

Covenants from a Hebrew Perspective



Cut and Bound by Oath: The Ancient Covenant Remembered

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For the Awakening Remnant

Walking the Ancient Path of Torah Obedience
Calling out Deception – Calling out Truth

*On that day YHWH cut a Covenant with 'Abram, to say:
To your seed I have given this land... (Gen. 15:18)*

As Roots Nourish the Tree ~ So Torah Nourishes the Soul

Covenants from a Scriptural Perspective

Introduction

In a world of handshakes, signatures, and broken promises, the idea of covenant has all but lost its weight. But in the Hebrew Scriptures, a covenant isn't a contract to be revised — it is a vow sealed in blood, a bond forged by the breath of the Living Elohiym. It is sacred ground. Eternal ground.

The word *berit* (בְּרִית) echoes through the scrolls of Torah like a steady drumbeat — from the garden to the mountain, from the desert to the promised land. Each Covenant reveals a deeper layer of the relationship between YHWH and His people. These were not casual agreements. They demanded loyalty, obedience, love, and sacrifice. And they still do.

Yet somewhere along the way, something changed. A different narrative emerged — one that called the “old” Covenant obsolete and proclaimed a “new” one without the same holy demands. But is that truly what the Scriptures teach? Or have we misunderstood the very foundation of YHWH's relationship with mankind?

This article seeks to walk back along the ancient path — to revisit what a Covenant truly is, what it meant to the Hebrew people, and what it still means today. Not through the lens of tradition or religion, but through the lens of the Word itself.

For those who desire to walk with YHWH in spirit and in truth... the Covenant still stands.

They said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So, we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a Covenant with you." (Genesis 26:28, ESV)

We will begin this study with the Hebrew word for a "Covenant," which is *ברית* (*b'riyt*, Strong's #1285). This noun is derived from the verb *ברה* (*B.R.H*, Strong's #1262), which means, "to select the best."

When studying Covenants (*בְּרִית*, *beriyt*) in Hebrew, we are going to explore related terms and concepts that connect to this idea. Here are some key words and their meanings that are relevant to the study of Covenants:

These Related Topics:

- **Beriyt** (Covenant)
- **Torah** (Law/Instructions/Directives)
- **Shavu'a** (Oath)

- **“Edut** (Testimony/Witness)
- **Chesed** (Loving-kindness/Steadfast Love)
- **‘Emunah** (Faithfulness/Trustworthiness/Steadfastness)
- **Berakah** (Blessing)
- **Qadosh** (Holy/Set-Apart)

כָּרַת בְּרִית (Karat Beriyyt) – What does it mean "to cut a Covenant": This phrase is often used to describe the act of making a Covenant, emphasizing the solemn and binding nature of the agreement.

What is a Covenant?

A Covenant is a formal, solemn, and binding agreement between two or more parties. In the biblical context, it often refers to agreements between God and humans, establishing a relationship of commitment and obligation. The Hebrew word for Covenant is **בְּרִית** (beriyt), which can be translated as "Covenant," "treaty," "pact," or "agreement".

Meaning of "Cutting" a Covenant

The phrase "to make a Covenant" in modern translations often simplifies the rich and nuanced meaning of the original Hebrew term **כָּרַת בְּרִית** (karat beriyyt). The Hebrew word **כָּרַת** (karat) literally means "to cut," and this phrase "to cut a Covenant" reflects an ancient practice where Covenants were ratified by cutting animals in half and walking between the pieces. This act symbolized the seriousness and binding nature of the agreement, implying that breaking the Covenant would result in a fate similar to that of the sacrificed animals.

Ancient History of Cutting a Covenant

In the Ancient Near East, Covenants were often sealed with blood rituals. Participants would cut animals in half and walk between the pieces, signifying their commitment to the Covenant and invoking a curse upon themselves if they failed to uphold their part of the agreement. This practice is vividly illustrated in Gen.15, where God cuts a Covenant with Abram by passing between the pieces of sacrificed animals.

Suzerain and Vassal Nations

A suzerain is a dominant state or ruler that controls the foreign policy and relations of a subordinate state, known as a vassal. The vassal state retains internal autonomy but owes allegiance and tribute to the suzerain. This relationship is often formalized through treaties or Covenants, where the suzerain provides protection and benefits in exchange for the vassal's loyalty and service.

