

# אחרית דבר

*Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When Moshe ascended on high, he found the Holy One, Blessed Be He, sitting and tying crowns to the letters of the Torah ...*

When he is all alone God is a typesetter, a meticulous designer of Torah—Torah whose masterpiece book of crowned letters was blueprint for the world's past conception, Torah which is a cryptic code for all future.

In typesetting even God must sit—not standing in fatherhood or judgment of his universe. It is a child's work; throughout history, the most delicate knots have always been tied by children. Look—tiny delicate hands moving from letter to magisterial letter in the intricate and tiny braid of the Still, Small Voice.

The design of books is a holy act and a sacred act—so it is with enormous trepidation and deep love for the Master Typesetter, who himself is crowned with myriad fractal crowns, that I type these words at the end of this process, just as this book goes to press, and unexpectedly I have begun to cry, because I have just now realized the cruel irony of this endeavour, unlocked the deep pain and sadness that have accompanied me in this *imitatio dei* creation of a modern holy book, this flesh-and-blood attempt to tie crowns.

*God said, "In the future, many generations from now, there will be a man named Akiva ben Yosef, who will expound—upon every point and pica of these crowns—heaps and heaps of law."*

*Moshe said, "Can you show me?"*

*God said, "Turn around."*

*Moshe went and sat in Akiva's class, back in the eighth row.*

*But Moshe could not follow what they were saying.*

This is the cruelty of tradition—we try to turn around and embrace our pasts, but in doing so we propel ourselves into the future.

This book embodies that cruelty—the fate of all attempts to seamlessly sew past to future.

Nevertheless, here is why I wanted to tie this book:

We are not a generation of God-fearers. We are not good at the natural piety of our forefathers. We are good at breaking traditions, but are bad at making new ones. We succeed in oral Torah, but fail at written Torah. I wanted and want this book to be a *tiqqun* for us, a reconciliation of our thirsty souls, each of which has fragmented and contracted in our acts of creation. I wanted and want a book that recognizes female Jews and queer Jews as uncompromisingly equal without it also being entirely sexless. I wanted and want a book whose cord to our history and our God, Ancient of Days, is triple-braided with our past, present and future and is easily broken neither by our cynicism nor our idealism, cemented as an unimpeachable part of the world to come.

But the very fact and even consciousness of these goals spells a failure—for how can you receive something of your own design? We turned around and turned around again and we are only dizzy and out of time. Just like Moshe, our teacher.

*Moshe felt very uneasy—until one of the students asked a question.*

"Rebbe," he asked, "but how do we know this?"

Akiva said, "It is a law that Moshe received at Sinai," and Moshe's mind was put to rest.

Like Moshe, we are consoled by the promise of that future classroom. Torah—whose crowns are beautiful for beauty's sake, are sanctified by God's own faith that beauty tied to Torah and given nothing but time will crystallize into more Torah—crowns now ready for new crowns of their own, truth dwelling in the home that beauty has furnished. This is why the Torah's crowns look like inky flowers which have only just begun to bud, unopened, miniature life awaiting the day when they will blossom into letters of their own.

This book was worth making, then, because present time is the problem and future time is the solution. The fragile and tentative knots of our time will be twisted, twisted, twisted again until they are the unbreakable traditions of the future. We each write a Torah and tie its crowns and lift it up and say,

"This is the Torah that Moshe gave to Israel." We point to it prescriptively; we point to it for the sake of our children and their truth. We—we who ourselves are only children, we create these tiny ties to the past and must have faith that someone in the future will turn around, too.

Night after night, in imitation of the Likeness-shaped hole in my heart, I've been sitting, going to bed right before the time for *shacharit*, with my computer and my pile of tiny crowns, the carob seeds whose full fruition I anticipate but will likely never see, all in the hope that the beauty within those crowns (the *tiferet* of *malchut* atop the *yesod* that is the letters) will one day become the Torah for another Akiva many generations hence—for her to learn that which is novel, for her to teach that which is new, for her to tie her crowns atop my crowns, tying higher and higher. Every day now I dream of turning around and suddenly being a silent student in the eighth row of that future classroom, even just to be present, even if I cannot follow, even to be in the form of a bird, just to know that she is there, just to hear that future Torah sound, just to know that there are more crowns beyond my horizons, that this was really given to Moshe at Sinai after all.

But, Hashem, what about in the meantime? What about us?

I ask because here I am, writing these last lines with tears in my eyes, like Moshe at the very end of his book. There was no Torah left for him to write, because all had been revealed, because reverence needed mystery, because in the service of creating reverence, of learning the craft of tying crowns, I sense that I've shed light where there should be darkness, have violated the divine separation between day and night, the revealed things and the hidden things.

Moshe asked, "Hashem, if you have someone like Akiva, then why did you reveal the Torah through me?"

God said, "Be quiet. This is how it came to me."

Holiness and meaning flow from past to future, but the present is circumvented. Not even Moshe could get You to change that.

You are first and You are last, but are You in between? Hashem, in the meantime—where shall I turn?

David Zvi