



What is the Torah, Actually? Preparing for Shavuot

Dr. Benjamin D. Sommer

Benjamin D. Sommer joined The Jewish Theological Seminary faculty as professor of Bible in July 2008. Previously, he served as director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish Studies at Northwestern University, where he had taught since 1994. Dr. Sommer has been a fellow at the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Tikvah Center for Jewish Law and Civilization at the New York University School of Law, and the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He has served as a visiting faculty member in the Department of Bible of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at the Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. He has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies and the Yad Hanadiv/Berakha Foundation.

Dr. Sommer's most recent book, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* received the prestigious Goldstein-Goren Prize in Jewish Thought from Ben Gurion University for the years 2014-2016 and was a finalist for both for the National Jewish Book Award for 2015 and the Association for Jewish Studies' Jordan Schnitzer Prize for 2014-2016. A Hebrew edition of the book, *Hitgallut Vesamkut: Sinai Bamqra Uvemeasoret*, was published by Carmel Publishing House in Jerusalem in 2022. An earlier book by Professor Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, received the Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion in 2010 awarded by the American Academy of Religion, as well as the Jordan Schnitzer Award from the Association for Jewish Studies for the years 2006-2009. The first book Dr. Sommer published, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66*, was awarded the Salo Wittmayer Baron Prize by the American Academy of Jewish Research in 1998. Dr. Sommer has long been active as a lecturer and scholar -in-residence, teaching rabbis, Jewish educators, and laypeople in a variety of settings in the United States and Israel.

The Verb Horah (the hiphil of ה'יר)

I Samuel 20:20

(20) Now I will **shoot** three arrows to one side of it, as though I were shooting at a mark,

שמואל א כ:כ'

(כ) וְאֲנִי שָׁלַחְתִּי הַחֲצִים צֶדֶה אֹרֶה
לְשַׁלַּח-לִי לְמַטְרָה:

II Kings 13:17

(17) “Open the window toward the east,” he said; and he opened it. Elisha said, “**Shoot!**” and he shot. Then he said, “An arrow of victory for the LORD ! An arrow of victory over Aram! You shall rout Aram completely at Aphek.”

מלכים ב י"ג:י"ז

(יז) וַיֹּאמֶר פָּתַח הַחֲלוֹן קִדְמָה וַיִּפְתָּח
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְיָשָׁע יְרֵה נִיּוֹר וַיֹּאמֶר
חֲזִי-תְשׁוּעָה לָּהּ וְחָזַן תְּשׁוּעָה בְּאַרְם
וְהִכִּיתָ אֶת-אַרְם בְּאַפְקֵי עַד-כַּלְהָ:

Exodus 15:25

(25) So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD **showed** him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There [God] made for them a fixed rule; there they were put to the test.

שמות ט"ו:כ"ה

(כה) וַיִּצְעַק אֶל-ה' וַיִּזְרְהוּ ה' לְעֵץ
וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶל-הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשַׂם
לָו חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט וַיִּשָּׂם נִסָּהוּ:

Proverbs 6:13

(13) Winking his eyes,
Shuffling his feet,
Pointing his finger

משלי ו':י"ג

(יג) קִרְץ בְּעֵינָיו מִלֵּל בְּרַגְלָו מִזָּה
בְּאֶצְבָּעֵתָיו:

Genesis 46:28

(28) He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, **to point the way** before him to Goshen. So when they came to the region of Goshen,

בראשית מ"ו:כ"ח

(כח) וְאֶת-יְהוֹנָדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל-יֹסֵף
לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גֹּשֶׁן וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶרְצָה גֹּשֶׁן:

The Noun Torah: Guidance

Proverbs 1:8

(8) My son, heed **the discipline of your father**,
And do not forsake the **instruction of your mother**;

משלי א':ח'

(ח) שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ
וְאַל-תִּטְּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ:

Proverbs 3:1

(1) My son, do not forget **my teaching**,
But let your mind retain **my commandments**;

משלי ג':א'

(א) בְּנִי תוֹרָתִי אַל-תִּשְׁכַּח וּמִצְוֹתַי יִצָּר
לִבְךָ:

Proverbs 13:14

(14) The **instruction** of a wise man
is a fountain of life,
Enabling one to avoid deadly
snares.

