

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN: CONSENT AND COERCION AT SINAI*

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The graphic description of God holding Mt. Sinai over the Israelites' heads, threatening to bury them under it unless they accepted His Torah, is familiar to many. Whatever the existential import of this tale, its literal sense is that the Jewish people were coerced into receiving the Torah. This essay analyzes other traditions about the Sinai covenant and indicates that these, in contrast, assert the consensual nature of the receiving of the Torah.

I

One of the best-known Midrashim tells that when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, "the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them [the Israelites] like an [inverted] cask and said to them, 'If ye accept the Torah, 'tis well; if not, there shall be your burial.'"¹ The drama of the Midrashic image of the mountain, suspended over the heads of the people, clearly helped make this legend so popular. Furthermore, this story is cited (in part) in Rashi's exegesis to the Torah.² And Rashi's commentary, more than any other factor, is responsible for the popular dissemination of Aggadot. An Aggadah which appears in Rashi's commentary to the Torah is assured meaningful survival, while one which does not appear there ekes out an existence, primarily, in scholarly circles.

There is another explanation for the popularity of the "overturned mountain" Aggadah: it reflects the complex and ambivalent feelings of the Jew who has accepted upon himself the yoke of Torah and its commandments. It offers graphic expression of the heteronomy and coercion which an observant person experiences side by side with his sensibility of "Happy are we! How goodly is our portion, how pleasant our lot, how beautiful our heritage!" There is something threatening about these authoritarian aspects of revelation, but they have their appeal as well. In fact, much use was made of this Aggadah by rabbinic homilists and philosophers, so much so that this homily and its message have almost reached the status of normative belief, a test of loyalty to Torah. It seems that specifically in modern times, so apparently accommodating to individualism and rationality, this Aggadah

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represents values of authority, coercion, and anti-rationalism. Indeed, it is possible to identify other Aggadot which have achieved special status in modern times due to this same phenomenon — but that is not our topic.

Of course, there are those who understand our Aggadah differently. J. Heinemann³ (who, I believe, follows in the footsteps of the Maharal — Rabbi Judah Loew Ben Bezalel of Prague)⁴ shifts the focus from the problematics of consent/authority to the question of the necessity of the Torah for the Jew and the world: “The giving of the Torah and its acceptance by the people of Israel had to be; without it the world would have returned to utter chaos, and all the more so — the Jewish people could not have existed.” If so, the words “there shall be your burial” are not a threat but rather the description of an alternative; they express the cultural significance of the refusal to accept the Torah. Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik turns to a more existential-personal level and explains that the coercive element in this Aggadah is meant to reflect the idea that “...man feels overpowered and defeated by God even when he appears to be a free agent of his own will.”⁵ But all these readings aside, it is difficult to deny that the essential, literal sense of the Aggadah describes the historical giving of the Torah at Sinai, if only as a model for other moments of the Jewish experience.

This essay seeks to examine the motif of consent in the many other Aggadot which deal with the giving of the Torah, so as to discover if the “overturned mountain” Aggadah represents — in its popular interpretation — a representative view, or, on the contrary, an extraordinary and unusual one. In fact, E.E. Urbach has already stated that our homily “is an individual view, which has no parallel.”⁶ However, before we survey other midrashim, let us take a closer look at our Aggadah itself and comment on its history and development.⁷

II

1. The earliest expression of the idea that the Jewish people stood under Mount Sinai (literally!) when the Torah was given is found, apparently,⁸ in *Mechilta de Rabbi Ishmael*. However, this account should be viewed in full, in the round:⁹

And they stood. They were huddled together. This teaches that they were afraid of the winds, of the earthquakes, of the thunders and lightnings that came on.

Below the mount. Scripture indicates that the mount was pulled up from its place and the people came near and stood under it, as it is said: “And ye came near and stood under the mountain” (Deut. 4:11). Of them it is declared in the traditional sacred writings: “Oh, my

dove that art in the clefts of the rock," etc. "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (Song of Songs 2:14).

