



# From the Covenant at Sinai to Covenants Today

**Covenants. Connections. Identity.**



**KEEPING  
ISRAEL JEWISH  
TOGETHER**

L'ilui nishmat **Tzipporah Devorah Kronitz**  
bat Yosef Halevi and Chana (Yoshpa) z"l



**Bikkurei Bayit**  
First Fruits of the Home  
Learning Together on Shavuot

## Study Unit #1

# Giving of the Torah or Event at Mount Sinai?

## Covenant: Meeting and Laws

### *Ayelet and Nitai Hod*

#### Introduction

Shavuot invites us to reflect on the event at Mount Sinai. But what actually was the event? Was it the revelation of God – a face-to-face meeting between God and the Jewish people, or the Giving of the Torah?

Both of these are distinct – and different - ways of looking at whatever happened at Mount Sinai, and they are the focus of this study unit. By delving more deeply into both aspects, of the event, we will develop a more nuanced understanding of "covenant/brit," a concept that defines the deepest connections between individuals, between individuals and their nation, and between a people and its God.

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In the Torah, there are two places where the covenant at Sinai is described: Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 4. While both aspects of the event — the Giving of the Torah and the Revelation of God — appear in both, the Giving of the Torah aspect is emphasized more in one of them, and the Revelation of God in the other.

#### Exodus 19: Revelation of God at Mount Sinai

*Mishnah Taanit 4, 8*

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, "What does it mean, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, come out, and look, you daughters of Zion. Look at King Solomon wearing a crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding the day his heart rejoiced.' (Song of Songs 3)

**The day of His wedding is the day that the Torah was given.** And the day His heart rejoiced was the day that the Temple was built, that it may be rebuilt speedily in our days.

*משנה תענית ד', ח*

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל: .... צאִינָה וראִינָה בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן בַּמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בַּעֲטָרָה שְׁעָטָרָה לוֹ אִמּוֹ בְּיוֹם חֲתָנָתוֹ וּבְיוֹם שְׁמֻחַת לְבָבוֹ (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ג'). בְּיוֹם חֲתָנָתוֹ, זֶה מֵתֵן תּוֹרָה. וּבְיוֹם שְׁמֻחַת לְבָבוֹ, זֶה בְּבִן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, שְׂיִבְנָהּ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ. אָמֵן.

Why did Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel compare the Giving of the Torah to a wedding day?

The following text, which describes the actual Giving of the Torah, offers insight:


*Exodus 19*

3 Moses went up to the mountain of God. Then God called to him from the mountain, saying: This is what you will say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites:  
 4 You have seen how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.  
 5 Now, if you obey me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine.  
 6 You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites.

*שמות י"ט*

ג ומנשה עלה אל האלהים; ויקרא אליו ה' מן ההר לאמר, כה תאמר לבית יעקב, ותגיד לבני ישראל:  
 ד אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים; ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, ואבא אתכם אלי.  
 ה ועתה, אם שמעו תשמעו בקלי, ושמרתם את בריתי, והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים, כי לי כל הארץ.  
 ו ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל.

In God's speech to Moses, first there is a **declaration** (verse 4), and afterwards a **contract** (verses 5-6), similar to a marriage contract.

 What are the terms of this contract? What does the Jewish people gain if they fulfill their side of the bargain?

Let's take a look at how the people prepared to meet God at Mount Sinai:

*Exodus 19*

15 Moses said to the people, "Be ready for the third day. Do not approach a woman."  
 16 On the morning of the third day, there were peals of thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud over the mountain, and a very loud blast of the shofar, so that all the people in the camp trembled.  
 17 But Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stationed themselves at the foot of the mountain.

*שמות י"ט*

טו ויאמר [משה] אל-העם, ה'י נכבדים, לשלשת ימים: אל-תגשו, אל-אשה.  
 טז ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקק, ויהי קולת וברקים וענן כבד על-ההר, וקול שפר, חזק מאד; ויחרד כל-העם, אשר במחנה.

18 Now Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke, because God had come down upon it in fire. The smoke rose from it as though from a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently.

יֵצֵא מִן־הַהָרָה אֶת־הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים, מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה; וַיִּתְּצֵבוּ, בְּתַחֲתִית הָהָרָה.  
יָחַד סִינַי, עָשָׂן כְּלוֹ, מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו ה', בָּאֵשׁ; וַיַּעַל עָשָׁנוּ כְּעָשָׁן הַכִּבְשָׁן, וַיִּחַרַד כָּל־הָהָר מְאֹד.  
וַיֵּאָתֶם תְּהִיּוּ לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהִנִּים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ, אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר אֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

On verse 17, Rashi says: “לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים”:

The Divine Presence went out to meet them **like a groom meeting his bride...**



Try to imagine Mount Sinai as a wedding: How does the groom feel? The bride? What were the preparations like? What kind of music was played? What food was served? When you think of it this way, you look at the text in a different light.