משלי י"ג:י"ד

(יד) תּוֹרַת חָכָם מְקוֹר חַיִּים לְסוֹר
מִמְקוֹשֵׁי מָוֶת:

The Noun Torah: A law to be obeyed

Jeremiah 9:12

(12) The LORD replied: Because
they forsook the **Teaching** I had set
before them. They did not obey Me
and they did not follow it,

ירמיהו ט':י"ב

(יב) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' עַל-עֲזוֹבֵי אֶת-תּוֹרָתִי
אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיהֶם וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי
וְלֹא-הִלְכוּ בָּהּ:

Daniel 9:10

(10) and we did not obey the LORD
our God by following **His teachings** that He set before us
through His servants the prophets.

דניאל ט':י'

(י) וְלֹא שָׁמְעֵנוּ בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְלַכֵּת
בְּתוֹרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְפָנֵינוּ בְּיַד עֲבָדָיו
הַנְּבִיאִים:

The Noun Torah: A ritual law

Leviticus 6:2

(2) Command Aaron and his sons thus: This is the **ritual** of the burnt offering: The burnt offering itself shall remain where it is burned upon the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar is kept going on it.

ויקרא ו'ב'

(ב) צו אֶת-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת-בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תֹּרֶת הָעֹלָה הִוא הָעֹלָה עַל מוֹקְדָה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה עַד-הַבֹּקֶר וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּוְקַד בּוֹ:

Leviticus 6:7

(7) And this is the **ritual** of the meal offering: Aaron's sons shall present it before the LORD, in front of the altar.

ויקרא ו'ז'

(ז) וְזֹאת תֹּרֶת הַמִּנְחָה הַקֶּרֶב אֹתָהּ בְּנֵי-אַהֲרֹן לִפְנֵי ה' אֶל-פְּנֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

Leviticus 7:1

(1) This is the **ritual** of the guilt offering: it is most holy.

ויקרא ז'א'

(א) וְזֹאת תֹּרֶת הָאֲשָׁם קֹדֶשׁ קֹדְשִׁים הִוא:

Leviticus 7:7

(7) The guilt offering is like the sin offering. The same **rule** applies to both: it shall belong to the priest who makes expiation thereby.

ויקרא ז'ז'

(ז) כַּחַטָּאת כְּאֲשֶׁם תֹּרֶה אֶתֶת לָהֶם הַפְּהֹו אֲשֶׁר יְכַפֵּר-בּוֹ לוֹ יִהְיֶה:

The Noun Torah: Civil, criminal, or ethical rules

Amos 2:4-7

(4) Thus said the LORD:
For three transgressions of Judah,
For four, I will not revoke the
decree:
Because they have spurned **the
Teaching of the LORD**.
And have not observed divine laws;
They are beguiled by the delusions
After which their ancestors walked.
(5) I will send down fire upon
Judah,
And it shall devour the fortresses of
Jerusalem.
(6) Thus said the LORD:
For three transgressions of Israel,
For four, I will not revoke the
decree:
Because they have sold for silver
Those whose cause was just,
And the needy for a pair of sandals.
(7) [Ah,] you who trample the heads
of the poor
Into the dust of the ground,
And make the humble walk a
twisted course!
Father and son go to the same
woman,
And thereby profane My holy
name.

