

1. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88a

The Torah says, "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount" (Exodus 19:17).

Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: the verse teaches that the Praised Holy One, overturned the mountain above the Israelites like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial.

Rav Aha bar Ya'akov said: From here there is a substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah. The people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding.

Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: "The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them" (Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews ordained what they had already taken upon themselves through coercion at Sinai.

2. Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 29b:4

Moses went and sat at the end of the eighth row in Rabbi Akiva's study hall and did not understand what they were saying. Moses' strength waned, as he thought his Torah knowledge was deficient. When Rabbi Akiva arrived at the discussion of one matter, his students said to him: My teacher, from where do you derive this? Rabbi Akiva said to them: It is a halakha transmitted to Moses from Sinai. When Moses heard this, his mind was put at ease.

3. R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbitz, Mei Ha-Shiloah, Parshat Yitro (19th c. Poland)

"I (*anokhi*) am the Lord your God." The verse does not state "*ani*," for if it stated "*ani*" that would imply that the Holy One revealed then the totality of the heavenly light to Israel, precluding the possibility of further delving into the Holy One's words, for everything would already be revealed.

The letter "*khaf*" [of *anokhi*], however, denotes that the revelation is not complete, but is rather an estimation and comparison to the light which God will reveal in the future.

4. R. Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man

Revelation means that the thick silence which fills the endless distance between God and the human mind was pierced, and man was told that God is concerned with the affairs of man; that not only does man need God, God is also in need of man...At Sinai we have learned that spiritual values are not only aspirations in us, but a response to a transcendent appeal to us...(p. 196-197).

There is a partnership of God and Israel in regard to both the world and the Torah: He created the earth and we till the soil; He gave us the text and we refine and complete it. The Bible is a seed, God is the sun, but we are the soil. Every generation is expected to bring forth new understanding and new realization. The word is the word of God, and its understanding He gave unto man (p. 274).

5. Dr. Tamar Ross, Expanding the Palace of Torah

The fluid notion of Torah...presents the Sinai revelation of God's word as the initiator of a series of revelations in the form of inspired interpretations throughout the ages. The ideal meaning of the Sinaitic revelation is eked out only with these accumulated interpretations. The various strata are then absorbed as an integral part of the primary text, expanding upon and sometimes even transforming its original meaning, while forever remaining rooted in its precise language and frames of reference...Through this unified prism, we look out onto the world, and we understand it too as an extension of the text (p. 201).

6. R. Eliezer Berkovits, God, Man and History

Religion does not reduce man to being a puppet of God; it elevates him to his highest dignity by enabling him to acknowledge God in free commitment. The "fellowship" is initiated by God in the encounter; it is sustained after the encounter in the ever-renewed act of faith by man. To make this possible, God must hide--during the encounter, to safeguard man's very survival; in history, to protect the spiritual independence of man in making his decision for God; and finally, He must remain rather elusive to the conclusive grasp of reason, so that man may retain his intellectual freedom when inquiring after Him. Where there is compulsion, there can be no fellowship (p. 49).

7. Midrash Shmot Rabbah 28:6

"And God spoke all these words, saying" (Exod. 20:1) - R. Isaac said: At Mount Sinai the prophets of each and every generation received what they were to prophesy, for Moses told Israel, "But with him that stands here with us this day before Adonai our God, and also with him that is not here this day" (Deut. 29:14). He did not say, "That is not standing here with us this day," but, "That is not here with us this day," a way of referring to souls that are destined to be created. Because as yet these had no substance, Moses did not use the word "standing" for them. Still, even though they did not as yet exist, each one received his share of the Torah. Nor were the future prophets the only ones who received at Sinai the prophecy they were to utter. The sages who were to rise in each and every generation--each and every one of them also received at Sinai the wisdom he was to utter.