Zelda, a poet from a Hasidic family, also focuses on the intimacy of the meeting between God and the people at Mount Sinai:

*I Will Not Hover in the Void / Zelda*


לֹא אֶרְחַף בְּחֶלֶל / זלדה

I will not hover in the void  
unbridled—  
lest a cloud swallow  
the slender line within my heart  
that separates good from evil.

לֹא אֶרְחַף בְּחֶלֶל  
מִשְׁלַחַת רֶסֶן  
פֶּן יִבְלַע עָנָן  
אֶת הַפֶּסֶד הַדַּקִּיק שֶׁבְּלִבִּי  
שֶׁמִּפְרִיד בֵּין טוֹב לָרָע

I have no existence  
without the lightning and voices  
I heard at Sinai.

אֵין לִי קִיּוֹם  
בְּלִי הַבְּרָקִים וְהַקּוֹלוֹת  
שֶׁשִׁמְעֵתִי בְּסִינַי.


 What does Zelda find in the lightning and voices that she heard at Sinai, that give meaning to her existence? Do you connect to the experience that Zelda describes?

Viewing the Sinai experience as an intimate encounter, like a wedding, offers a new way to reflect on our relationship with God and on the idea of a covenant that emerges from it. Let us look at a passage from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks about this metaphor and its meaning:

*Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Radical Then, Radical Now (p.76):*

“According to the prophets, **the central metaphor for the relationship between God and the people of Israel is the marriage covenant.** God is the husband, and the people of Israel are His wife...

“**Every other religious value in Judaism stems from this metaphor.** Faith does not mean belief alone, but also loyalty—just as, in a wedding ceremony, the couple pledges to be faithful to one another. Idolatry thus becomes a form of adultery—a betrayal of the marriage between God and His people...The covenant made with the patriarchs, and later with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, is a form of marriage, in which God says to His people—just as a groom says to his bride—“Behold, you are betrothed to Me.” The Torah is not merely a document, but a *ketubah*, a marriage contract between the Divine Presence and the people, setting out the terms of their covenantal bond—their relationship of trust.”

 What is the essence of the covenant made at Sinai? And what is the role of the Torah within this covenant? Where do you see the need for trust and faithfulness in Judaism? Does the metaphor of a wedding and marriage influence your relationship with God or the Torah?

If the Sinai event is likened to a wedding, then the focus is on the **encounter itself**—the intimate union between bride and groom—while the content of what is said becomes secondary. Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, who lived and worked in America during the second half of the 20th century, develops this idea further:

*Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, God, Man and History, (p. 15)*

"The truly unexpected and astonishing element in any revelation is the very fact that God reaches out to humanity, that the two can even 'meet' at all. The fact that God speaks to man is the core of religious thought—and in itself, it is far more significant than the truth contained in God's words. Thus, the most wondrous aspect of revelation is not its content, but the mere possibility of its occurrence: not the word of God, but the encounter itself."

### **Interim Summary**

These sources define the focal point of the Sinai experience as the encounter between the people of Israel and God. This is a unique and powerful moment that combines the highest possible levels of excitement with awe at the sheer magnitude of the event. It is also an intimate encounter, portrayed as a "wedding" between God and the people that reaches its pinnacle with the forging of the covenant binding Israel to its God. At Mount Sinai, this covenant is given expression through the direct meeting of God and his people, and through the mutual pledge and commitment.

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### **Deuteronomy 4: The Giving of the Torah**

The second aspect of the event described in Exodus 19, and expounded upon when it is reviewed in Deuteronomy, is that God gave us his Torah, and from that moment on that became the law that we were obligated to follow.

#### *Deuteronomy 4*

11 And you approached and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire up to the midst of the heavens, with darkness, a cloud, and opaque darkness.

12 The Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of the words, but saw no image, just a voice.

#### *דברים ד'*

יֵא וַתִּקְרְבוּ וַתַּעֲמִדוּן תַּחַת הָהָר,  
וְהָהָר בָּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ עַד לֵב הַשָּׁמַיִם,  
חֹשֶׁךְ עָנָן וְעָרָפֶל.


יְב וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֲלֵיכֶם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ, קוֹל  
דְּבָרִים אֲתֶם שֹׁמְעִים, וְתַמוּנָה אֵינְכֶם  
רֹאִים, זִוְלָתִי קוֹל.

יג וַיַּגֵּד לָכֶם אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה  
אֲתֶכֶם, לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲשָׂרַת הַדְּבָרִים,  
וַיַּכְתֶּבֶם עַל שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים.