עמוס ב' ד'-ז'

(ד) כֹּה אָמַר ה' עַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעַי
יְהוּדָה וְעַל-אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ
עַל-מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֶת-תּוֹרַת ה'
וְחֻקֶּיךָ לֹא שָׁמְרוּ
וַיִּתְעוּם כְּזִבְיֶיךָ
אֲשֶׁר-הִלְכוּ אַבּוֹתֵם אַחֲרֵיכֶם:
(ה) וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי אֵשׁ בְּיְהוּדָה וְאָכְלָהּ
אֲרָמְנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָּם: {פ}
(ו) כֹּה אָמַר ה'
עַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְעַל-אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ
עַל-מִכְרָם בַּכֶּסֶף צְדִיק
וְאֶבְיוֹן בְּעֵבֹר בְּעֵלִים:
(ז) הִשְׁאַפִּים עַל-עַפְרֵי-אֲרֶץ בְּרֵאשׁ
דְּלִים וְדָרָךְ עֲנָוִים יָטוּ
וְאִישׁ וְאָבִיו יִלְכּוּ אֶל-הַנְּעֻלָּה
לְמַעַן חַלֵּל אֶת-שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי:

The Noun Torah: Law generally

Psalms 89:31-32

(31) If his sons forsake **My Teaching**
and do not live by **My rules**;
(32) if they violate **My laws**,
and do not observe **My commands**,

תהילים פ"ט:ל"א-ל"ב

(לא) אם־יעזבו בְּנָיו תּוֹרָתִי
וּבְמִשְׁפָּטַי לֹא יִלְכוּן:
(לב) אם־תִּקְחֵתִי יַחְלִלוּ
וּמִצְוֹתַי לֹא יִשְׁמְרוּ:

The Noun Torah: Legal ruling, פסק הלכה

Haggai 2:11-13

(11) Thus said the LORD of Hosts:
Seek a **ruling** from the priests, as
follows: (12) If someone is
carrying sacrificial flesh in a fold of
their garment, and with that fold
touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or
any other food, will the latter
become holy? In reply, the priests
said, "No." (13) Haggai went on,
"If someone defiled by a corpse
touches any of these, will it be
defiled?" And the priests responded,
"Yes."

חגי ב':י"א-י"ג

(יא) כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת שְׂאֵל־נָא
אֶת־הַכֹּהֲנִים תּוֹרָה לֵאמֹר: (יב) הֲנָו
יִשְׂאֵ־אִישׁ בְּשֵׁר־קֹדֶשׁ בְּכַנְיָהּ בְּגָדוֹ וַיִּגַּע
בְּכֶנֶפוֹ אֶל־הַלֶּחֶם וְאֶל־הַנֶּזֶיֶד וְאֶל־הַיַּיִן
וְאֶל־שֶׁמֶן וְאֶל־כָּל־מֵאֲכָל הַיְקֹדֶשׁ וַיַּעֲנוּ
הַכֹּהֲנִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא: (יג) וַיֹּאמֶר חֲגִי
אִם־יִגַּע טָמֵא־נִפֶּשׁ בְּכָל־אֶלֶּה הֲיִטְמָא
וַיַּעֲנוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ יִטְמָא:

Isaiah 2:2-4

(2) In the days to come,
The Mount of the LORD's House
Shall stand firm above the mountains
And tower above the hills;
And all the nations
Shall gaze on it with joy.
(3) And the many peoples shall go and
say:
"Come, Let us go up to the Mount of the
LORD ,
To the House of the God of Jacob;
That we may be **instructed** in God's
ways,
And that we may walk in God's paths."
For **instruction** shall come forth from
Zion,
The word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
(4) Thus [God] will judge among the
nations
And arbitrate for the many peoples,
And they shall beat their swords into
plowshares.
And their spears into pruning hooks:
Nation shall not take up
Sword against nation;
They shall never again know war.

