



Chapter 1 Mishna 1

"Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua to the Elders; the Elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: 'Be prudent in judgment, raise many disciples, and make a fence around the Torah.'"

Why does it say "from Sinai" and not "from Hashem"?

One must understand why it did not say: "Moshe received the Torah from HASHEM." Did Mount Sinai give him the Torah?

It may be answered that, had it said that he received the Torah from HAKADOSH BARUCH HU, we might have mistakenly thought that everything he received during those forty days in which he ascended to the heavens, when he was completely stripped of materiality, did not remain with him once he descended again to earth and returned to his physical state, and that the secrets of the Torah became hidden from him. Therefore, the Tanna taught: "from Sinai," to teach us that although he was a physical man and stood upon Mount Sinai within the physical world, the

Shechinah descended upon the mountain, and there Moshe received the Torah.

Furthermore, it may be answered that, in truth, Moshe merited to receive the Torah precisely because of the event at Mount Sinai. For at first it had been decreed that the upper beings should not descend to the lower realms, and that the lower beings should not ascend upward. But when, at the time of the giving of the Torah, HAKADOSH BARUCH HU descended upon Mount Sinai, He annulled that decree; and then Moshe was able to ascend to the heavens and reveal the light of the Torah in this world.

The Connection Between the Three Teachings of the Men of the Great Assembly

One must explain the connection between these three teachings, in accordance with what our Sages alluded to (*Shabbat* 105a) through the acronym of the word "Anochi" (אנכי: "I").

This acronym may be expanded as the phrase "Ana Nafshi ketavit yehavit": (אנא נפשי כתבית יהבית: "I Myself wrote it; I [Myself] gave it"), meaning that HAKADOSH BARUCH HU Himself wrote the Torah and He Himself delivered it. From this, the Men of the Great Assembly said, in relation to the first teaching, that one is obligated to be prudent in judgment; for if the laws of the Torah are not properly safeguarded, HAKADOSH BARUCH HU withdraws the Torah (*Shemot Rabbah* 30:3).

Furthermore, the first half of this acronym may be interpreted as corresponding to the phrase "amirah ne'imah" (אמירה נעימה: "a pleasant expression"), and this relates to the second teaching. From here they said that one must raise many disciples, because the way to achieve this goal is to draw their hearts close in such

a manner that the words of the Torah become sweet and pleasant to them.

And the second half of the acronym may be read in reverse as "yehivah ketivah" (יהיבה כתיבה: "given, written"). In this way it may be connected to the third teaching, according to which they said that one must make a fence around the Torah; that is, additional commandments should be established beyond those already "given" [in the Torah], serving as a safeguard for the safeguard itself. For the Torah commanded that the laws written within it be preserved, and the "written" fences added by the Sages of the generations, as they deem necessary, serve as an additional protection helping to prevent transgression of the law written in the Torah.

Through this, the words of the Torah will remain "given" exactly as they were "written," without deviation, and they will fulfill His faithful words.

"Be prudent in judgment," even when the matter is as clear as the sun

One may ask: What did the Men of the Great Assembly add with this teaching of "be prudent in judgment," if this is already learned from the verse, "Set right the oppressed" (*Yeshayahu* 1:17), concerning which our Sages explained (*Sanhedrin* 35a): "Set right the one who delays judgment?"

It may be said that from that verse of the Prophet we learn that it is good to be prudent in judgment in order to reach the true

depth of the correct ruling. However, the Men of the Great Assembly came to teach us something additional: that even if the judge has risen to a high level and possesses the ability to rule easily on the law in a manner that appears as clear as the sun, he must nevertheless remain prudent, because the generations continue to decline in understanding and in depth of reasoning; and because of this, he must fear that perhaps he has still not arrived at the true essence of the ruling.

Published and distributed by The International Organization to Disseminate the Works of The Zera Shimshon
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