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# THE EVOLUTION OF JEWISH THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

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## SESSION #1 WHAT CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN?

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## WHAT CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN?

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The point of this session is to gain an understanding of how Torah was given over to the Jewish people starting on Mount Sinai and continuing on until today. Fundamental Jewish belief includes the knowledge that the entire Torah was given to us by G-d through Moshe. However, it is somewhat difficult to understand how exactly that happened. Through this session we will gain an understanding of how the Torah we know came into being.

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### WHAT DID MOSHE ACTUALLY RECEIVE WHILE UP ON MOUNT SINAI FOR 40 DAYS?

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SHEMOS 12:24

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#### שמות פרק כד פסוק יב

ויאמר יקוק אל משה עלה אלי ההרה והיה שם ואתנה לך את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר כתבתי להורתם :

G-d spoke to Moshe saying, ascend the mountaintop and I will give you the Tablets of Stone, the Torah, the Commandments that I have written for you to teach and give over.

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**THE TALMUD IN BRACHOS EXPLAINS THE  
MEANING OF THIS VERSE**

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**BRACHOS 5A**

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**תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ה עמוד א**

ואמר רבי לוי בר חמא אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: מאי דכתיב (שמות כ"ד) ואתנה לך את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר כתבתי להורותם, לחות - אלו עשרת הדברות, תורה - זה מקרא, והמצוה - זו משנה, אשר כתבתי - אלו נביאים וכתובים, להורותם - זה תלמוד; מלמד שכולם נתנו למשה מסיני.

R' Levi bar Chama explains the meaning of the above verse is as follows..."The Stone Tablets" refer to the Ten Commandments, "Torah" refers to scripture, "Mitzvah" refers to the passages of the Mishnah, "That I have written" refers to the books of prophets, "To teach and give over" refers to the passages of the Talmud. The Gemarah concludes that the point of this verse is to teach us that all of these elements were taught to Moshe on Mount Sinai.

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**RASHI'S COMMENTS ON THE VERSE QUOTED  
ABOVE ECHO THE OPINION OF THE TALMUD.**

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**רש"י שמות פרק כד פסוק יב**

את לחת האבן והתורה והמצוה אשר כתבתי להורותם - כל שש מאות ושלוש עשרה מצות בכלל עשרת הדברות הן, ורבינו סעדיה פירש באזהרות שיסד לכל דבור ודבור מצות התלויות בו:

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**RASHI EXPLAINS THAT ALL OF THE 613 BIBLICAL  
COMMANDMENTS CAN BE DEDUCED FROM THE  
TEN COMMANDMENTS AND WERE TAUGHT TO  
MOSHE ON MOUNT SINAI. FROM THESE SOURCES  
IT IS CLEAR THAT MOSHE WAS TAUGHT THE  
ENTIRE TORAH ON MOUNT SINAI.**

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A QUESTION THEREFORE ARISES....

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**WHY DID MOSHE MAKE THE MISTAKE OF  
HITTING THE ROCK OR SENDING THE SPIES?  
COULDN'T HE HAVE LOOKED AHEAD IN THE BOOK  
HE WAS GIVEN ON MOUNT SINAI AND AVOIDED  
THESE ERRORS?**

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TALMUD GITTEN 60A

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**תלמוד בבלי מסכת גיטין דף ס עמוד א**

א"ר יוחנן משום רבי בנאה: תורה - מגילה מגילה ניתנה, ר"ש בן לקיש אומר:  
תורה - חתומה ניתנה .

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**THERE IS A DEBATE IN THE TALMUD REGARDING  
HOW THE TORAH WAS WRITTEN DOWN BY  
MOSHE. ACCORDING R' YOCHANAN, MOSHE WAS  
TAUGHT THE TORAH ONE PORTION AT A TIME  
AND WOULD IMMEDIATELY WRITE DOWN THAT  
SECTION AND TEACH IT TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE.**

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**ACCORDING TO R' SHIMON BEN LAKISH, MOSHE  
WOULD COMMIT EACH SECTION TO MEMORY AS  
HE WAS BEING TAUGHT BUT DID NOT ACTUALLY  
WRITE DOWN THE WORDS UNTIL HE WAS  
TAUGHT THE ENTIRE TORAH.**

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SHEMOS 24:7

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**שמות פרק כז**

ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם ויאמרו כל אשר דבר יקוק נעשה ונשמע:

This verse says that Moshe took the “Book of the Covenant” and taught it to the Jewish people.

RASHI IBID.