ישעיהו ב'ב'ב'-ד'
(ב) וְהָיָה | בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים
נִבְנוֹן יְהוָה הַר בֵּית־ה'
בְּרֹאשׁ הַהָרִים
וּנְשָׂא מִגְבָּעוֹת
וַנִּהְרֹו אֵלָיו כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם:
(ג) וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ
לָכוּ | וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל־הַר־ה'
אֶל־בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
וַיְרַנּוּ מִדְּרָכָיו
וַנִּלְכֶה בְּאַרְחֵתָיו כִּי
יִמְצִיֹן תִּצְאָ תוֹרָה
וַדַּבֵּר־ה' מִירוּשָׁלַם:
(ד) וְשִׁפְטוּ בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם
וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים רַבִּים
וְכִתְּתוּ חַרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים
וַחֲגִיתוּתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמֵרוֹת
לֹא־יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל־גּוֹי חֶרֶב
וְלֹא־יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה: {פ}

Torah is associated with priests and scribes

Jeremiah 18:18

(18) They said, “Come let us devise a plot against Jeremiah—for **instruction** shall not fail from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor oracle from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and we shall no longer have to listen to all those words of his.”

ירמיהו י"ח:י"ח

(יח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָכֹחַ וַנְּחַשְׁבָה עַל־יְרֵמְיָהוּ
מִחֻשְׁבוֹת
כִּי לֹא־תֵאבֵד תּוֹרָה מִפִּהוֹן
וְעֵצָה מִחֻכְמָם
וְדָבָר מִנְּבִיא
לָכֹחַ וַנִּכְהוּ בַלְשׁוֹן וְאֶל־נִקְשִׁיבָה
אֶל־כָּל־דְּבָרָיו:

Ezekiel 7:26

(26) Calamity shall follow calamity, and rumor follow rumor. Then they shall seek vision from the prophet in vain; **instruction** shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.

יחזקאל ז':כ"ו

(כו) הָיָה עַל־הָהָה תְּבוֹאָה
וְשִׁמְעָה אֶל־שְׁמוּעָה תִּהְיֶה
וּבִקְשׁוּ חִזּוֹן מִנְּבִיא
וְתוֹרָה תֵּאבֵד מִפִּהוֹן
וְעֵצָה מִזְקֵנִים:

Jeremiah 8:8-9

(8) How can you say, “We are wise, And we possess the LORD’s **Instruction**”?

Assuredly, for naught has the pen labored,

For naught the scribes!

(9) The wise men shall be put to shame,

Shall be dismayed and caught;

See, they reject the word of the

LORD,

So their wisdom amounts to nothing.

ירמיהו ח':ח'-ט'

(ח) אֵיכָה תֹאמְרוּ חֻכְמַיִם אֲנִיחֵנוּ
וְתוֹרַת ה' אֲתָנוּ אָכֹל הִנֵּה לַשֶּׁקֶר עֲשֵׂה
עַט שֶׁקֶר סִפְרִים:
(ט) הִבְשׂוּ חֻכְמַיִם חֲתוּ וַיִּלְכְּדוּ הִנֵּה
בְּדַבְרֵה' מְאֹסוּ וְחֻכְמַת מָה לָּהֶם:

Torah is parallel to law and covenant

Psalms 19:8-10

(8) The **teaching** of the LORD is perfect, renewing life;
the **decrees** of the LORD are enduring, making the simple wise;
(9) The **precepts** of the LORD are just, rejoicing the heart;
the **instruction** of the L. is lucid, making the eyes light up.
(10) The **fear** of the LORD is pure, abiding forever;
the **judgments** of the LORD are true, righteous altogether,

תהילים י"ט:ח-י'

(ח) תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נַפְשׁ
עֲדוֹת ה' נֶאֱמָנָה מְחַכֵּמַת פְּתִי: (ט)
פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׂרִים מְשַׁחֵי-לֵב
מִצְוֹת ה' בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם: (י)
יְרֵאת ה' | טְהוֹרָה עוֹמְדַת לְעַד
מִשְׁפָּטֵי-ה' אֱמֶת צְדָקוֹ יִחְדּוּ:

Torah is the title of a book of law (Deuteronomy)

Deuteronomy 4:44

(44) This is the **Teaching** that Moses set before the Israelites:

דברים ד':מ"ד

(מד) וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר-שָׂם
מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Deuteronomy 17:18

(18) When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this **Teaching** written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests.

