

Torah – Five Books of Moses / Written Law / Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Early Israel was tribal; parts of the Torah were certainly known orally for hundreds if not thousands of years. Authorship of both the oral and later the written versions were traditionally credited to Moses - “From the mouth of God to the ear of Moses.” Modern scholarly consensus is that the pieces that make up Torah were actually written over the course of centuries by multiple authors.

Tanach - Hebrew Bible / Jewish Bible / ~~Old Testament~~ – Torah (Five Books of Moses), Prophets (e.g. Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah), and Writings (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth).

There is no scholarly consensus as to when the Hebrew Bible canon was fixed: dates range from 200 BCE to 200 CE.

Talmud – Oral Law – Rabbinic discussions, primarily about *Tanach*.

A concise version of *Talmud*, called the *Mishnah*, was written down in ~2nd century CE. Over the next few centuries, additional commentaries known as *Gemara*, elaborating on the *Mishnah*, were written down. The *Gemara* and the *Mishnah* together are known as *Talmud*. There are two versions of *Talmud*: Jerusalem (completed in ~350 CE) and Babylonian (longer, more authoritative, written down in ~500 CE, edited further during the following two centuries). The Babylonian Talmud is organized into orders; each order is divided into tractates. There are six orders and 63 tractates. References below are given as “Tractate Page.”

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1. Sin....

- Jewish tradition does not include the concept of “original sin.”
- Sin - or, better, transgression - is the result of our negative human tendencies or inclinations, which must be channeled in ways that affirm life.
- There are many Hebrew words for transgression, but the implication behind all of them is that you’ve gone in the wrong direction and need to return - to the right path, to who you want to be, to a better version of yourself.

2. The Evil Impulse....

Kohelet Rabbah, on 3,11 (Translation from The Talmud Anthology - Tales and Teachings of the Rabbis, ed. Louis I. Newman, Behrman House, Inc, 1945.)

Is the Evil Impulse good? If it were not for the Evil Impulse, no man would build a house, nor marry a wife, nor beget children, nor engage in trade. Solomon said (Ecclesiastes 4:4), “All excelling work is man’s rivalry with his neighbor.”

3. Reproach....

Torah, Leviticus 19:17

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. You must surely reprove your kinsfolk so that you incur no guilt on their account.

Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De-ot 6:7, Maimonides (adapted)

One who reproves another, whether it be regarding an injury committed between one person and another, or whether it be regarding matters between an individual and God, it is essential that the reproof be spoken only between them both; and the one who reproves shall speak to the other calmly, employing soft language, stating that the reproof is done for the benefit of the other, for the purpose of spiritual growth.

4. Repentance and Forgiveness....

1. Sam injures Max.
2. Max reproaches Sam.
3. Sam goes through the steps of t'shuvah (repentance; literal meaning: returning). Following the idea of sin as going astray, the idea of repentance is a return to the path of righteousness.
 - recognition of one's sins as sins
 - remorse
 - restitution where possible
 - confession
 - desisting from sin

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86b

How is one proved to be a true penitent? Said Rabbi Judah: If the opportunity to commit the same sin presents itself on two occasions, and he does not yield to it.

Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 34b

In the place where a repentant sinner stands, a thoroughly righteous person is not entitled to stand.

Babylonian Talmud, N'darim 39b (Also, Pesachim 54a)

Seven phenomena were created before the world was created, and they are: Torah, and repentance, the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, and the Temple, and the name of the Messiah.

4. Sam asks Max for forgiveness.
5. If Sam's t'shuvah is not real and complete, Max must not forgive Sam. Forgiveness without t'shuvah denies Sam a chance for spiritual growth.
6. If the t'shuvah is real, Max must forgive the injury and help to repair the relationship from his side.

Torah, Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against one of your people so that you may love your companion as yourself. I am YHVH.

7. After Sam asks for forgiveness three times without receiving it, it is assumed that there is nothing more that he can do to repair the relationship. At this point, the blame for the lack of resolution is transferred to the victim of the original offense.

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 87a:13

Rabbi Yosi bar Chanina said, 'Whoever seeks forgiveness from his friend should not seek it more than three times.

Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit 20a-b (Translation from Heads and Tales - Stories of the Sages to Enlighten our Minds by Edwin Goldberg.)

1. Rabbi Shimon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding leisurely [*metayel*] on his donkey by the riverside, feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah.
2. He happened to meet an exceedingly ugly man.
3. The man said to him, “Peace be upon you, Rabbi.”
4. He [the rabbi] did not return his [the man’s] greeting.
5. Instead, Rabbi Simeon said to the man, “You ignoramus! You are so ugly! Is it possible that all your fellow citizens are as ugly as you?”
6. The man replied, “I do not know. Go and tell the craftsman who made me, “How ugly is the vessel that you have made!”
7. When Rabbi Simeon realized that he had done wrong, he dismounted from the donkey and prostrated himself before the man.
8. Rabbi Simeon said to the man, “I submit myself to you; forgive me.”
9. The man replied, “I will not forgive you until you go and tell the craftsman who made me, “How ugly is the vessel that you have made.”

