

THE WORD "TORAH" IN THE TORAH

JACOB CHINITZ

This article will attempt to answer two questions: What is the meaning, or what are the meanings, of the word "Torah" when it occurs in the Torah? Is the Torah aware of itself as a book? There are 32 appearances of the word *torah*, or *ha-torah*, in the Pentateuch. In 11 of these, it is a common noun meaning "law" or "rule" in general, without specific reference to the Torah.

In the other 21 appearances, the word refers to the Torah; once in Exodus and 20 times in Deuteronomy. In the first meaning, the word is used twice for law in general and nine times for a rule for a particular situation. In the second meaning, the word is used 10 times for the contents of the Torah, and 11 times for the material scroll of the *Sefer Torah*.

I shall now list, cite and comment upon all the examples in these four categories. I shall number the verses according to their order in the Pentateuch, but I shall list them in the order of the four subdivisions: Law in general, a particular rule, the contents of the Torah, the book of the Torah.

LAW

One torah there shall be for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you (Ex. 12:49). The text is not referring to the Torah, but to rule of law being applied to all equally.

One torah and one justice there shall be for you and for the stranger among you (Ex. 15:16). Here too, the concept is of the rule of law in society in general. Whether the "stranger [*ger*]" is a convert or an alien resident is a subject for another article.

RULES

For the sin offering as for the guilt offering, one rule shall apply: the priest through whom the atonement is achieved, it belongs to him (Lev. 7:7). This

Jacob Chinitz was ordained at Yeshiva University and is a member of The Rabbinical Assembly. He has taught at several colleges, and has written over 100 articles for many journals. He has served as rabbi at numerous congregations, and is currently at Congregation Shaare Zedek, Montreal. His book In My Opinion, a collection of 60 essays previously published in 17 journals, was published in 2000.

is not a general concept of law, but rather a particular rule stating that in these two types of offering, the food belongs to the priest.

This is the torah for the holocaust, the flour offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, and for the initiating offerings and for the peace offerings (Lev. 7:37). The word *torah* is used here in terms of regulation or procedure in the manner of dealing with the different types of offerings.

This is the torah for all the cases of leprosy and the pernicious skin blemish (Lev. 14:54). Another example of the use of the word *torah* in terms of a specific rule.

Or for the man over whom there passes a mood of jealousy, and he suspects his wife, he shall make the woman stand before the Lord, and the priest shall apply all of this torah (Num. 5:30). Here we are dealing not with one particular rule, but the application of the entire procedure as described in the chapter of the Sotah.

For the citizen among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them, one torah shall apply for you for the one who sins inadvertently (Num. 15:29). The implication here is not for law in general, but for the specific case of the offering brought by this class of sinner.

This is the law of the torah which the Lord commanded, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel and let them take to you a red heifer, whole, unblemished, upon which no yoke was placed (Num. 19:2). Here we have a combination of *torah* as procedure and as authority. The word *hukat* represents the particular command and the word *torah* is the matrix in which it is found.

This is the torah: If a man dies in a tent, all who enter the tent, and all that is in the tent, will be unclean for seven days (Num. 19:14). After using the word *torah*, the text explicates the particular case which is intended.

And Eleazar the priest said to the men of the host who had participated in the war: 'This is the law of the torah which the Lord commanded to Moses (Num. 31:21). Again, as with the red heifer, we have a case of a particular law attributed to the law in general.

According to the torah they shall teach you, and the judgment which they shall tell you to do, you shall not deviate from the matter to the right or to the left (Deut. 17:11). The court will issue a decision in a particular case. In the Talmud, this is extended to imply the legislative powers of the court, in addition to the judicial function.

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CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

And the Lord said to Moses: Ascend the mountain to Me and be there, and I shall give to you the tablets of stone, and the Torah and the commandment which I have written to teach them (Ex. 24:12). It is clear that here the text speaks of a body of law in which various commandments are embedded.