13 And He told you His covenant, which He commanded you to do, the Ten Commandments, and He inscribed them on two stone tablets.

14 And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, so that you should do them in the land to which you are crossing, to possess.

יָד וְאֶתִּי צִוָּה ה' בְּעֵת הַהוּא לִלְמַד  
 אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים לַעֲשׂוֹתָם  
 אַתֶּם, בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶם עֹבְרִים שָׁמָּה  
 לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.

 Have a look at verse 12 above: Is the atmosphere as it is described here as powerful as it was in Exodus? What is the focus of the Deuteronomy text? What does it say was the purpose of meeting at Mount Sinai?

*Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch*

רש"ר הירש

*On Deuteronomy 4, 13*

דברים ד', י"ג

The **commandments that God instructed us to perform are his covenant, and they are the absolute condition of His bond with us.** This covenant—namely, that which He commanded us to do—was presented to us in the form of the Ten Commandments.


הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁהוּא צִוּוֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת הן  
 "בריתו", והן התנאי המוחלט של  
 התקשרותו אלינו. ואת הברית  
 הזאת, כלומר, הדבר שהוא צִוּוֵנוּ  
 לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ, הוא הציג לפנינו בעשרה  
 דיברות.

*On Exodus 19, 1*

שמות י"ט, א'

**"And Israel camped there opposite the mountain"** – Their encampment in this manner opposite the mountain signified that they had prepared their hearts for the receiving of God's commandments and were ready and poised to hear whatever God would say to them next.

יוֹחַן שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל - בחנותם כך נגד  
 ההר, הכינו את ליבם לקראת קבלת  
 מצוות ה' והיו מוכנים ומזומנים  
 לשמוע מה ידבר ה' אליהם עוד.

 What, according to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, were the People of Israel preparing for when they camped at Mount Sinai? What, according to him, was the focus of the covenant? Is this the same focus that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks noted?

**Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik** refines this approach arguing that in the encounter between God and man it is **the content of the words that are most important**, not the encounter itself.

*Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, And from There You Will Seek Him*

**When God reveals Himself to man, He does not do so to fulfill a scientific or intellectual purpose—to tell him about the cosmic drama—but rather to command him and impose upon him laws and statutes, positive and negative commandments.** The God of Sinai is a God of will and mystery, who commands us to follow a unique way of life without explaining to us why or for what purpose.

הרב יוסף דב סולובייצ'יק, ובקשתם משם, (עמ' 145)

כשהאלוהים נחשף לאדם, הרי הוא עושה זאת לא לשם גישום מטרה שכלית מדעית - לספר לו על דבר הדרמה הקוסמית - אלא לצוות לו ולהטיל עליו חוקים ומשפטים, מצוות עשה ולא תעשה. אלוהי סיני הוא אלוהי הרצון והסתום, המצווה אותנו על אורח חיים יחודי בלי להסביר לנו מדוע ולמה.

Note that this approach is the polar opposite of the approach taken by Rabbi Berkovits!



Think about it: Why is the same event described in two very different ways? What is the meaning of the two different perspectives?

Do you resonate more with the Revelation at Mount Sinai approach or the Giving of the Torah approach? What, in your opinion, is the event's central focus? And what, in your opinion, is the central focus of Judaism?

## Concluding Thoughts

We saw that in **Exodus 19**, the emphasis is on the *encounter* with God—a meeting that is likened to a wedding. In contrast, **Deuteronomy 4** focuses on the *giving of the Torah* and the laws that come with it. So what, then, is the relationship between the *Giving of the Torah* and the *Revelation at Mount Sinai*? Between the "wedding" and the receiving of the Torah? And what can we learn from this about the concept of *covenant*?

It seems that the book of **Exodus** presents the event as an occurrence that happened in the *present moment*, to the Israelites standing beneath the mountain ablaze with fire. They are preparing for, and excited by, God's anticipated descent upon the mountain, the long-awaited

encounter between groom and bride. God lovingly and caringly took them out of Egypt, carried them on eagles' wings, and saw them as a “treasure,” a “beloved possession.” This is the pinnacle moment in their relationship.

In contrast, in the book of **Deuteronomy**, Moses recalls the event that happened to their *ancestors*, not to them personally. It is a past-tense event. True, Moses emphasizes that the covenant was made with them as well, but they did not experience what their forefathers experienced. Therefore, from that awe-inspiring event, what remains for them is mainly the “keepsake”—the Torah, the laws and commandments that were given there. From that generation onward, all the way through to today, the Torah becomes a substitute for that majestic moment, that impressive “wedding,” and that event becomes known as the Giving of the Torah—*Matan Torah*. As the generations pass, our focus shifts to finding God within the Torah and its commandments, and the direct encounter with God becomes the encounter with God's *word*.