In the biblical context, the Covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai resembles a Suzerain-Vassal treaty. God (the Suzerain) establishes the terms of the Covenant, promising protection and blessings, while Israel (the Vassal) agrees to obey God's laws and Commandments.

Structure of a Suzerain-Vassal Covenant

Preamble: Identifies the suzerain (the superior party).

Preamble:

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in Commandment to them, after he had defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth and in Edrei. Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law, saying... (Deut. 1:1-5)

This preamble sets the stage for the Covenant by identifying the parties involved (God and Israel) and providing the historical context for the Covenant.

Historical Prologue: Recounts the past relationship and the benevolent acts of the suzerain towards the vassal.

Historical Prologue:

The Lord our God spoke to us at Horeb, saying, 'You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and set your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negev and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to them and their descendants after them. (Deut. 1:6-8)

This prologue emphasizes God's guidance and promises to the Israelites, reminding them of His faithfulness and the Covenant He cut with their ancestors.

Stipulations: Detailed obligations and duties of the vassal.

Example:

Key Stipulations from YHWH to the People

The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17):

- I am the YHWH your ‘Elohiym
- Acknowledging the one true God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt.
- You shall not have for yourself other ‘elohiym upon My Face
- Prohibiting the worship of other gods or idols; and putting a face on God by images or pictures.
- You shall not lift up the Name of YHWH your ‘Elohiym to vanity
- Prohibiting the misuse of God's name.
- Remember and guard the Sabbath day, to keep it Set-Apart
- Commanding rest and worship on the seventh day. No work whatsoever
- Honor your father and your mother
- Emphasizing respect for parents.
- You shall not murder
- Prohibiting the taking of innocent life.
- You shall not commit adultery
- Prohibiting marital and Spiritual infidelity against God.
- You shall not steal
- Prohibiting theft.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
- Prohibiting lying or giving false testimony.
- You shall not covet
- Prohibiting the desire to obtain others' possessions or relationships.

These Commandments form the foundation of Jewish ethical and moral conduct and are central to Jewish religious teachings.

Laws on Worship and Sacrifice (Leviticus 1-7)

- Instructions for burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings.
- Regulations for priests and their duties.

Dietary Laws (Leviticus 11)

- Clean and unclean animals.
- Prohibitions on eating certain animals, birds, and fish.

Laws on Purity and Holiness (Leviticus 18-20)

- Prohibitions on various immoral behaviors.
- Instructions for maintaining ritual purity.
- Commandments to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18).
- Festivals and Holy Days (Leviticus 23)
- Instructions for observing the Sabbath, Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles.

Civil and Social Laws (Exodus 21-23)

- Laws regarding slavery, personal injury, property rights, and social justice.
- Instructions for fair treatment of foreigners, widows, and orphans.

Blessings and Curses (Deuteronomy 28):

- Blessings for obedience to God's Commandments.
- Curses for disobedience and breaking the Covenant.

These stipulations form the core of the Covenant relationship between God and the people of Israel, outlining their responsibilities and the consequences of their actions.

Provision for Deposit and Public Reading: Instructions for storing the Covenant document and reading it publicly at regular intervals.

Example:

When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end, Moses commanded the Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, 'Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. (Deut. 31:24-26).

Public Reading:

And Moses commanded them, 'At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. (Deut. 31:10-13)

These passages illustrate the importance of preserving the Covenant document and ensuring that it is regularly read aloud to the entire community, so that everyone remains aware of their obligations and the terms of the Covenant.

Witnesses: Invocation of gods and other entities (in the heathen nations) as witnesses to the Covenant. For YHWH He called upon heaven and earth to witness His Covenant.

Example:

Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel... 'Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. (Deut. 31:19, 26)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live. (Deut. 30:19)

Then Joshua said to the people, 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.' And they said, 'We are witnesses. (Joshua 24:22)

Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting Covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. (Is. 55:3-4)

These references highlight the importance of witnesses in the Covenant relationship between God and Israel, ensuring that the terms of the Covenant are remembered and upheld.

Blessings and Curses: Consequences for obedience or disobedience to the Covenant terms.

Blessings for Obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14)

- Blessings in the city and field
- Prosperity in urban and rural areas.
- Fruitfulness
- Blessings on offspring, crops, and livestock.
- Protection and Victory
- Protection from enemies and victory in battles.