Urbach has noted that in this early Midrash *the Jews are standing under the mountain of their own free will*. They did not feel that the mountain rising above their heads presented any danger or threat. At this point, the "mountain overturned upon them" imagery, making the people passive and defensive, is absent. Furthermore, the text in its entirety indicates that not only did the people not sense a threat from God's mountain, but that they *sought refuge and protection under it*. They "huddled together" under the mountain when they heard the thunders and the earthquakes, and then they "came near and stood under (the mountain)." The image of a dove pressing into the clefts of the rock may also be appropriate; the dove hides in the rock until the birds of prey pass by. In an adjacent Midrash, the dove flees from the claws of the hawk to the cleft of the rock.¹⁰ Since the awesomeness of the event at Mount Sinai is already communicated in the Bible, which describes the thunders and lightnings which terrified the people, the Sages attempt to balance the picture, to soften it, and to depict a God who protects his people even while frightening them. Thus, when R. Abdimi said that God "overturned the mountain like a cask," threatening the people and compelling them to accept his Torah, *he reworked an old tradition, creating a new homily*. The graphic element of this traditional legend remained, but it acquired a totally different meaning. The people did not place themselves under the protecting mountain, but rather the mountain was held as a threat above the frightened people.

2. The "overturned mountain" Aggadah appears in two Talmudic contexts. In the first (Avodah Zara 2b), the nations of the world defend themselves by claiming that they did not accept the Torah because God did not overturn the mountain upon them to force them to accept it, as He did with Israel. This narrative does not deal with the nature of such forcibly imposed consent. Yet, it is clear that the nations perceive this act to be valid and binding — despite the critical tone that pervades their words: the Jewish people do not merit special praise for accepting the Torah, for they were forced to do so. However, our Aggadah is mentioned elsewhere in the Talmud (Shabbat 88a) and there its other implications are discussed:

R. Abdimi b. Hama b. Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an (inverted) cask, and said to them, "If ye accept the Torah, 'tis well: if not, there shall be your burial." R. Aha b. Jacob observed: This furnishes a strong protest against the Torah. Said Raba, Yet even so, they re-accepted it in the days of Ahasuerus, for it is written

(Esther 9:27), “[The Jews] confirmed and took upon them [etc.]”: [i.e.] they confirmed what they had accepted long before.

R. Aha obviously opposes R. Abdimi’s statement. Rashi points out that because Israel’s agreement to accept the Torah was coerced, the people are not culpable for not adhering to it; R. Aha “uses” R. Abdimi’s homily, as it were, to defend the people. However, it is possible to explain, more broadly, that according to R. Aha the “overturned mountain” Aggadah completely strips the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai of its moral and legal significance.¹¹ Raba, who points to the element of consent in the story of Purim, concedes that coerced acceptance is insufficient. In principle, then, both R. Aha and Raba oppose the view that is implied in R. Abdimi’s legend. The difference between these two Amoraim is perhaps that R. Aha totally rejects R. Abdimi’s account, while Raba believes it to be a significant tradition, once it is complemented and balanced. However, they both agree that the Jewish people’s acceptance of the Torah cannot be based on coercion.¹²

3. Another text that testifies to the protective quality of standing under the mountain may be found in the comment of R. Eliezer with regard to Israel’s crossing the Red Sea:

He (=God) arched the deep over them (*tehom kahah aleihem*) and under it Israel went across, so as not to be discomfited.

One cannot but notice the linguistic similarity to our Aggadah. But here the purpose of this act is clearly stated — “so that they should not be discomfited.” Let us keep in mind that those verses and motifs which R. Eliezer applied to the crossing of the Red Sea are consistently interpreted by R. Akiva and his students as referring to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It is thus possible that “The deep arched over them,” with its overtone of protective kindness, is truly parallel to the “overturned mountain,” and allows us to hear its benevolent, protective timbre.¹³

III

Be what may the meaning of the “overturned mountain” Aggadah and the nature of the response it elicited, the question remains: to what extent does Midrashic tradition stress the element of choice and consent in the acceptance of the Torah? The answer to this question is important in itself, but it also contains a message about the nature of Jewish spiritual experience in general. What we find is that the Midrash, time and again, stresses the fact that the giving of the Torah was accompanied by consent.

1. There is, first of all, the prevalent use of the marriage covenant as a basic image for the covenant at Sinai. We know that the Song of Songs was interpreted as an allegory describing the relationship of love between the people and their God, especially as it developed on the day the Torah was given.¹⁴ This interpretation is fundamental to the teaching of R. Akiva. His students and their students continued to espouse it.¹⁵ “‘The Lord came from Sinai,’ to receive Israel, as a bridegroom comes forth to meet the bride.”¹⁶ This picture evokes many associations and has many repercussions, but one of the echoes heard is that of consent and volition. For, marriage in Jewish culture is not a matter of coercion. Husband and wife do not impose their authority on each other; they agree to live together in partnership and mutuality, though the individual may feel “compelled” on a personal level.

