



Seventh Annual Semikha Ceremony June 17, 2019 Rabbanit Jenna Englander

In masechet Shabbat 89a, we are presented with a scene in which the Satan is looking for the Torah. After searching the entire earth, God finally tells him to speak with Moshe Rabbeinu. “Moshe,” says the Satan, “Where is the Torah that God gave to you?”

Moshe responds with a puzzling question: “וכי מה אני שנתן לי הקב"ה תורה?” “Who am I that God would give *me* the Torah?”

The same Moshe who witnessed God putting the final touches on the Torah is now saying he wasn't worthy to receive it.

It is a doubt that has come into my own head many times in the course of my learning. The Torah is a special combination of overwhelming and magical and has one constantly asking “How have I merited to be here, sitting in front of this text, part of this millennia long conversation? How could I possibly have something valuable to contribute?”

The commentaries frame Satan as the yetzer hara, the evil inclination. His goal is to work his way into our hearts, to make us doubt that the Torah is really ours.

In our story in masechet Shabbat, God fights back against this self-doubt. “Moshe,” he says, “בדאי אתה?!” “Are you a liar?!” You just finished carrying the tablets down Mount Sinai. I put the Torah in your arms. What are you saying, it is not yours?

Moshe stands in the presence of God and responds: “רבונו של עולם” “Master of the Universe, You have a hidden treasure in which You delight every day. Should I take this goodness for myself?”

Moshe reveals a depth of understanding of the nature of Torah that goes beyond even what God could have expected. The Torah, says Moshe, is not contained in a set of stone tablets. It is a living treasure, one that changes on a daily basis, like a child who laughs and plays and grows. The Satan has not found the Torah because he does not understand what he is looking for.

Receiving Torah does not happen in one moment; it is a lifetime of work. To believe it belongs to you is to misunderstand it. It requires fierce love, intellectual curiosity, patience, and most of all a wonder at the miracle of seeing it in your arms for the briefest of moments before you release it into the world to challenge and delight others.

I pray that I merit to see Torah when it is in front of me, that I may give it voice when I can, and teach others to do the same. I pray that each of us continues to receive the Torah, to see ourselves as worthy of being in its presence, and most of all to delight in it.