However, it may be that the Torah is not merely a substitute for that moment. It seems that the Torah also serves as an *operating manual* to help us become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation under God's guidance. From this perspective, the Torah is the *ladder* by which we climb back to that encounter with God. It is through the Torah that we can reestablish that relationship anew.

This dual perspective deepens the concept of *covenant* that has accompanied our learning. **A covenant is the establishment of a relationship.** It demands mutuality, and its pinnacle is an interpersonal encounter. But the covenant cannot rely solely on an uncommitted encounter. It demands action, effort, a shared agreement within which the covenant is sustained. The covenant made with God at Mount Sinai represents the *peak* of the relationship, and the Torah given there is the *practical expression* of the covenant—what enables it to be preserved for generations to come.

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## Study Unit #2

# "And despite it all, we make this covenant" On the Renewal of the Covenant Out of the Brokenness

*Rabbi Elchanan Nir*


### Introduction

**We are living in historic times:** The horrific events of October 7<sup>th</sup>, the amazing unity that followed, the still-raging Swords of Iron War, and the tragic captivity of our hostages —and now, the heartbreaking return of our society to the profound divisions that were so terrifyingly alive right up until October 6<sup>th</sup>.

Throughout our history, the Jewish people have experienced many momentous occasions, and in every one - beginning with **Noah and the rainbow**, on through **Abraham and the Covenant Between the Pieces** and the return of the Jews from Babylon and their ascent to Jerusalem - our people have **paused and made a covenant, a declaration of intent and obligation**.

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In this study session, we will take a journey through the biblical verses that describe these covenantal events, and from them, we will learn about the nature of a covenant.

 Each biblical source here describes a different covenant. As you study them, think about:

- What was the event that led to the covenant?
- Why was a covenant made at that time?
- Between whom was the covenant made?
- How was it made?
- What was the timing for its formation?
- What did those who make the covenant hope to gain from it?

You might find it useful to have a full Bible available for reference.



Questions about each covenant that are worthy to think through together:

- What is a covenant according to this text? A promise? A contract? A relationship?
- What is the place for such a covenant between God and humanity? What is it about the events that led up to this covenant that made this kind of bond necessary?

As we answer these questions, let's see if we can learn something about ourselves, and about the turbulent days we are all living through.

### Covenants from the Days of Noah through Joshua

#### Genesis 9

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,

9 "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you,

10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth.

11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:

13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,

15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

בראשית ט'

ח וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל נֹחַ וְאֶל בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ לֵאמֹר.

ט וְאֲנִי הִנְנִי מִקְיָם אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת זֶרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם

י וְאֶת כָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם... מִכָּל יוֹצְאֵי הַתֵּבָה לְכָל חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ.

יא וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא יִכָּרֵת כָּל בָּשָׂר... וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עוֹד מַבּוּל לְשַׁחַת הָאָרֶץ.

יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם.

יג אֶת קַשְׁתִּי נֹתַתִּי בָעָנָן וְהָיְתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ.

יד וְהָיָה בָעָנָן עָנָן עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִרְאָתָה הַקַּשֶׁת בָּעָנָן.

טו וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל בָּשָׂר וְלֹא יִהְיֶה עוֹד הַמַּיִם לַמַּבּוּל לְשַׁחַת כָּל בָּשָׂר.

טז וְהָיְתָה הַקַּשֶׁת בָּעָנָן וְרֵאִיתִיהָ לְזִכָּר בְּרִית עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹהִים וּבֵין כָּל נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל הָאָרֶץ.

16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

#### Genesis 15

13 And God said to Abram, "You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years.

14 And also the nation that they will serve will I judge, and afterwards they will go forth with great possessions.

15 But you will come to your forefathers in peace; you will be buried in a good old age.

16 And the fourth generation will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites will not be complete until then."

17 Now it came to pass that the sun had set, and it was dark, and behold, a smoking furnace and a fire brand, which passed between these parts.

18 On that day, the Lord formed a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land, from the river of Egypt until the great river, the Euphrates river.

#### Genesis 17

1 And Abram was ninety-nine years old, and God appeared to Abram, and He said to him, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be perfect.

2 And I will place My covenant between Me and between you, and I will multiply you very greatly."

3 And Abram fell upon his face, and God spoke with him, saying,

4 "As for Me, behold My covenant is with you, and you shall become the father of a multitude of nations.

בראשית ט"ו

יג וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תֵּדַע כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה זֶרְעֶךָ  
 בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע  
 מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה.

יד וְגַם אֶת הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָן אֲנִכִּי וְאַחֲרֵי  
 כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל.

