

Those who fall into the third perspective (God and people wrote the Torah) will usually ascribe to some form of the documentary hypothesis, while insisting that the Torah not be viewed in scientific/ historical terms alone but as the outcome of a dynamic process which included - and includes - some kind of ongoing dialogue between God and humans, or in traditional words, revelation.



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It must be said that for all Jews who take Jewish tradition seriously, whatever category they fall into, the Torah is seen as absolutely central to their understanding of Judaism and to their lives. For many the possible human origin of the Torah does not make it any less sacred than if it were written by God alone. The reasons for the Torah's centrality may differ but for all it remains the 'Book of Books'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Some varying perspectives on the sanctity of the Torah can be found in Prof. Nahum Sama's "Understanding Genesis" and Rabbi Neil Gillman's "Sacred Fragments".

## MIDRASH

Midrash refers to a type of literature which flourished roughly between the years 400 and 1200 CE. We can understand the nature of Midrashic Literature by the word's root:  $\Psi.7.7$ (D.R.Sh) - to search out. It is probably most useful to define Midrash as a kind of process, rather than as a specific result. The Midrashic process takes Biblical sources and attempts to search out other layers of meaning.

There is no single book called "The Midrash". Rather, there are collections of midrashim which were put together by different editors at different times. We present here three midrashim in an attempt to come to some generalizations about what midrash looks like and the functions it serves.

***Cain spoke to his brother Abel and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4:8)***

*What Cain said to Abel was: "Come and let's separate and divide our possessions". Abel replied, "Very well". So Cain said, "You take the sheep and cattle and I will take the land". And it was stipulated between them that neither should have any claim against the other about this division. Nevertheless, when Abel proceeded to graze his flock, Cain said "The land you are standing on is mine!" Abel replied, "The wool you are wearing is mine. Strip!" "Get off my land!" said Cain. At that, Cain rose up against Abel his brother. (Genesis Raba 22:7)*

***This is my God and I will glorify him (Ve-anvehu) (Exodus 15:2)***

*Abba Saul construed the word Ve-anvehu as made up on ani-ve-hu, "I am to be like Him". Hence, as He is gracious and compassionate, so are you to be gracious and compassionate. (B Shab 133b)*

***And they said, Come let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves, else we shall be scattered all over the world. The Lord came down to look at the city and tower which man had built and the Lord said "If as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they propose to do will be out of their reach. Let us then go down and confound their speech there, so they shall not understand one another's speech. Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth and they stopped building the city. (Genesis 11:3-8)***

*The tower was built with careful planning. On the east side were steps which were used to go up and on the West side was a down staircase. The tower got to be so high that it took a year to reach the top. People cared more about the bricks than they did about other people. If a person fell, no one cried. But if a brick was dropped, the workmen cried and tore out their hair, because it would take a year to replace it.*

These are just three examples of midrashim but we can draw from them several characteristics which are common to all midrashim :

- a. They all originate with a question or problem within the text (whether it be a genuine questions or a manufactured one) which afford an opportunity for the Rabbis to offer an explanation.
- b. They use some information from the text and some which is not included, to create an explanation which fits the text.
- c. Besides solving the problem, the midrash uses the opportunity to explore an idea or to teach a lesson or a value.