2. However, there are texts in which the motif of consent comes through much more directly and explicitly. We will focus on Tannaic Midrashim, on the homilies and legends which appear in the *Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, the Tannaitic Midrash on Exodus. We will not deal with textual problems, nor even attempt to study each and every Midrash thoroughly. What we are concerned with is the issue of consent and coercion.

(a) *I am the Lord thy God*. Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah? They give a parable. To what may this be compared? — to the following: A king who entered a province said to the people: May I be your king? But the people said to him: Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us? What did he do then? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then when he said to them: May I be your king? They said to him: Yes, yes. Likewise, God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them, He fought for them the battle with Amalek, then He said to them: I am to be your king. And they said to Him: Yes, yes.¹⁷

God is compared to someone who comes to a province from the outside, unknown to the people, and wishes to rule them. Their initial, natural reaction is to refuse, until the outsider proves that he deserves to rule — that he is capable of fulfilling their needs and is even concerned for their welfare. Only then do they agree to accept his rule. The outsider, it should be noted, does not employ his power, which he has used against the enemies of the people, to force himself upon them. Similarly, God fought the wars of Israel and saved the people in order to create a basis of trust and maybe even commitment on their behalf — so that they accept Him as king. The focus of this Midrash is obviously not the motif of consent. Rather, its exegetic purpose is to explain the

declaration given as background to the Ten Commandments (“I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt.”) Its historiographic purpose is to explain why God gave the Torah following His intervention in the nation’s history through bondage and redemption, and did not initially give the Torah when the world was created. In the answer given in this Midrash, the need to have the people’s agreement *is taken for granted*. (In the history of ideas, that which is “taken for granted” reflects the basic pattern of thought.) The assumption is that once the relationship between God and his people is described through a political model, the element of consent cannot be foregone. In fact, the difference between the (possible) commandments of the “beginning of the Torah” and those given after the Exodus from Egypt is the same as that between a mythic-cosmic model and a dialogic-political one. It goes without saying that the people’s consent is only possible due to God’s choosing the latter model.

(b) Rabbi says: This proclaims the excellence of Israel, for when they all stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah they all made up their mind alike to accept the reign of God joyfully. Furthermore, they pledged themselves for one another. And it was not only concerning overt acts that God, revealing Himself to them, wished to make His covenant with them, but also concerning secret acts, as it is said: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God and the things that are revealed,” etc... (Deut. 29:28). But they said to Him: Concerning overt acts we are ready to make a covenant with Thee, but we will not make a covenant with Thee in regard to secret acts lest one of us commit a sin secretly and the entire community be held responsible for it.¹⁸

R. Yehuda ha-Nassi’s statement includes two sub-clauses that deserve our attention in the present context. Rabbi explains that the Ten Commandments are addressed in the singular person because the people came together “as one” and accepted the reign of God “joyfully.” Both expressions, “as one” and “joyfully,” testify to the people’s *will*; joy is felt by one who acts out of freedom and love. Furthermore, Rabbi adds, God negotiated with the people until they agreed to accept the Torah and the responsibility it entails. Surprisingly enough — the people even *refused* to accept the conditions offered by God and successfully held their own: they were willing to be national guarantors for those among them who sinned in public, but not for the sins committed in private. God accepted this reservation and made his covenant applicable only to the “public” offenses. In this context we will not analyze the difference between “public” and “private” sins. It is important to realize, though, that the people’s successful demmural demonstrates the necessity of consent. Moreover, consent not only forms the basis of commitment to God’s Torah, but it also lies at the base of the national-

ethical tie, for collective responsibility is also dependent on consent. There is undoubtedly an educational purpose here in promoting adherence to the covenant, on one hand, and collective responsibility and its results, on the other. Yet, once again, the basic element of consent in this Midrash should not be overlooked.