טו וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם תִּקָּבֵר  
 בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה

טז וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי יִשְׁוֹבוּ הֵנָּה כִּי לֹא שָׁלֵם עוֹן  
 הָאָמְרִי עַד הֵנָּה

יז וַיְהִי הַשָּׁמֶשׁ בָּאָה וְעֵלְטָה הָיָה וְהֵנָּה תִּנּוֹר  
 עָשָׂן וְלִפִּיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָבַר בֵּין הַגְּזָרִים  
 הָאֵלֶּה.

יח בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת ה' אֶת אַבְרָם בְּרִית  
 לֵאמֹר לְזֶרְעֶךָ נִתְּנִי אֶת הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר  
 מִצְרַיִם עַד הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר פָּרָת.

בראשית י"ז

א וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וַתִּשְׁעַ שָׁנָיו  
 וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵי  
 הַתְּהֵלֶךְ לִפְנֵי וְהָיָה תָמִיד.

ב וְאַתָּה בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְבָּה אוֹתָךְ  
 בְּמֵאד מְאֹד.

ג וַיַּפֵּל אַבְרָם עַל פָּנָיו וַיְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים  
 לֵאמֹר

ד אֲנִי הֵנָּה בְּרִיתִי אִתָּךְ וְהָיִיתָ לְאֵב הַמּוֹן  
 גּוֹיִם.

ה וְלֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֶךָ  
 אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֵב הַמּוֹן גּוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ.

ו וְהִפְרַתִּי אִתָּךְ בְּמֵאד מְאֹד וְנִתְּתִיךָ לְגוֹיִם  
 וּמְלָכִים מִמֶּךָ וַיֵּצְאוּ.

5 And your name shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

6 And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings will emerge from you.

7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and between you and between your seed after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be to you for a God and to your seed after you.

8 And I will give you and your seed after you the land of your sojournings, the entire land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be to them for a God."

9 And God said to Abraham, "And you shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations.

10 This is My covenant, which you shall observe between Me and between you and between your seed after you, that every male among you be circumcised.

11 And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be as the sign of a covenant between Me and between you.

12 And at the age of eight days, every male shall be circumcised to you throughout your generations, one that is born in the house, or one that is purchased with money, from any foreigner, who is not of your seed.

13 Those born in the house and those purchased for money shall be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant.

#### *Exodus 34*

10 And He said: "Behold! I will form a covenant; in the presence of all your people, I will make distinctions such as have not been created upon all the earth and among all the nations, and all the people in whose midst you are shall see

ז וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ וּבֵין זָרְעֶךָ  
 אַחֲרַיִךְ לְדֹרֹתָם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֹא־  
 לֵהִים וּלְזָרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ.

ח וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזָרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרִיךְ  
 אֶת כָּל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְאַחֲזֹת עוֹלָם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם  
 לֵאלֹהִים.

ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל אַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת  
 בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר אֵתָּה וְזָרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ לְדֹרֹתָם.

י זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין  
 זָרְעֶךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ הַמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל זָכָר.

יא וְנִמְלַתֶּם אֶת בָּשָׂר עֶרְלַתְכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת  
 בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם.

יב וְבֵן שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים יְמוֹל לָכֶם כָּל זָכָר  
 לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף מְכַל בֶּן נֶכֶד  
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזָּרְעֶךָ הוּא.

יג הַמּוֹל יְמוֹל יְלִיד בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף  
 וְהָיְתָה בְרִיתִי בְּבָשְׁרְכֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם:

#### *שמות ל"ד*

י וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלֶיךָ אֲנִי בֹרֵךְ בְּרִית נֶגֶד כָּל עַמֶּךָ  
 אֶעֱשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִבְרְאוּ בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ  
 וּבְכָל הַגּוֹיִם וְרָאָה כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אֵתָּה  
 בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת מַעֲשֵׂה ה' כִּי נִוְרָא הוּא אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי  
 עֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ.

יא נִשְׁמָר לְךָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
 גִּרְשׁ מִפְּנֵיךְ אֶת הָאֻמִּים וְהִכְנַעְנִי וְהִחַתִּי  
 וְהִפְרַדִּי וְהִחַיִּי וְהִיבֹסִי.

יב הַשְׁמָר לְךָ פֶּן תִּכְרֹת בְּרִית לְיוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ  
 אֲשֶׁר אֵתָּה בָּא עָלֶיךָ פֶּן יִהְיֶה לְמוֹקֵשׁ  
 בְּקִרְבְּךָ.

יג כִּי אֶת מִזְבְּחֹתָם תִּתְחַצֵּן וְאֶת מִצְבְּתָם  
 תִּשְׁבְּרוּן וְאֶת אֲשֵׁרֵי תִּכְרֹתוֹן.