דברים י"ז:י"ח

(יח) וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ
וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת-מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת
עַל-סֵפֶר מִלְּפָנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:

Deuteronomy 29:20

(20) The LORD will single it out from all the tribes of Israel for misfortune, in accordance with all the sanctions of the covenant recorded in **this book of Teaching**.

דברים כ"ט:כ'

(כ) וְהִבְדִּילוּ ה' לְרַעָה מִכָּל
שְׁבֹטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֱלוֹת הַבְּרִית
הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּה:

Joshua 8:31-32

(31) as Moses, the servant of the LORD, had commanded the Israelites—as is written in **the Book of the Teaching** of Moses—an altar of unhewn stone upon which no iron had been wielded. They offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and brought sacrifices of well-being. (32) And there, on the stones, he inscribed a copy of the **Teaching** that Moses had written for the Israelites.

יהושע ח':ל"א-ל"ב

(לא) כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה עֶבְד־ה' אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּכְּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה מִזְבַּח אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הִגִּיף עָלֶיהֶן בְּרִזָּל וַיַּעֲלוּ עָלָיו עֹלוֹת לַה' וַיִּזְבְּחוּ שְׁלָמִים: (לב) וַיִּכְתֹּב־שָׁם עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אֵת מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב לִפְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

II Kings 14:6

(6) But he did not put to death the children of the assassins, in accordance with what is written in **the Book of the Teaching of Moses, where the LORD commanded**, “Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents; they shall be put to death only for their own crime.”

מלכים ב י"ד:ו'

(ו) וְאֶת־בְּנֵי הַמַּכִּים לֹא הִמִּית כַּכְּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר־תּוֹרַת־מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר לֹא־יּוּמְתוּ אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וּבָנִים לֹא־יּוּמְתוּ עַל־אָבוֹת כִּי אִם־אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאוֹ יָמוּת [יּוּמַת]:

Deuteronomy 24:16

(16) Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents: they shall each be put to death only for their own crime.

דברים כ"ד:ט"ז

(טז) לֹא־יּוּמְתוּ אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וּבָנִים לֹא־יּוּמְתוּ עַל־אָבוֹת אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאוֹ יּוּמַתוּ:

Torah is the title of a book of law (the Pentateuch)

Ezra 7:10

(10) For Ezra had dedicated himself to study the **Teaching of the LORD** so as to observe it, and to teach laws and rules to Israel.

עזרא ז':י'

(י) כִּי עֲזָרָא הִכִּין לְכַבּוֹ לְדַרְשׁ
אֶת־תּוֹרַת ה' וְלַעֲשׂוֹת וּלְלַמֵּד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
חֻק וּמִשְׁפָּט:

Nehemiah 8:1

(1) the entire people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring **the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which the LORD had charged Israel.**

נחמיה ח':א'

(א) וַיֵּאסְפוּ כָּל־הָעָם כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד
אֶל־הַרְחֹב אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמַּיִם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְעֲזָרָא הַסֹּפֵר לְהָבִיא אֶת־סֵפֶר
תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה ה'
אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Nehemiah 9:3

(3) Standing in their places, they read from the scroll of the **Teaching of the LORD their God** for one-fourth of the day, and for another fourth they confessed and prostrated themselves before the LORD their God.

נחמיה ט':ג'

(ג) וַיִּקְוּמוּ עַל־עַמֻּדָם וַיִּקְרְאוּ בְסֵפֶר
תּוֹרַת ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם רְבַע־יְת הַיּוֹם
וּרְבַע־יְת מְתוּנָדִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לַה'
אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

II Chronicles 30:15-16

(15) They slaughtered the paschal sacrifice on the fourteenth of the second month. The priests and Levites were ashamed, and they sanctified themselves and brought burnt offerings to the House of the LORD. (16) They took their stations, as was their rule **according to the Teaching of Moses**, man of God. The priests dashed the blood [which they received] from the Levites.