(c) *Thou shalt not have other Gods before me.* Why is this said? Because it says: "I am the Lord thy God." To give a parable: A king of flesh and blood entered a province. His attendants said to him: Issue some decrees upon the people. He, however, told them: No! When they will have accepted my reign I shall issue decrees upon them. For if they do not accept my reign how will they carry out my decrees? Likewise, God said to Israel: "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have other gods — I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves in Egypt." And when they said to Him: "Yes, yes," He continued: "Now, just as you accepted My reign, you must also accept My decrees."¹⁹

From an exegetic point of view, as we learn from this Midrash, the first verse of the Ten Commandments should be read as a question. God *asks* the people if He had, in fact, taken them out of Egypt, and if they had accepted His reign then. But even a king will not issue rules and decrees unless they are likely to be followed, and for the decrees to be followed there must be a basic acceptance of this king's rule. Once again, a king cannot expect to rule a people at the point of a gun. That is why God reminded His people that they had already accepted His reign — and it is only proper that they accept the obvious manifestation of that reign, His commandments. In that aspect the kingdom of heaven is not unlike the kingdom of earth: both are dependent on the people's "acceptance," i.e., on their consent. We have already seen [in (a)] how this "acceptance" came about and on what it was based. The linkage between the authority of the law and the fundamental consent to a system of rule — whether by a social-psychological process or through theoretical acknowledgment of the fact that the authority of the law presupposes the legitimacy of a rule — is echoed in the experience of the individual on a ritualistic-religious level. "Joshua b. Korhah said: Why was the section of *Hear* placed before that of *And it shall come to pass*? So that one should first accept upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and then take upon himself the yoke of the commandments."²⁰ We will not examine, here, the relationship between the daily acceptance of the kingdom of heaven and the commandments and the historical acceptance at Sinai, which, according to the Midrashim we have just reviewed, included both "commitments." Yet, the common assumption of the Sages in both these topics is that the establishment of a reign through "acceptance" precedes the

determination of its rules and commandments. It would be interesting, of course, to consider the educational significance of this Mishna.

(d) ...they said: We accept all these. When he saw that they accepted them, he took the blood and sprinkled it upon the people...He said to them: Now you are bound, held and tied; tomorrow, come and receive all the commandments.²¹

This Midrash describes the acceptance of the Torah as a two-step process. The first is apparently described in Exodus (24:1-8): Moses reads the "Book of the Covenant" to the people. They answer "we will do and obey" and Moses sprinkles the blood of the covenant on the people. Through this agreement, Moses continues, "you are bound, held and tied." The people committed themselves to get to the second stage, accepting "all the commandments," the Torah in its entirety. Once again, the emphasis is on the people's responsibility, on their having a central and independent role in accepting the Torah. At the same time, the imagery suggests that even a freely-accepted normative regimen binds and, even, chafes; and that the primal covenant is an open-ended, trusting commitment.

(e) And it was for the following reason that the nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah: In order that they should have no excuse for saying: Had we been asked we would have accepted it, for, behold, they were asked and they refused to accept it, for it is said: "And he said: 'The Lord came from Sinai,'" etc. (Deut. 33:2). He appeared to the children of Esau the wicked and said to them: Will you accept the Torah? They said to Him: What is written in it? He said to them: "Thou shalt not murder" (*ibid.* 5:17). They then said to Him: The very heritage which our father left us was: "And by thy sword shalt thou live" (Genesis 27:40). He then appeared to the children of Amon and Moab. He said to them: Will you accept the Torah? They said to Him: what is written in it? He said to them: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Deut. 5:7). They, however, said to Him that they were all of them children of adulterers, as it is said: "Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father" (Gen. 19:36). Then He appeared to the children of Ishmael. He said to them: Will you accept the Torah? They said to Him: What is written in it? He said to them: "Thou shalt not steal" (Deut. 5:17). They then said to Him: The very blessing that had been pronounced upon our father was: "And he shall be as a wild ass of a man: his hand shall be upon everything" (Gen. 16:12). And it is written: "For indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews" (*ibid.* 40:15). But when He came to the Israelites and: "At His right hand was a fiery law unto them" (Deut. 33:2), they all opened their mouths and said: "All that the Lord

hath spoken will we do and obey" (Ex. 24:7). And thus it says: "He stood and measured the earth; He beheld and drove asunder the nations."²²

The main purpose of this Aggadah is to point out the difference between the nations of the world and the Jewish people: the former accepted the Torah and the latter refused. In fact, different exegetical approaches developed with regard to this text. This Aggadah served as proof, throughout the generations, for the claim that gentiles are different from Israel in the very "form" of their psyche and in the root of their soul; but it also supported the contrary claim that the gates of choice are never locked, and that the non-Jew can still win the right to the Torah. Others maintain that this text provides an explanation of sorts for the remarkable fact that the universal God gave his Torah to one nation only — does this then render Judaism a non-universal faith? In any case, with regard to the acceptance of the Torah by the Jewish people, the emphasis was laid on our willingness, determination and choice, in accepting what was rejected by others.²³