יד כִּי לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָאֵל אֲחֵר כִּי ה' קָנָא  
 נִשְׁמוֹ אֶל קָנָא הוּא.

the work of the Lord how awe inspiring it is that which I will perform with you.

11 Keep carefully what I am commanding you today: Lo! I will drive out from before you the Amorites and the Canaanites, the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivvites and the Jebusites.

12 Beware lest you form a covenant with the inhabitant[s] of the land into which you are coming, lest it become a snare in your midst.

13 But you shall demolish their altars, shatter their monuments, and cut down their sacred trees.

14 For you shall not prostrate yourself before another god, because the Lord, Whose Name is "Jealous One," is a jealous God.

15 Lest you form a covenant with the inhabitant[s] of the land, and they [the gentiles] go astray after their gods, and they offer sacrifices to their gods, and they invite you, and you eat of their slaughtering,

#### *Joshua 24*

21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord."

22 And Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him."

And they said, "[We are] witnesses."

23 "And now," [said he,] "remove the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel."

24 And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we shall serve, and to His voice we shall hearken."

25 And Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

טו פֶּן תִּכְרַת בְּרִית לַיּוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ וְזֵנוּ אַחֲרֵי  
 אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וְזָבְחוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְקָרָא לָךְ וְאָכַלְתָּ  
 מִזִּבְחֹם.

#### *יהושע כ"ד*

כא וַיֹּאמֶר הָעָם אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לֹא כִי אֵת ה'  
 נַעֲבֹד.

כב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל הָעָם עֵדִים אַתֶּם בְּכֶם  
 כִּי אַתֶּם בְּחַרְתֶּם לָכֶם אֵת ה' לַעֲבֹד אוֹתוֹ  
 וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֲדִים/

כג וַעֲתָה הִסִּירוּ אֵת אֱלֹהֵי הַנֶּכֶר אֲשֶׁר  
 בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְהִטּוּ אֵת לְבַבְכֶם אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵי  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל.

כד וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָעָם אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
 נַעֲבֹד וּבְקוֹלוֹ נִשְׁמָע.

כה וַיִּכְרַת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּרִית לָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא  
 וַיִּשָּׂם לוֹ חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט בְּשִׁבְכֶם.

כו וַיִּכְתֹּב יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֵת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּסֵפֶר  
 תּוֹרַת אֱלֹהִים וַיִּקַּח אֲבָן גְּדוֹלָה וַיְקִימָהּ שָׁם  
 תַּחַת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמַקְדָּשׁ ה'.

כז וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶל כָּל הָעָם הִנֵּה הָאֲבָן  
 הַזֹּאת תִּהְיֶה בֵּינוּ לְעֵדָה כִּי הִיא שִׁמְעָה אֵת  
 כָּל אֲמָרֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר עִמָּנוּ וְהִיְתָה בְּכֶם  
 לְעֵדָה פֶּן תִּכְחֲשׁוּן בְּאֵלֵיהֶם.

26 And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it under the doorpost which is in the sanctuary of the Lord.

27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; it shall be a witness against you, lest you deny your God."

### Future Covenants

So far, we've looked at covenants formed in the present. Is there a common thread that links these covenants and the events that preceded them—events that called for the making of such a covenant? Now, let's move on to future covenants.



*What is the nature of such covenants according to Jeremiah and Ezekiel?*

#### Jeremiah 31

31 See, a time is coming—declares God—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors, when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant that they broke, though I espoused them—declares God.

33 But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days—declares God: I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, "Heed God"; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me—declares God.

For I will forgive their iniquities,

And remember their sins no more.

ירמיה ל"א

לא הנה ימים באים נאם ה' וכרתי את בית ישראל ואת בית יהודה ברית חדשה.

לב לא כברית אשר כרתי את אבותם ביום החזיקי בידם להוציאם מארץ מצרים אשר המה הפרו את בריתי ואנכי בעלתי בם נאם ה'.

לג כי זאת הברית אשר אכרת את בית ישראל אחרי הימים ההם נאם ה' נתתי את תורת בקרבם ועל לבם אכתבנה והייתי להם לא־להים והמה יהיו לי לעם.

לד ולא ילמדו עוד איש את רעהו ואיש את אחיו לאמר דעו את ה' כי כולם ידעו אותי למקטנם ועד גדולם נאם ה' כי אסלח לעונם ולחטאתם לא אזכר עוד.

יחזקאל ל"ז

כא ודבר אליהם כה אמר אדני ... הנה אני לקח את בני ישראל מבין הגוים אשר הלכו

### *Ezekiel 37*

21 And say to them, So says the Lord God: Behold I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land.

22 And I will make them into one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be to them all as a king; and they shall no longer be two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms anymore.

