

# The Shabbat Torah Service

## Torah

Next to human life, that which is most sacred to Jews is the Torah (the Five Books of Moses). Written by hand on parchment with a quill and permanent ink, the words of these five books depict the formative narratives of Jewish identity and self-understanding and the fundamental regulations of Jewish practice, the 613 mitzvot. Later rabbinic teaching presents itself as but an elaboration of these words—midrash.

Because the Torah is written as a continuous scroll, only a part of the text of the Torah can be seen at any one time. Metaphorically, this reminds us that the meaning of Torah is always partially revealed and partially hidden, and its teaching is constantly unfolding; even so, it is one continuous, integrated whole.

## To Whom Is the Torah Addressed?

Rabbi Levi taught that when God appeared on Mount Sinai, each person believed that God was speaking directly to him or her. That is why the Decalogue begins, "I am Adonai your God" (Exodus 20:2; "your" is singular).

Rabbi Yose the son of H̄nina added: The divine word came to each person in accord with that individual's own capacity.

—PESIKTA D'RAV KAHANA

## Taking Out the Torah

None compares to You, ADONAI, and nothing is like Your creation.

Ein kamokha va-elohim Adonai, v'ein k'ma-asekha.

Your sovereignty is eternal;

Your dominion endures in every generation.

ADONAI is sovereign, ADONAI has always been sovereign,

ADONAI will be sovereign forever and ever.

ADONAI, give strength to Your people;

ADONAI, bless Your people with peace.

Malkhut'kha malkhut kol olamim, u-memshalt'kha b'kol dor vador.

Adonai melekh, Adonai malakh, Adonai yimlokh l'olam va-ed.

Adonai oz l'amo yitein, Adonai y'varekh et amo va-shalom.

Compassionate creator,

may it be Your will that Zion flourish;

build the walls of Jerusalem,

for in You alone do we put our trust,

transcendent sovereign—master of all time.

Av ha-rahamim,  
heitivah virtzon'kha et tziyon, tivneh homot yerushalayim.  
Ki v'kha l'vad batahnu, melekh El ram v'nisa, adon olamim.

*We rise as the ark is opened.*

As the ark was carried forward, Moses would say:

ADONAI, rise up and scatter Your foes,

so that Your enemies flee Your presence.

Va-y'hi binso-a ha-aron, va-yomer moshe:  
Kumah Adonai v'yafutzu oyvekha,  
v'yanusu m'sanekha mi-panekha.

Torah shall go forth from Zion,

and the word of ADONAI from Jerusalem.

Praised is the one who gave Torah to the people Israel!

in holiness.

Ki mi-tziyon teitzei torah, u-dvar Adonai mirushalayim.  
Barukh she-natan Torah l'amo yisrael bikdushato.

# סדר קריאת התורה לשבת

## הוצאת התורה

THE TORAH SERVICE קִדְר קְרִיאת הַתּוֹרָה. Opening the ark, carrying the Torah in a procession through the congregation, and reading aloud from the scroll are all symbolic moments when the presence and will of the Divine may be especially felt. It is as if with the opening of the ark, the doorway to heaven itself is opened.

Since there is no physical representation of God in Judaism, the Torah has come to be seen as the most significant expression of the presence of God—it is the representation of God's voice, God's call to us. Taking out the Torah has come to be seen as a representation of divine sovereignty, and so it has taken on the drama of a royal procession. Thus, the Torah is adorned with a crown, and its cover is kissed as it passes through the congregation, as was the custom for kissing the hem of the king's garments. Additionally, the Torah is dressed with accoutrements of the High Priest, including a breastplate and bells (originally used to signal his presence). In short, how we treat the Torah scroll combines the three "crowns" about which the ancient rabbi spoke: the crown of sovereignty, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of Torah (Pirkei Avot 4:17).

*We rise as the ark is opened.*

וַיְהִי בַנְסֵעַ הָאָרוֹן וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה:

קוּמָה יְהוָה וְיִפְצוּ אוֹיְבֶיךָ, וַיִּנְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאָדָי מִפְּנֶיךָ.

כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה, וְדַבַּר יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם.

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁנִתָּה תוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִדְשָׁתוֹ.

NONE COMPARES TO YOU Psalm 86:8. As etiquette in Europe's royal courts became more elaborate (12th–14th centuries), the Ashkenazic Torah service incorporated verses emphasizing God's sovereignty, as if to say that God alone—and no earthly ruler—is the ultimate sovereign. The next verse, "Your sovereignty," is Psalm 145:13: "Adonai, give strength" is Psalm 29:11.

ADONAI IS SOVEREIGN קוּמָה מֶלֶךְ הַתְּהוֹמִים. This sentence is a compilation of biblical phrases about God's sovereignty stitched together to form a creed: God has ruled the world since before creation and will continue to rule eternally.

COMPASSIONATE CREATOR אֵב הַתְּהוֹמִים מֹשֶׁה. This address, followed by a verse that calls for Jerusalem's reconstruction (Psalm 51:20), is all that remains from prayers for forgiveness that were recited during the Torah service in an earlier era.

AS THE ARK WAS CARRIED FORWARD וַיְהִי בַנְסֵעַ הָאָרוֹן. Numbers 10:35 depicts the ark as the seat of divine protection, leading the march and warding off the fledgling nation's enemies. One interpretation is that upon realizing that it is God whom they are fighting, enemies will flee and warfare will become unnecessary (Abraham ibn Ezra).

TORAH SHALL GO FORTH FROM ZION תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה מִצִּיּוֹן. From Isaiah 23: "And many peoples shall come and say, 'Let us go up to the mountain of Adonai, to the House of the God of Jacob, for Adonai shall teach us God's ways, that we may walk in that path; for Torah shall go forth . . .'" As the ark is opened, we express our belief that Torah contains ideals of ethics, politics, and wisdom that affect all humanity.