

## Ruth the Moabite and Matan Torah Part 1

“‘revelation’ from ‘reveal’, classical Latin *revēlāre* to remove the covering from, unveil, to raise the lid of, open, to unmask, to divulge, in post-classical Latin also to explain, to manifest (with reference to divine revelation) (late 2nd or early 3rd cent. in Tertullian) < re- re- prefix + *vēlāre* to cover (see veil v.). (Oxford English Dictionary, “reveal”)

Matan Torah – how does this coincide with and differ from “Revelation”?

Emmanuel Levinas “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition”, in ed. Sean Hand, *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 190-210.

193 ... an exposition of the contents of the Revelation.

194 [the] invitation to seek, to decipher... marks the reader’s participation in the Revelation, in the Scriptures. ... This provides a first indication of what we may call the ‘status’ of the Revelation: its word comes from elsewhere, from outside, and, at the same time, lives within the person receiving it.

195 The Revelation has a particular way of producing meaning, which lies in its calling upon the unique within me. It is as if a multiplicity of persons... were the condition for the plenitude of ‘absolute truth’, as if each person, by virtue of his [or her] own uniqueness, were able to guarantee the revelation of one unique aspect of the truth, so that some of its facets would never have been revealed if certain people had been absent from [humankind].

196 another essential feature of the Revelation in Judaism: the role of oral tradition as recorded in the Talmud.

198 ...the style of the oral Torah retains, even in its written form, the character of oral teaching; the direction and energy of the teacher addressing his [or her] disciples, who listen and ask questions. In its written form it reproduces the variety of opinions expressed, always taking great care to give the name of the person contributing or commenting upon them. It records the multiplicity of views and the disagreements between the [rabbis].

199 The Revelation is this continual process of hermeneutics, discovering new landscapes in the written or oral Word, uncovering problems and truths locked within each other.

200 From the outset the Jewish Revelation is one of commandment, and piety lies in obedience to it. But this form of obedience, while it accepts the practical decrees, does not bring to a halt the dialectic which is called upon to fully determine them. This dialectic continues, and is intrinsically valuable for its style of open discussion. ...oral Law and written Law, on the one hand, and Aggadah and Halakhah on the other constitute... the four compass points of the Jewish Revelation.

202 ...so far we have talked only about the form or structure of the Revelation in Judaism without saying anything about its contents. ... We want to set out...some of the relationships which are established between, on the one side, Him whose message is carried by the Bible and, on the other, the reader, when [s/]he agrees to place the verse [s/]he is examining in the context of the entire Biblical text – that is, when [s/]he takes the oral tradition as the point of departure for his[her] reading of the Bible.

Of course, the invitation extended is to follow the highest path at all times, to keep faith with the Unique alone.... But to follow the Most High is to know, also, that nothing is of greater importance than the approach made toward one’s neighbour, the concern with the fate of the ‘widow and the orphan, the stranger and the poor man’, and no approach made with empty hands can count as an approach. ...My

very uniqueness lies in my responsibility for the other; nobody can relieve me of this.... Obedience to the Most High is defined for me by precisely this impossibility of running away; through this, my self is unique.

206 ...the primordial importance in Judaism of the prescriptive, which is the keystone of the entire Revelation... There is also the fact that the attitude in which the revealed is received is one of obedience [Ex 24: 7 na'aseh ... v'nishmah] ... in which the expression of obedience is placed before the expression referring to understanding. ...This obedience ... derives ...from the love of one's neighbour, a love without eros, lacking self-indulgence, which is, in this sense, a love that is obeyed. Or equally, it stems from responsibility for one's neighbour, the taking upon oneself of the destiny of the other.... The relationship with the other is placed right at the beginning!

207 the subject of our enquiry is the very fact of Revelation, and the relation it establishes with exteriority. This exteriority ... remains 'uncontainable', infinite, and yet the relation is maintained. ...we may find a model for this relation in the attitude of non-indifference towards the Other, in the responsibility towards him [her]; and that it is precisely through this relation that [humans] become [their selves], ...chosen, unique, not interchangeable....