dew. Dew in our tradition is a symbol for divine grace, and he linked dew with the Torah of our mother as well as the Torah of our mother planet. We need to receive and be open to the Torah of our mother in this era, in order that someday we may be able to read both the black fire of the letters of Torah and the white fire of the spaces between them, to see and to value both figure and ground.

(recorded at Velveten Rabbi)

Merle Feld, "We All Stood Together"

for Rachel Adler

My brother and I were at Sinai
He kept a journal
of what he saw
of what he heard
of what it all meant to him

I wish I had such a record
of what happened to me there

It seems like every time I want to write
I can't
I'm always holding a baby
one of my own
or one for a friend
always holding a baby
so my hands are never free
to write things down

And then
As time passes
The particulars
The hard data
The who what when where why
Slip away from me
And all I'm left with is
The feeling

But feelings are just sounds
The vowel barking of a mute

My brother is so sure of what he heard
After all he's got a record of it
Consonant after consonant after consonant

If we remembered it together
We could recreate holy time
Sparks flying

BONUS MATERIALS

Tamar Kadari, Zipporah: Midrash and Aggadah

Before the Giving of the Torah, God ordered Moses to sanctify the people, and [Moshe] said to them ([Ex. 19:15](#)): “Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman.” All Israel withdrew from their wives, and Moses withdrew from his wife. After the Giving of the Torah, God instructed Moses ([Deut. 5:26–27](#)): “Go, say to them, ‘Return to your tents.’ But you remain here with Me”—Israel shall return to their wives, but you shall not return to marital relations (*Tanhuma*, Zav 13).

Since modesty is appropriate for the relations between a man and his wife, how did Miriam learn of Moses’s abstinence? According to one tradition, Miriam saw that Zipporah no longer adorned herself with women’s jewelry, and asked her: “Why have you stopped wearing women’s ornaments?” Zipporah answered: “Your brother no longer cares about this.” Thus Miriam learned that Moses had abstained from intercourse (*Sifrei on Numbers* chap. 99).

Rabbi Robin Nafshi, “Interpreting God’s Approach at Sinai”

When God tells Moses that the people must purify themselves, and Moses in turn tells the people to remain pure, the Hebrew words used contain the root letters *kof – dalet – shin*, to sanctify or make holy. The classical biblical commentators suggest two different ways in which the Israelites would fulfill this commandment. Most commentators claim it is a reference to abstaining from sexual relations, and point to Moses’ interpretation of God’s words in saying “do not go near a woman.”

Other commentators, including Rambam, assert that it is a reference to immersion in a mikveh, the traditional way in Judaism that people and objects are purified. Immersion in a mikveh, one might argue, is the opposite of abstaining from sexual relations. Under the laws of niddah, a Jewish woman immerses in a mikveh following her menstrual period and subsequent clean days in order to prepare for sexual relations.

Through these two interpretations, the Israelites are told on the one hand, “Prepare to meet God by refraining from sex,” and on the other hand, “Prepare to meet God by preparing yourself as you would for sex.”...

The sexual innuendo of the encounter between God and Israel is reflected in a Midrash. In commenting on [Exodus 19:20](#), “The Eternal came down upon mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain,” the Midrash supposed that one might think that God actually descended from heaven and transferred God’s Presence to the mountain. Thus the Midrash notes that [Exodus 20:19](#) reads, “You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven,” and deduced that God bent down the heavens, lowered them to the top of the mountain, spread the heavens as a person spreads a mattress on a bed, and spoke from the heavens as a person would speak from the top of a mattress. (Mekhilta Bachodesh 50:1:11–12, 4th century.) Was God alluring? Enticing? How else does one speak “from the top of a mattress?”