דברי הימים ב ל':ט"ו-ט"ז

(טו) וישחטו הפסח בארבעה עשר לתחדש השני והכהנים והלויים נכלמו ויתקדשו ויביאו עלות בית ה': (טז) ויעמדו על-עמדם כמשפטם כתורת משה איש-האלקים הכהנים זרקים את-הדם מיד הלויים:

**Torah is a text providing guidance broadly,
not only of a book of law**

Joshua 1:7-9

(7) But you must be very strong and resolute to observe faithfully all **the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you**. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. (8) Let not this **Book of the Teaching** cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful. (9) "I charge you: Be strong and resolute; do not be terrified or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

יהושע א':ז'-ט'

(ז) רק חזק ואמץ מאד לשמר לעשות ככל-התורה אשר צוה משה עבדי אל-תסור ממנו ימין ושמאל למען תשפיל בכל אשר תלך: (ח) לא-ימוש ספר התורה הזו מפיה והגית בו יומם ולילה למען תשמר לעשות ככל-הפתיח בו כי-אז תצליח את-דרךך ואז תשפיל: (ט) הלא צויתיה חזק ואמץ אל-תערך ואל-תחת כי עמך ה' אלקיך בכל אשר תלך: {כ}

Psalms 78:1-5

(1) A *maskil* of Asaph.
 Give ear, my people, to my **teaching**,
 turn your ear to **what I say**.
 (2) I will expound **a theme**,
 hold forth on **the lessons of the past**,
 (3) things we have heard and known,
 that our fathers have **told us**.
 (4) We will not withhold them from
 their children,
 telling the coming generation
 the praises of the LORD and His might,
 and the wonders He performed.
 (5) He established a decree in Jacob,
 ordained a teaching in Israel,
 charging our fathers
 to make them known to their children,

תהילים ע"ח:א-ה'

(א) משפיל לאָסר
 האַזינה עמי תורתִי
 הטו אָזנְכֶם לאַמְרֵי־פִי:
 (ב) אַפְתָּחָה בְּמִשְׁלַל פִּי
 אֲבִיעָה חֵדוֹת מִנִּי־קֹדֶם:
 (ג) אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְנוּ וּבִדְעָם
 וְאַבֹּתֵינוּ סִפְרוּ־לָנוּ:
 (ד) לֹא נִכְחַד | מִבְּנֵיהֶם לְדֹר
 אַחֲרָיוֹן מִסִּפְרֵים תְּהִלֹּת ה' וְעֲזֹזוֹ
 וְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:
 (ה) וְנִקֶּם עֲדוֹת | בְּיַעֲקֹב וְתוֹרָה
 שָׁם בִּישְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
 אֶת־אַבֹּתֵינוּ לְהוֹדִיעֵם לְבְנֵיהֶם:

Isaiah 8:16-20

(16) Bind up the message,
 Seal the **instruction** with My
 disciples.”
 (17) So I will wait for the LORD,
 whose face is hidden from the
 House of Jacob,
 and in whom I will trust.

ישעיהו ח':ט"ז-כ'

(טז) צֹר תַּעֲבֹדָה
 חֲתוּם תּוֹרָה בְּלִמְדֵי:
 (יז) וְחִפִּיתִי לֵה'
 הַמִּסְתִּיר פָּנָיו מִבֵּית יַעֲקֹב
 וּקְנִיתִי־לוֹ

Deuteronomy 1:5

(5) On the other side of the Jordan,
 in the land of Moab, Moses
 undertook to expound **this**
Teaching. He said:...

דברים א':ה'

(ה) בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב הוֹאֵיל
 מִשְׁנֵה בְּאֵר אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לֵאמֹר:

Exodus 13:5-10

(5) So, when the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which was sworn to your fathers to be given you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following practice: (6) “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the LORD. (7) Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory. (8) And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.’ (9) “And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead in order that **the Teaching of the LORD may be in your mouth**—that with a mighty hand the LORD freed you from Egypt. (10) You shall keep this institution at its set time from year to year.

