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## BOOK REPORT

by

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BOOK REPORT: The Torah  
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English 8-302

This book report on a classic goes a little outside the recommended reading list, so I want to thank Ms. Teplitsky for allowing me to write about a book that has taken up my life for the past year or so: *The Torah*, by Moses.

*The Torah* is the Jewish name for what Christian people call The Old Testament. It is also called The Five Books of Moses, so in a way I am writing five book reports in one. Jewish people, including me what I am Bar Mitzvahed next year, believe that God dictated *The Torah* to Moses, so he was in a way God's ghost writer. This may account for some of the things in the story that are hard to understand or don't really move the plot, because it's the biggest story there is.

The five books that make up *The Torah* are:

- Genesis - The beginning of the story.
- Exodus - The part where the Jews are slaves and God helps free them from the Egyptians.

- Leviticus - Where God lays down the law.
- Numbers - The census and some fighting and wandering.
- Deuteronomy - Where Moses repeats everything and dies.

Everything starts at Genesis, literally. Here the Big Bang happens and in a few verses telling about that long first week we get to Adam and Eve in their garden, skipping over trilobites and dinosaurs entirely. This moves the story along to Noah and the flood. That is the part that I am studying for my Bar Mitzvah. God here isn't happy with developments, so He tells Noah, the one person who'll listen, to build a boat and load up the animals because everything is going to get flooded out. Noah and his sons build the boat, and the family gets the animals and their stuff together just in time. Then they're stuck floating for forty days, which is *The Torah's* way of saying a long, long time. Nothing is written about how they kept the carnivores from eating the others but eventually the boat lands, God says sorry I won't do it again and gives everyone a rainbow. Noah gets drunk.

The story moves away from Noah to Abraham. He and his wife Sarah have no kids, but after they are nice to guests who turn out to be angels they have a son. Isaac grows up with parents who are like grandparents until one day God tells Abraham to go sacrifice Isaac, so they schlep up a mountain and you get the sense that Abraham is in on the joke but Isaac isn't, he's tied up and asking What now? Then an angel comes and a ram turns up in a thicket to get him off the hook.

There are a lot of events like this in Genesis, like Jacob tricking old Isaac by putting some fur on his arm so Isaac thinks he's the oldest brother Esau, and Jacob's kids tricking him into thinking his favorite Joseph is dead when they give him Joseph's messed up coat, and then

Joseph sticking it to his brothers when they don't spot him as the Pharaoh's agent. I really did find myself wondering what I was supposed to learn from this but I figured it was early days.

Things get heavy in Exodus, as told in the famous movie loosely based on the story. The Israelites have moved in and suddenly the new Pharaoh is not so keen on immigration so the Jews become slaves and build the pyramids. Baby Moses is sent floating on the river so he won't be killed and is found and adopted by a princess.

Long story short, he grows up and finds out who he is, goes out to the wilderness and talks with a burning bush, comes back and hooks up with his brother Aaron so they can go and tell Pharaoh that he should let the Israelites go. It doesn't go well at first with the snakes and the blood in the river because Pharaoh thinks he's all that and isn't buying that God's suddenly paying attention. The plagues get worse and worse and Pharaoh isn't so sure anymore but then God hardens his heart, which kind of feels like stacking the deck.

Eventually everything is so awful that Pharaoh tells Moses and his people to go already. They take some matzoh and reparations and leave but Pharaoh decides to chase them and it winds up with the Jews walking through the Red Sea on dry land and the Egyptian chariots not so much.

To this point *The Torah* has been full of action, but after Moses goes to get the Law from God and Aaron makes the Golden Calf to keep everyone entertained for the forty days he's away the story slows down and *The Torah* gets into rules, which is why we still go over and over it today: because there are a lot of rules, 613 of them according to some people, though a lot of these mitzvot aren't in *The Torah*. Some of the rules in Leviticus were actually very interesting, talking about holiness, and the opposite in a lot of detail that is not appropriate for class discussion but I could talk about offline if anyone is interested.

Most of what follows that isn't about law or instructions for building an ark is the Israelites complaining about how good they had it in Egypt and Moses yelling at them and throwing himself on the ground asking God to take him. For example, even though they are getting fed with manna every day they want meat, so God and Moses just about bury them with quail till it's coming out their noses.

This is already a long report, so I will conclude by saying that *The Torah* is the most confusing book I have ever read. How could Moses write about his own death, except maybe God told him here's how to finish it up? This probably explains why so many people study it over and over, and why I have to study it now.

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