

Demanding Silence

When Moses went up to the heavens to receive the Torah, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting in front of a Torah scroll and crowning certain of the letters with the pen strokes that would adorn those particular letters in every Torah for all time. Moses said, Master of the World, who is it who is delaying you? God responded, In the future, many generations from now, there will be a man named Akiba ben Yosef. He will find meaning not only in every word and letter of the Torah, but he will even derive mounds of meaning from the fact that certain letters are adorned while others are not.

Moses said, Master of the World, Show him to me! God said, Turn back and walk. Moses did so, and he found himself sitting in the eighteenth row of Rabbi Akiba's students. Moses did not understand anything that they were saying and he became depressed. But when they arrived at a particular matter, Rabbi Akiba's students said to him: Rabbi, how do you derive this conclusion? He said to them: This is a halacha given to Moses on Sinai. Moses' mind was settled.

Moses turned back and came before the Holy One and said, Master of the World, you have a man such as this and you give the Torah through me? Silence! God said to him. This is how it has come up in my thought.

Moses said: You have shown me his Torah; show me his reward. God said to him, Turn back. He turned back and saw the Romans weighing out Akiba's flesh in the market. Moses protested: Master of the World, This is his Torah and this is his reward? God replied: Silence! This is how it has come up in my thought.

(Babylonian Talmud Menachot 29b)