On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this Torah saying . . . (Deut. 1:5). Here, in the beginning of Deuteronomy, we have a clear concept of Torah as a system of law and teaching.

And who is a great nation that has righteous laws and judgments as all of this Torah which I place before you today (Deut. 4:8). Moses is praising the superiority of the Torah as a whole.

And this is the Torah which Moses placed before the children of Israel (Deut. 4:44). It is tempting to interpret this passage as referring to the actual *Sefer Torah*, as when we recite this in the synagogue when the scroll is raised, but the context demands that we take this phrase as referring to the contents of the Torah, not to the material document.

'And it shall be with him, and he shall read out of it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to fear the Lord his God, to observe all the words of this Torah and these laws to fulfill them (Deut. 17:19). Here we have the closest reference to a document called the Torah, but the interest is more in the contents than in the material document.

'Cursed will be the one who will not keep the words of this Torah to do them, and all the people will answer, Amen' (Deut. 27:26). Here the text refers to the entire Torah in terms of its contents.

The hidden things belong to the Lord our God and the revealed things to us and our children forever, to fulfill all the words of this Torah (Deut. 29:28). Here, too, the subject is the content rather than the actual document.

'Gather the people, men, women and children, and the stranger within your gates, so that they will hear and they will learn and will fear the Lord your God, and will be careful to do all the words in this Torah (Deut. 31:12). Although the context involves the public reading of the Torah scroll, the immediate emphasis in this verse is upon the words of the Torah, not the actual document.

And he said to them: 'Pay attention to all the words to which I testify before you today, to command your children to observe to do all the words of this Torah (Deut. 32:46). Again, the emphasis upon the words of the Torah.

Moses commanded us a Torah, an inheritance for the congregation of Jacob (Deut. 33:4). Obviously, the intent here is to stress the contents of the Torah.

THE BOOK

And when he sits on his royal throne, he shall write for himself the copy of this Torah in a book, before the Levite priests (Deut. 17:18). The reference is to the physical writing of this copy of the Torah. Possibly, it means the Book of Deuteronomy.

'And you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah when you cross over, so that you may come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, a land of milk and honey, as the Lord the God of your fathers spoke to you' (Deut. 27:3). The inscription upon the stones placed in the River Jordan exemplifies especially a tangible form of the Torah.

'And you shall inscribe upon the stones all the words of this Torah, well explained' (Deut. 27:8). Again, the tangible form of the Torah.

'If you do not observe to do all the words of this Torah written in this book [sefer] to fear this noble and awesome Name, the Lord your God (Deut. 28:58). The book of Deuteronomy is mentioned explicitly.

'Also all sickness and plague not written in this book of the Torah, will the Lord your God bring upon you to destroy you (Deut. 28:61). The Torah is mentioned expressly as a book.

'The Lord will separate him out for evil from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the oaths of the Covenant written in this book of the Torah (Deut. 29:20). Clearly, the reference here is to a written document.

'If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe His commandments and His laws, written in this book of the Torah, when you return to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul (Deut. 30:10). The book is specified.

And Moses wrote this Torah and he gave it to the priests, sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel (Deut. 31:9). A specific reference to Moses writing the text of the Torah.

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When all Israel comes to be seen by the Lord your God, in the place He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel, into their ears (Deut. 31:11). Here we have an actual reading of a physical book.

And it was when Moses completed the writing of the words of this Torah in a book, until they were ended (Deut. 31:24). Here the process of the writing of the Torah book is graphically described in terms of its completion. There are problems about who writes the Torah, God or Moses, but it is clear that the Torah identifies itself as a book.

Take this Torah book, and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, and it shall be for witness there for you, or against you' (Deut. 31:26). Here the written Torah is objectified on a level equal to the Tablets of the Commandments.

CONCLUSION

When a book refers to itself, does this reference become part of the book? Apparently, yes. Although it could be argued that speaking about the book is external to it, we find authors doing this in ordinary books. God and Moses could and did do this in referring to the Torah within the text of the Torah. The Torah is aware of itself as a book.