

FOREWORD to It Takes Two to Torah

By Mayim Bialik

An Orthodox rabbi, and a reform lady journalist walk into a podcast studio. No; it's not the opening to a joke. It's the opening to witness a living conversation about the most important book ever written.

The conversation is 52 weeks long and also eternal; it is a conversation designed to get directly to the heart of the matter. The matter at hand for Abigail Pogrebin and Rabbi Dov Linzer is The Torah, aka the Chumash, aka the Five Books of Moses.

The Torah is the guidebook and jumping off point for all of the questions humans have and even the ones we don't yet know we have. And you're not going to find anything in the Torah about how to get more followers on TikTok or how to use an AI algorithm to improve attendance in your synagogue. You also won't find anything about which \$300 sneaker you should (or shouldn't) buy your teenager for their birthday, and you certainly won't find anything about which transcendental experience might help you overcome the pervasive anxiety that is with you for all of your waking hours and some of your sleeping hours as well.

What Abigail and Rabbi Dov both believe, albeit from different sides of the ideological and philosophical room, is that the Torah is a foundation and a scaffold for life. Everything is in it, and everything comes from it. It is from this shared consciousness that they embarked on a conversation which you are now holding in your hands.

One of the most exceptionally unique things about the Torah as a foundational document of the Jewish religion is that it is prescriptively designed to not be studied in isolation. The Torah is said to be understood only by turning it over and over inside and out and questioning all of it and interpreting all of it and living it fully - but in order to do so, it should never be done alone. Rather, Torah must be studied with another person.

This kind of healthy confrontation of the text has historically occurred between two men. In addition, Orthodox Judaism tended to be the venue for this type of approach to interpretation of the Torah. However, the beauty of the Torah is that it allows for every conversation and every possibility in its understanding and analysis; especially those that shed new light on the wisdom contained within its letters and spaces.

What used to be a separation between men and women, between the Orthodox and the rest of us has shifted and evolved as, similarly, so many aspects of the black and white aspects of our culture have shifted and evolved. And what the Torah holds truest is that we are all united in our capacity to think and to learn and to question and find delight and joy in the Torah.

Abigail, a venerable and respected journalist and thinker, has decided to wade into the waters of Torah analysis with an Orthodox Rabbi from another dimension of Torah teaching. This book is the product of two people literally meeting in the middle of all that there is and all there was and all there will be to bring us their most honest intellectual and relevant understanding of the Divine Torah.

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Every chapter has a narrative as it walks us through each story and lesson, but as any thorough analysis of Torah ought to be, each chapter touches on mysticism, hidden interpretation and insight into Divine meaning. Rabbi Dov and Abigail dutifully sift through doubt and fear and confusion together to find where they agree, where they disagree and where they - and all of us - can be united. Where they find themselves united is in the most diverse of places: the place where we are all one.

For those of us who crave Torah knowledge, Abigail and Rabbi Dov deliver in spades. For those of us looking for a deeper understanding of the mystery and beauty of the Torah, this conversation does not disappoint. And for all of us who picture a world where we are drawn closer together in spite of our differences in order to facilitate greater understanding, a deeper sense of purpose, and an intoxicating blissfulness that only comes from the partnership of Torah analysis, Rabbi Dov and Abigail let us into their world which is also our world. In every chapter here, they establish new branches on a thriving Tree of Life, and our wisdom, understanding, and joy grow with each branch we climb with them.