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At the end of this review, let us highlight one terminological characteristic. Over and over again, in the context of the giving of the Torah, one comes across the root *ק.ב.ל.* The expression *קבלת התורה* "receiving of the Torah" also exists. Now, the biblical use of the root *ק.ב.ל.* in the sense of "accept," is relatively slight. The root *ש.מ.ע.* "listen" is much more common in the Bible for that purpose. On the other hand, the Sages do use the root *ק.ב.ל.* for "acceptance" and "willingness to be committed."²⁴ One who makes a vow, *מקבל על עצמו* "accepts it upon himself," etc. In our context, we have already encountered a person who accepts upon himself the "yoke of the kingdom of heaven." Similarly, in the context of acceptance of the Torah, we should also interpret the frequent use of the root *ק.ב.ל.* in the same way and understand it as an expression of willingness and consent. Thus, the expression *קבלת התורה* "acceptance of the Torah," itself, does not refer to a passive act of receiving.²⁵

IV

In this review, we have attempted to show how the motif of consent is refracted in the Sages' understanding of the giving and the accepting of Torah. We have surely not exhausted the subject matter and have even set certain literary limitations. In any case, we see that in the Tannaic Midrashim relating to the biblical account of the giving

of the Torah, the theme of consent recurs again and again — either as a main motif or as an underlying pattern. That, obviously, corresponds to the biblical story itself, which emphasizes the desire of the people to accept the Torah and the vitality of that commitment:

These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and he called for the elders of the people and he set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. And all the people answered together, and they said: All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people unto the Lord....And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the ordinances; and all the people answered (with) one voice and they said: All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord....And he took the Book of the Covenant, and read in the ears of the people; and they said: All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey.²⁶

The biblical text also describes the dread that seized the people when confronted with the physical manifestations of the Divine revelation, and almost caused them to flee the place. The awe and fear of God, though, made the people ask Moses to mediate between them and God, so they would not have to face His direct and unmitigated presence.²⁷ Yet, the text does not say that these phenomena caused the people to agree to God's offer-demand (although there were interpreters who suggested that it was specifically this awe that made the people willing to accept the Torah).²⁸

Other Aggadot may also be considered in our context. There is, for example, a tradition, found already in Tannaic literature, which tells that God's utterance at Sinai killed all those who heard it and God, then, had to revive each and every one.²⁹ If this tradition relates to a mystical experience or even to death as a symbol of entrance to a new level of spiritual life (initiatory death), then its significance for our issue is limited, though not entirely inconsequential.³⁰ But if this death reflects the loss of human freedom in the face of the overpowering and coercive Divine command, then it has great relevance for us. There would also be much significance in the fact that after this "death," God returns man to life.³¹

In any case, it is clear from all the above that the Aggadah of the "overturned mountain" should not be cited exclusively, to determine categorically that the Torah was given without the people's consent, or more precisely: that their consent was imposed upon them by God, with all the repercussions this interpretation has with regard to understanding both Judaism as a religion and Judaism's broad ethos and ethical values. On the contrary, the motif of consent is the dominant,

leading theme in all that is connected to the establishment of the relationship between the people and their God.

The thrust of this study, in which it has been argued that the "overturned mountain" is not the dominant, defining motif it is often taken to be, requires one final observation. The consensual moment, as has been argued here, is the dominant element of the Midrashic tradition about the giving of the Torah. Israel consents to its vocation — it is not compelled to it. But let us remind ourselves of the complementary fact: Israel's vocation is the service of God, and it is to this service — both ritual and ethical — that Israel consents. Obligation remains central to the tradition as, indeed, does the reality of tradition itself. These complementary aspects of Judaism entail a "dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy" (as Jon Levenson has described it), a dialectic which draws upon both the sense of compulsion experienced within the religious experience and in the communal relationship, as well as upon the requirement of freedom which is so basic to the ethical constitution of man's relationship's with God and with his fellows. Making sensitive use of both the suzerainty model of covenant as well as the overturned mountain motif, Levenson sums up the career of the Jewish people pithily: "Chosen for service, they must choose to serve."³² Jewish experience has attempted to fuse the contrasting Aggadic motifs and to be nourished by both.