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10. Rabbi Simeon walked [*metayel*] behind the man until he reached his city.
11. All the people of the town came out to greet him.
12. They said to him, “Peace be upon you, Rabbi.”
13. The man asked them, “Who are you calling ‘Rabbi’?”
14. They responded, “The man who is walking behind you.”
15. The man said to them, “If this man is a rabbi, may there not be any more like him in Israel!”
16. They said to the man, “God forbid you should say this! What has he done to you?”
17. The man replied, “Such and such a thing he has done to me “[i.e. the man described what the rabbi did to him.]”
18. They said, “Even so, forgive him.”
19. The man said, “I will forgive him, but only on the condition that he does not act this way in the future.”
20. After this, Rabbi Simeon entered the house of study. He taught, “One should always be gentle as the reed and never unyielding as the cedar.”

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 87a (Translation by Moshe Halbertal in [At the Threshold of Forgiveness: A Study of Law and Narrative in the Talmud](#), with minor edits by LJS)

Rabbi Jeremiah injured Rabbi Abba. Rabbi Jeremiah went and sat at Rabbi Abba's doorstep. When Rabbi Abba's maidservant poured out wastewater, some drops sprayed on Rabbi Jeremiah's head. Rabbi Jeremiah said, "They have made me into a trash heap," and he recited the verse, "[God] lifts up the needy from the trash heap," [Psalms 113:7] as being about himself. Rabbi Abba heard him and went out to him. Rabbi Abba said to Rabbi Jeremiah, "Now it is I who must appease you, as it is said, 'Go abase yourself; and importune your fellow' [Proverbs 6:3]."

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When a certain person injured Rabbi Zera, Rabbi Zera would repeatedly pass before him and invite himself into his presence, so that the injurer would come and appease him.

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A certain butcher injured Rav, and he did not come before him [to seek forgiveness]. On the day before Yom Kippur, Rav said, "I will go and appease [forgive] him." Rabbi Huna met Rav. He asked, "Where is my master going?" Rav said, "To appease so-and-so." Rabbi Huna said [to himself] "Rav is going to kill a man!" Rav went and stood over the butcher. The butcher was seated, cleaning the head [of an animal]. The butcher raised his eyes and saw Rav. The butcher said to Rav, "Rav, go; I have nothing to do with you." While the butcher was still cleaning the animal's head, a bone shot out, struck the butcher's neck, and killed him.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Translation by Rabbi Micah Ellenson, https://www.tbdcheshire.org/blogs/rabbi-micah?post_id=888850

The story is told of the rabbi of Brisk who was once unassumingly traveling home on the train. He shared company with a group of callous Jews playing cards. Bothered by his aloof attitude, one of them demanded that he join the game or leave the car. When the rabbi didn't comply, the fellow physically removed him from the train car.

When the train arrived at Brisk, also the stop of the offender, he was shocked to see the throngs of people who stood there waiting to greet their rabbi. Mortified, he ran over to ask forgiveness but was denied. Not able to be calmed, he tried again and again. Finally, he made contact with the rabbi's son and begged him to find a way for him to be absolved.

The boy, surprised at his father's uncharacteristic behavior, agreed to do whatever possible. He visited his father [the rabbi] and began discussing the laws of forgiveness. Their discussion touched upon the law that a person must not turn away someone asking his forgiveness more than three times. Taking his cue, the boy asked his father, "What about So-and-So, he's asked you to forgive him numerous times; yet you deny him forgiveness?"

He replied, "Him? I cannot forgive him for he didn't offend *me*, the rabbi of Brisk; he offended the simple Jew he took me to be. Let him ask forgiveness from a simple Jew."

Chasidic story. Translation by Rabbi Micah Ellenson, https://www.tbdcheshire.org/blogs/rabbi-micah?post_id=888850

There is another story, of a king who quarreled with his son. In a fit of rage the king exiled his son from the kingdom. Years passed and the son wandered through the world. In time, the king's heart softened, so he sent his ministers to find his son and ask him to return. When they located the young man, he said that he could not return to the kingdom. He had been too hurt and his heart still harbored bitterness. The ministers brought back word to the king. The king told his son the following message, "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way."

Babylonia Talmud, Gittin 55a:12

....The Sages taught: If one robbed another of a beam and built it into a building, Beit Shammai says: He must destroy the entire building and return the beam to its owners. And Beit Hillel says: The injured party receives only the value of the beam but not the beam itself, due to an ordinance instituted for the sake of the penitent. In order to encourage repentance, the Sages were lenient and required the robber to return only the value of the beam, according to Beit Hillel.

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 8:9

For sins against God, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) brings forgiveness. For sins against another, the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness until one has become reconciled with the other.

Kol Nidre (Translation from Mishkan HaNefesh - Machzor for the Days of Awe, Yom Kippur, CCAR Press, NY 2015.)

For a beautiful rendition of Kol Nidre, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-C-8f_SoNqg

All vows -

resolves and commitments, vows of abstinence and terms of obligation,
sworn promises and oaths of dedication -
that we promise and swear to God, and take upon ourselves
from this Day of Atonement until next Day of Atonement, may it find us well:
we regret them and for all of them we repent.
Let all of them be discarded and forgiven, abolished and undone;
They are not valid and they are not binding.
Our vows shall not be vows; our resolves shall not be resolves;
And our oaths - they shall not be oaths.

Kol Nidre by Nan Cohen (b. 1968)

My neighbor's roses are blooming, blooming;
Their perfume spills past me and into the street.
The world gives us so much
Without being asked.

But again and again
We break our promises to it:
We breathe, eat, sleep away
The glittering nights, spend
The tapestried days.

These broken promises,
Let them be forgotten.
Our sworn oaths, unswear.
They drop noiseless on the earth,
Become the earth.