שמות י"ג:ה'-י'

(ה) וְהָיָה כִּי-יְבִיאֲכֶם ה' אֶל-אֶרֶץ
הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לָתֶת לְךָ אֶרֶץ
זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ וְעַבַדְתָּ אֶת-הָעֵבֶרָה
הַזֹּאת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה: (ו) שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
תֹּאכַל מִצֶּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תֵג לֶה:
(ז) מִצּוֹת יֹאכֹל אֵת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים
וְלֹא-יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חֶמֶץ וְלֹא-יֵרָאֶה לְךָ
שָׂאֵר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלְךָ: (ח) וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה'
לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם: (ט) וְהָיָה לְךָ
לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וּלְזִכָּרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ לְמַעַן
תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת ה' בְּפִיךָ כִּי בְיַד חֲזִקָה
הוֹצֵאתָ ה' מִמִּצְרָיִם: (י) וְשָׁמַרְתָּ
אֶת-הַחֻקָּה הַזֹּאת לְמוֹעֲדָה מִיָּמִים
יְמִימָה: {פ}

Law, narrative, and justification

Rashi's first comment on the first verse of Genesis:

In the beginning. Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have started with the verse, “This month shall be the first of your months” (Exodus 12:2), which is the first commandment given to Israel. So why did it start with the this verse? Here is why. A verse states: “He told His people about the strength of His works [i.e., the strength He displayed in creating what created], in order to give them what [other] nations had inherited” (Psalms 111:6). Thus if the peoples of the world say to Israel, “You are thieves, for you conquered the lands of seven nations,” Israel can reply, “All the world belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it, and He gave it to whomever He thought best. It was His desire to give it to them, and then it was His desire to take it from them and to give it to us.”

בראשית. אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק לֹא הָיָה צָרִיף לְהַתְחִיל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה אֶלָּא מִהַחֲדָשׁ הַיָּהּ לָכֶם [שְׁמוֹת י"ב ב'] שֶׁהִיא מִצְוָה רִאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁנִּצְטַוּ בָּהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל. וּמָה טַעַם פָּתַח בְּבְרָאשִׁית? מִשּׁוּם "כַּח מַעֲשָׂיו הִגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לְתַתּ לָהֶם נִחְלַת גּוֹיִם" [תהילים קי"א ו']. שָׂאֵם יֹאמְרוּ אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְסֻטִּים אַתֶּם, שֶׁכָּבְשֶׁתֶּם אַרְצוֹת שְׁבָעָה גּוֹיִם, הֵם אוֹמְרִים לָהֶם כָּל הָאָרֶץ שֶׁל הַקָּב"ה הִיא, הוּא בְרָאָהּ וּנְתַנָּהּ לְאִשְׁרָיִךְ בְּעֵינָיו, בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ נְתַנָּהּ לָהֶם, וּבְרִצּוֹנוֹ נִטְלָהּ מֵהֶם וּנְתַנָּהּ לָנוּ:

*Source Sheet created on Sefaria
using the NJPS translation*

For further reading:

Sommer, Benjamin. *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 122-123, 171-172.

García-López, F. “Tôrāh.” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Ed. G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977–2006. 15:609–46.

G. Liedke and C. Peterson, “Torah,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997) 3:1415–22

Fishbane, Michael. “Tōrâ.” [In Hebrew]. *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. Jerusalem: Bialik, 1955–88. 8:469–83.

Halivni, David Weiss. *Midrash, Mishna, and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1986.

Schwartz, Baruch. “On Peshat and Derash, Bible Criticism, and Theology.” A review of David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Destash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis*. *Prooftexts* 14 (1994): 71–102.

Schwartz, Baruch. “The Torah - Its Five Books and Four Documents.” [In Hebrew]. *The Literature of the Hebrew Bible: Introductions and Studies*. Ed. Zipora Talshir. Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2011. 161–226.