Notes

- * This article was translated from the Hebrew by Rachel Shloss.
- 1. Shabbat 88a.
- 2. Rashi on Exodus 19:17.
- 3. In n.8 below, p. 174.
- 4. *Tiferet Yisrael*, ch. 32. See also Maharsha, *Hiddushei Aggadot* on Avodah Zara 3a.
- 5. "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, 7:2 (Summer 1965): 29.
- 6. See n.8 below, p. 328.
- 7. For review of traditional commentary on the issue, see A. Corman, *Yeziat Mizraim Umatan Torah* (Tel Aviv, 1978), pp. 354-361.
- 8. These comments expand on E.E. Urbach, *The Sages — Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 1975, pp. 327-329. Compare J. Heinemann, *Aggadah and its Development*, (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 170-174. It seems that Heinemann did not fully appreciate Urbach's argument.
- 9. *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, trans. Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933), vol. 2, pp. 219-220.

10. While the other elements in *Song of Songs* 2:14 are explicitly interpreted further in the Midrash, "...my dove that art in the clefts of the rock" is not. Thus, it is clear that this phrase is the biblical proof-text for the tradition that the people huddled willingly under the mountain, and R. Akiva explicitly interprets that verse to mean that the Israelites "were hidden in the shadow of the mountain" (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah*, *ad. loc.*). I discuss in detail the Midrashic traditions to this verse in a forthcoming paper, and suggest that the teaching that the people willingly stood "under the mountain" is to be attributed to R. Akiva. I also indicate, though, that the motif of the "threatening Sinai" may also be Tannaitic. See also n.13 below.
11. See *Hiddushei HaRamban*, on Shabbat, *op. cit.* and Tosafot, *s.v.* "kafa."
12. Many commentators connected Raba's statement with the nature of Purim as a miraculous event though lacking the revealed presence of God, seeing the Purim heroes as opening the era of Oral Law — an era characterized by the lack of revelation of the Divine Presence, and by a Torah, for whose transmitting/creating the people of Israel are responsible.
13. *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, version A, ch. 33, end, trans. [with my revision] by Judah Goldin (Yale University Press, 1955), p. 136. On the correlation between the Red Sea Midrashim and the Mount Sinai Midrashim, see Lieberman (n.15 below) and n.10 above. According to Midrash Rabbah *Song of Songs*, it is R. Eliezer who says: "My dove in the cleft of the rock...because they were sheltered in the recess of the sea."
14. See G.D. Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality," in *The Samuel Friedland Lectures 1960-1966* (New York, 1966), pp. 1-21.
15. S. Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim" (Hebrew), in G. Scholem's *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1965), pp. 118-126.
16. *Mekilta*, p. 219.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.
20. Mishna, Berachot II, 2. This text, which does not relate to the historic giving of the Law at Sinai but to the ongoing relationship of the Jew to God, focuses on the individual. The degree to which rabbinic consensual materials in general relate to the collective or to the individual is a topic worth study. A major motif is the notion of *'arevut* (co-responsibility); see, e.g., Sotah 37b.
21. *Mekilta*, p. 211.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235. See Heinemann, *ibid.*, from p. 117 and Urbach's notes for pp. 531-535.

23. This approach is clearly expressed in Lamentations Rabbah III, 1 (ed. Buber, p. 122; and Urbach, p. 534) which tells how the community of Israel "reminds" God that only it, of all those asked, was ready to accept Him and His Torah.
24. See Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, *Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew*, entries: קבל and קבלה, and A. Bendavid's *Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew* (Hebrew), vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1967), under קבל.
25. See my note on the linguistic aspect of the Torah-giving at Sinai in "Iyunim beFerushai Rashi: Inyanai Hanhaga veShilton" (Hebrew), *Eshel Beer-Sheva* 3, 1986, p. 147, n.32.
26. Exodus 19:6-9, 24:3-7.
27. *Ibid.* 19:16; Deut. 5:5, 5:23-9.
28. See Tosafot on Shabbat, *op. cit.* (n. 11 above).
29. Toseftah, Arachin, ch. 1, 10, ed. M.S. Zuckerman, p. 543, and the following notes. See also Tosafot mentioned above.
30. I. Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* (Berlin, 1982), pp. 33-37.
31. E. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York, 1970). Note the tradition by which Israel, upon accepting the Torah and saying "We will do and obey," revived God (!), Leviticus Rabbah XXIII, 3, ed. Margulies (Jerusalem), p. 530, in ed. princ.
32. J. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (New York, 1988), pp. 140-156; see pp. 145-146 for Levenson's discussion of the "overturned mountain"; the citation is on p. 148. See, as well, E. Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 36-40.