23 And they shall no longer defile themselves with their idols, with their detestable things, or with all their transgressions, and I will save them from all their habitations in which they have sinned, and I will purify them, and they shall be to Me as a people, and I will be to them as a God.

24 And My servant David shall be king over them, and one shepherd shall be for them all, and they shall walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and perform them.

25 And they shall dwell on the land that I have given to My servant, to Jacob, wherein your forefathers lived; and they shall dwell upon it, they and their children and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.

26 And I will form a covenant of peace for them, an everlasting covenant shall be with them; and I will establish them and I will multiply them, and I will place My Sanctuary in their midst forever.

### *Nechemiah 9*

1 And on the twenty-fourth day of this month, the Children of Israel gathered with fasting and with sackcloth and [with] earth upon them.

שֵׁם וְקִבְצָתִי אֹתָם מִסְבִּיב וְהִבֵּאתִי אוֹתָם אֶל אֶדְמָתָם.

כב וְעָשִׂיתִי אִתָּם לְגוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ בְּהָרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִלָּךְ אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְכֻלָּם לְמִלָּךְ וְלֹא יִהְיוּ עוֹד לְשִׁבְי גוֹיִם וְלֹא יִחְצוּ עוֹד לְשִׁבְי מִמְּלָכוֹת עוֹד.

כג וְלֹא יִטְמְאוּ עוֹד בְּגִלּוּלֵיהֶם וּבִשְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וּבְכָל פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֹתָם מִכָּל מוֹשְׁבֵיתֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ בָהֶם וְטִהַרְתִּי אוֹתָם וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם וְאֲנִי אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים. כד וְעַבְדִּי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ עָלֵיהֶם וְרוּעָה אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְכֻלָּם וּבְמִשְׁפָּטִי יֵלְכוּ וְחֻקְתִּי יִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשׂוּ אוֹתָם.

כה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עַל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעַבְדִּי לְיַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בָּהּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עָלֶיהָ הַמָּה וּבְנֵיהֶם וּבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם עַד עוֹלָם וְדָוִד עַבְדִּי נָשִׂיא לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם.

כו וְכִרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם בְּרִית עוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אוֹתָם וְנִתְּתִים וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אוֹתָם וְנִתְּתִי אֶת מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכָם לְעוֹלָם:

### *נחמיה ט'*

א וּבִיּוֹם עֶשְׂרִים וָאַרְבָּעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה נֶאֱסָפוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּצוֹם וּבִשְׁקִים וְאַדְמָה עָלֵיהֶם. ב וַיִּבְדְּלוּ זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל בְּנֵי נֶכֶד וַיַּעֲמָדוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עַל חַטֹּאתֵיהֶם וְעוֹנוֹת אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם. ג וַיִּקְוֹמוּ עַל עַמָּדָם וַיִּקְרְאוּ בְּסֹפֶר תּוֹרַת ה' אֶל־הֵיהֶם.

### *נחמיה י'*

א וּבְכָל זֹאת אֲנַחְנוּ כְּרִיתִים אִמְנָה וְכִתְבִּים וְעַל הַחֲתוּם שָׂרִינוּ לְוִינֹה כְּהֵנִינוּ.

2 And the seed of Israel separated from all the foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their forefathers.

3 And they rose in their place, and they read in the scroll of the Law of the Lord their God a fourth of the day, and another fourth they confessed and prostrated themselves to the Lord their God.

#### *Nechemiah 10*

1 Yet, despite all this, we are making a treaty and writing, and signed thereon are our rulers, our Levites, [and] our priests.

### **A Contemporary Covenant**

*How do we see Israeli society today? Is there a need for a covenant, a renewed pact? Between whom should it be formed, and what will be written in it?*

After the Second Lebanon War, during a time when internal division was widespread, **Rabbi Shagar** wrote the following:

*Rabbi Shagar, "We Shall Walk in the Storm"*

To whom shall we cast our hope? Clearly, first and foremost, to our Father in Heaven. But what does it mean, to "cast our hope"? In my view—it is the People of Israel. In my eyes, the Lebanon War teaches that the foundational Zionist core of the People of Israel has not, heaven forbid, disappeared, but rather, when all is said and done, remains the center.

I have followed the stories of the fallen and their families, saturated with love for the people and the land, that were broadcast on Memorial Day. The Israel that is reflected in these broadcasts is completely different from the image so often portrayed in the media.