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**רש"י שמות פרק כז**

(ז) ספר הברית - מבראשית ועד מתן תורה ומצות שנצטוו במרה:

Rashi explains that “The Book of the Covenant” refers to the section of the Torah starting from Breishis until the story of the giving of the Torah, and the Mitzvos that had been taught.

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FROM HERE WE GET A SENSE OF WHAT TORAH  
SHEBICHSAV (THE WRITTEN TORAH) LOOKED LIKE.  
IT WAS NOT A COMPLETE WORK THE WAY WE  
KNOW IT NOW. THE STORIES WERE NOT INCLUDED  
AND WOULD NOT BE WRITTEN DOWN UNTIL THEY  
OCCURRED. HOWEVER THE FUNDAMENTAL  
PRINCIPALS THAT WOULD MAKE UP ALL OF THE  
ACTUAL MITZVOS WERE GIVEN TO MOSHE ON HAR  
SINAI AND TAUGHT TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

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## ORAL TORAH

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Torah today is much more elaborate than just the Written Torah. While the written Torah is the source of all Jewish law and practice, most of these laws are contained in what is referred to as the Oral Torah. It is important to understand what the Oral Torah is and how it relates to the Written Torah.

An analogy to help us understand the two is to view the Written Torah as lecture notes a teacher might prepare prior to a long presentation. The notes would contain every major idea that will be presented but they will be written in short hand with significant abbreviation. If one were to only look at the lecture notes without actually hearing the presentation it would be almost impossible to understand the ideas contained in the presentation. Only when one listens to the entire presentation can they then go back to the lecture notes and make sense out of them.



The Written Torah can be compared to these lecture notes. The ideas mentioned are abridged and at times seem incomplete. Only with the complement of the full Oral Torah can one go back to the Written Torah and understand the true meaning.

A few common examples where the Written Torah requires the Oral Torah for further explanation are the Esrog and the laws of Shabbos. The Torah simply instructs us to refrain from labor on the seventh day but gives no explanation of what exactly is considered labor. Is running up and down the stairs ten times a violation? How do we know what the Torah meant? Similarly the Torah instructs us to take a “beautiful fruit” and use it for a Mitzvah on Succos. How do we know which fruit the Torah is referring to? Can we just decide on our own which fruit we think is most beautiful?

In these situations we rely on the Oral Torah to provide us with the understanding of what is the intended meaning and how we are to follow the instructions of the Torah.

It is important to note that both the Written and Oral components of the Torah were given to Moshe on Mount Sinai. The two are impossible to separate from each other.

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## WRAP-UP

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### NOW WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT THE ORAL TORAH IS AND HOW WE USE THE ORAL TORAH TO DEVELOP THE MEANING OF THE WRITTEN TORAH.

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The Medrish teaches us how the Oral Torah was taught to Moshe on Mount Sinai.

#### **שמות רבה פרשה מא**

וכי כל התורה למד משה כתיב בתורה (איוב יא) ארוכה מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים ולארבעים יום למדה משה אלא כללים למדהו הקב"ה למשה

According to the Medrish Moshe was taught the basic principles behind all the Mitzvos and how to derive them from the Torah. The method to derive these details is known as "The 13 Ways The Torah Is Expounded Upon". Below is the list of these 13 ways.

#### **ספרא ברייתא דרבי ישמעאל פרשה א**

רבי ישמעאל אומר בשלש עשרה מדות התורה נדרשת מקל וחומר, מגזרה שוה, מבנין אב מכתוב אחד, מבנין אב משני כתובים, מכלל ופרט מפרט וכלל, מכלל ופרט וכלל אי אתה דן אלא כעין הפרט, מכלל שהוא צריך לפרט ומפרט שהוא צריך לכלל.

From the times of Moshe and through the end of the Talmudic era these 13 ways were used to develop the details of every Mitzvah and to determine how new cases would be decided.



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## TO SUMMARIZE WHAT HAVE LEARNED IN THE SESSION:

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- ❖ G-d gave Moshe the entire Torah on Mount Sinai
- ❖ The entire Torah did not include the stories as we know them today. Those stories were dictated to Moshe by G-d over time and written down later. Rather Moshe was taught the basic principles and how to derive every commandment.
- ❖ Oral Torah is where the details of the Written Torah are explained and applied. Both the Written and Oral components were taught to Moshe on Mount Sinai.
- ❖ The 13 ways of expounding upon the Torah allowed the sages to determine the meaning of The Written Torah and apply it to every case that would come up.

