

Story & Self - Week 5 - April 17, 2023

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Sinai (Tractate Shabbat 88b-89a)

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Shabbat 88b-89a

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? 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.

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" (Exodus 20:13) 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.

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 said to him: I have given it to the earth.

He went to the earth, and said to it: Where is the Torah? It said to him: I do not know. He 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."

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 said to him: 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 evaded the question and said to him: And what am I that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have given me the Torah? I am unworthy. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, are you a fabricator? Moses said before Him: Master of the Universe, You have a hidden treasure in which You delight every day, 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 to whom I commanded at Horeb laws and statutes for all of Israel" (Malachi 3:22).