



Torah Lesson #2

Studying Torah

There are two important points to remember when studying Torah which will help you to get the most out of it. The first is the original language it was written in, and the second is the people who have been it's custodians ever since it was given to humanity.

Language of Torah

We must always remember that it was written in Hebrew, not English! So what we read in English is only ever a translation of what Torah actually says. To get at what Torah actually says we need to either learn Hebrew completely so that we can read it for ourselves, or learn sufficient Hebrew to be able to use Interlinear versions (containing both Hebrew and English text) and lexicons. The simplest and most readily available option for the beginner is Strong's Concordance with it's Hebrew Dictionary. But it is not the most accurate option. The "Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament" (TWOT) is better. This is available online at <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/OldTestamentHebrew/>. Crosswalk also has an online interlinear - <http://bible.crosswalk.com/InterlinearBible/>. In the long term you may want to learn Hebrew yourself, there are numerous courses available for doing this.

But to begin with it is best to read it in English (assuming that's your native language). But because it was written in Hebrew, not English, you need the most accurate translation available. The one we recommend is called "*The Scriptures*," it can be obtained from the [Institute for Scripture Research](http://www.eliyah.com/thescritures), or accessed online at: <http://www.eliyah.com/thescritures>. This translation achieves a good balance between a literal translation of the text and being readable in English. Many translations that seek readability lose the direct relation to the Hebrew text and consequently are not good for study.

We will not go into the Hebrew language to any depth at this point, but there are some things you should be aware of:

(1) The original text of Torah was written in a Hebrew text-form called "Paleo-Hebrew" and was not changed to Modern (Square) Hebrew for some hundreds of years. Paleo (ancient) Hebrew is a picture alphabet which is the ancestor of most alphabets including English. Being a picture alphabet every letter carries considerable meaning. The principle was that three of these pictures could be put together to describe anything, these three lettered words are called "root" words. The effect is that even these "root" words are in reality a sentence in themselves.

(2) Every Hebrew letter is also a number. Yes, they didn't have a separate number system as we do, but used the alphabet to count. The effect is that even words can be counted! This system of counting - or calculating the value of words is called "Gematria."

(3) Hebrew thinking is different to modern thinking. What we mean by this is that they describe things differently to what we would. We have developed abstract concepts to describe things, whereas they describe things from a literal, physical, point of view. For example we speak of "language" whereas they speak of "tongue" or "lip" - the body parts used to form speech.

Custodians of Torah

Most of the Torah was given to the Hebrew people. The basics were revealed to Adam and those who lived before the flood, long before the Hebrew people into existence. For they only began with Abraham. But the Torah as we have it was revealed through Mosheh to the Nation of Israel. The Torah has been in the care of Israel ever since, it has been passed down to us through a progression that went from Mosheh to Yahusha (Joshua), to the Shophetim (Judges), to the Navi'im (Prophets), then to Ezra at the return from the Babylonian exile. At this stage, because the northern kingdom of Israel was still in exile it became the possession of the Yehudi people (tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi) commonly know as "Jews." Ezra placed it into the care of the Great Sanhedrin and the sopherim (scribes), the sopherim continued to be the primary custodians of the text, though the "oral Torah" - traditions as to how Torah should be applied - passed from the Great Sanhedrin to the Sages, then in turn to the Rabbis (Rabbim).

The text of Torah was then passed to the Massorites who designed the vowel-pointing system because the everyday use of Hebrew had ceased and people were forgetting how to pronounce the text.

After the fall of Jerusalem (70 CE) the Rabbis began the process of recording the "oral Torah," this resulted in a document called the

Mishnah. The Mishnah is a valuable tool for the Torah student because it gives us a snap-shot of how Torah was applied to everyday life 2000+ years ago. The Mishnah however should not be regarded as the "YHWH prescribed" way of doing things! Even a casual reading will reveal that not all Rabbis were in agreement, for along with the majority view, it contains dissenting opinions. But it is certainly worth consulting. Given that the Rabbis and the Jewish people have been studying Torah for around 3,500 years their opinions should not be lightly dismissed.

Sea of Torah

It has been said that the Torah is like the sea. What is meant is that the Torah not only has a surface - the obvious literal meaning of the text - but also has depth. Everyone can easily see and experience the surface for the sun shines full on it. But as we go deeper into the sea the light reduces and things become obscure. But it is below the surface that we find things that are normally hidden - fish, seaweed, etc. Going deeper still, it is in darkness that we finally discover the solid seafloor.

This is something that we can apply to our Torah study to get more and more meaning from it. The best and simplest model to use in order to do this is the "PaRDeS" model. PaRDeS is a Hebrew acronym derived from the first letters of the Hebrew names of the four levels of understanding it utilises. The best way to remember it I find is to think 'paradise' because 'paradise' contains the same four consonants. The PaRDeS model works as follows:

Peshat	Literal meaning of text	This is quite simply what the text says in plain Hebrew! This is the primary meaning and is ALWAYS valid!
Remez	Hint or allusion	This is something that the text hints at, but doesn't directly say, i.e. YHWH made coats of skin for Adam and Chavvah after the fall to cover their nakedness - suggesting that we should wear clothing too, but the text doesn't directly say that.
Drash	Teaching	A teaching or "moral" that can be derived from the text. Several different such teachings could possibly be derived from the same text, none of which would necessarily be wrong - unless they conflicted with the Peshat teaching of Torah.
Sod	Hidden or secret meaning	This is the deep underlying meaning. It can be derived by various methods, one of which is Gematria, another more modern one is ELS (Equidistant Letter Sequence).

In this course we will principally be examining the Torah from the Peshat and Remez levels of understanding. These are the most readily perceived by the beginner - actually it is **essential** that these levels be understood **before** one attempts to understand the others, otherwise the possibility of error is high. So as you read Torah ask yourself these two questions - and always in this order!

(1) What is this text literally saying?

(2) Does this text suggest anything that it doesn't say outright?

KEY POINT: *Torah is multi-dimensional!*

Exercises

1. Read Bereshith chapters 6-9.
 2. Write a list of Peshat instructions given by YHWH which apply to humanity (Ber. 9:1-7). Give source verse and also briefly state how each one could effect what we do now.
 3. Look for Remez meanings and write them down - particularly those which may contain Torah (instruction). Hint: Ber. 8:20.
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