We must therefore join together, despite our deep

הרב שג"ר, "נהלך ברג"ש", (עמ' 226)

על מי נשליך יהבנו? ברור, ראשית כל – אבינו שבשמים. אך מה מובנה הקונקרטי של השלכת יהב זו? לדעתי – עם ישראל. בעיניי, מלחמת לבנון מלמדת שהגרעין היסודי הציוני של עם ישראל לא רק שלא נעלם חלילה, אלא הוא הוא, בסופו של חשבון – המרכז. עקבתי אחרי סיפוריהם רפודי אהבת העם והארץ של הנופלים ובני משפחתם, ששודרו ביום הזיכרון. עם ישראל שהשתקף בהם שונה לחלוטין מדימויו השגור בתקשורת.

differences of opinion, with the positive Zionist forces—those who remain loyal to the ideal of justice and who care, those who thirst for the word of God.

עלינו אם כן לחבור, על אף חילוקי הדעות העמוקים, לכוחות הציוניים החיוביים, אלה ששמרו אמונים לאידאל הצדק ושאיכפת להם, לאלה הצמאים לדבר ה'.

Finally, let's look at the words of the Israeli hero, **Menachem Kalmanzon**, spoken during the Israel Prize award ceremony on Independence Day 5784 (2024). Through his heroic actions—together with those of his brother Elhanan (of blessed memory) and his nephew Itiel, known together as "Team Elhanan"—they rescued about a hundred residents of Be'eri from the inferno, and exemplified the essence of a **familial covenant** and the potential it holds:

Elhanan, who loved life and loved his family, knew the danger, and even in the middle of the night told me he did not want to go back into that hell. But despite the fear—he chose to go back in, again and again.

We did not ask ourselves why we were doing it—the 'why' was clear. That night was incredibly hard, the exhaustion and fear did not let up, but we could not stop. As Itiel explained, "When you know your brother is in danger, you do not really have freedom of choice."

At the Meir family home, Michal refused to open the door. She and her sister were too afraid. Michal, from behind the door, pleaded, "Speak so we can hear your Hebrew," and she didn't open until I shouted, "Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad." And the door opened immediately.

I confess—it was not a prayer, it was a cry: "I'm a Jew, I'm here for you, please open the door."  
 [...] We must no longer argue without seeing the good in this people, for the blood of our brothers cries out to us from the ground—for indeed, I am my brother's keeper.

אלחנן, שאהב חיים ואהב את משפחתו, ידע את הסכנה ואף באמצע הלילה אמר לי שהוא לא רוצה לחזור לתופת הזאת. אבל למרות הפחד - הוא בחר להיכנס פעם אחר פעם. לא שאלנו את עצמנו למה אנחנו עושים את זה - הלמה היה ברור. באמצע אותו הלילה כבר היה קשה מאוד, העייפות והפחד לא הרפו, אבל לא יכולנו להפסיק, כמו שהסביר איתיאל: "כאשר אתה יודע שהאח שלך בסכנה אין לך באמת חופש בחירה."  
 בבית משפחת מאיר, מיכל סירבה לפתוח את הדלת. היא ואחותה פחדו מדי. מיכל, מבעד לדלת, התחננה, "תדבר שנשמע את העברית שלך," והיא לא פתחה עד אשר צעקתי, "שמע ישראל ה' אלוקינו ה' אחד." והדלת נפתחה מיד. אתוודה - לא הייתה זו תפילה, זו הייתה זעקה: "אני יהודי, אני פה

בשבילך, בבקשה תפתחי את  
הדלת."  
[...] לא עוד נריב ללא ראיית הטוב  
שבעם הזה, כי דמי אחינו צועקים  
אלינו מהאדמה, כי שומר אחי אנוכי.

## Summary

Covenants, as we have seen, are often forged in the aftermath of trauma - after the Flood, after the sin of the Golden Calf - following collapse and devastation that at first glance seem beyond repair.

At times, however, covenants are formed during normal times as a concrete demonstration of our desire to formalize and give permanence to a relationship. For example, a couple in love often understands that in order to build a long-term, responsible relationship, they need to create a formal contract that anchors their bond beyond the emotional - a legal framework that provides the strength, support, and stable foundation needed to enable a deeply intimate partnership, filled with peaks, ascents, and dips.

Historic transitions, such as the return of Israel to its land after the first exile, necessitate a new type of covenant: an agreement aimed at returning the partners to the force and passion that was evident at the beginning, but that has long since been abandoned or forgotten. The partners in this bond seek to reposition themselves, to rediscover what they once knew but gradually lost.

And even if some part of the initial reality is still there, the partners feel then need to renew their commitment and their loyalty – their passion - as it was in the beginning. A covenant is a return to the point of origin, to the beginning, to the place where we were one, even as we were still two, split in two halves but still one – a complex whole, built of one essence, but which has different elements, and that reveals itself more and more fully through the revelation of its many facets and colors.

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