- Abundant Provision
- Blessings on food supplies and daily needs.
- Success in Endeavors
- Prosperity in all undertakings.
- Establishment as a Holy People
- Being set apart as God's holy people.
- Reputation and Respect
- Being feared and respected by other nations.
- Abundant Rain and Harvest
- Favorable weather and bountiful harvests.
- Leadership and Influence
- Being the head and not the tail, leading rather than following.

Curses for Disobedience (Deut. 28:15-68)

- Curses in the city and field
- Misfortune in urban and rural areas.
- Barrenness
- Curses on offspring, crops, and livestock.
- Defeat and Oppression
- Defeat by enemies and oppression by foreign powers.
- Scarcity and Famine
- Lack of food and basic necessities.
- Failure in Endeavors
- Failure and frustration in all undertakings.
- Diseases and Plagues
- Suffering from various diseases and plagues.
- Exile and Dispersion
- Being scattered among the nations.
- Economic Hardship
- Poverty and economic hardship.
- Fear and Anxiety
- Living in constant fear and anxiety.

These blessings and curses highlight the importance of obedience to God's Commandments and the consequences of disobedience. They serve as a reminder of the Covenant relationship between God and Israel and the responsibilities that come with it.

Scripture Examples of Covenants

Noahic Covenant: After the flood, God made a Covenant with Noah, promising never to destroy the earth with a flood again. The rainbow serves as the sign of this Covenant (Gen. 9:8-17).

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my Covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there anymore be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the Covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a Covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my Covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting Covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the Covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.
(Gen. 9:8-17, KJV)

Abrahamic Covenant: God made a Covenant with Abraham, promising him numerous descendants, land, and blessings. This Covenant is marked by the rite of circumcision (Gen. 15,17).

And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day

the LORD made a Covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: (Gen. 15:10-18, KJV)

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my Covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my Covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my Covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting Covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my Covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my Covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the Covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my Covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting Covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my Covenant. (Gen. 17:1-14, KJV)

Mosaic Covenant: God established a Covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, giving them the Law (Torah) and promising to be their God if they obeyed His Commandments (Exodus 19-24).

Davidic Covenant: God promised King David that his descendants would rule Israel forever, culminating in the Messiah (2 Samuel 7).

New Covenant: The concept of the New Covenant is a significant theme in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, the New Covenant promises a renewed relationship between God and His people, characterized by the internalization of His laws and the

forgiveness of sins. This Covenant is seen as a transformative shift from the external adherence to the law to an internal, heartfelt commitment to God's ways.

Christians believe that this New Covenant was fulfilled through Jesus, as described in Hebrews 8-9. They see Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the means by which the promises of the New Covenant are realized, offering forgiveness and a new relationship with God.

However, from a scriptural perspective, it can be argued that the full realization of the New Covenant is still awaited. The prophecy in Jeremiah speaks of a time when all will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest, and when God's law will be written on the hearts of His people. This universal knowledge and complete internalization of God's law have not yet been fully achieved in the world.

Thus, while the New Covenant is a profound and hopeful promise, its fulfillment still lies in the future, awaiting a time when the world fully embraces the divine relationship and understanding envisioned in the prophecy.

Why is Understanding Covenants so Crucial?

Understanding the Covenants from God is crucial for several reasons. These Covenants form the backbone of the biblical narrative, revealing God's plan for humanity and His commitment to His people. They provide a framework for understanding the relationship between God and humanity, highlighting themes of promise, faithfulness, and redemption.

Importance of Covenants from God

- **Foundation of Faith:** Covenants are foundational to the faith of Israel. They outline the terms of the relationship between God and His people, emphasizing mutual commitments and responsibilities.
- **Revelation of God's Character:** Through Covenants, God reveals His character—His faithfulness, mercy, and justice. For example, the Noahic Covenant demonstrates God's mercy in promising never to destroy the earth with a flood again (Genesis 9:8-17).
- **Revelation of God's Name:** The Covenants from God reveal His name and character in profound ways. Through these sacred agreements, God discloses His faithfulness, mercy, and justice. For instance, the Abrahamic Covenant showcases God's promise-keeping nature, while the Mosaic Covenant highlights His holiness and righteousness. The Davidic Covenant underscores His sovereignty and eternal kingship. Each Covenant not only establishes a relationship with His people but also unveils different aspects of His divine identity, making His name known and revered throughout generations.
- **Guidance for Living:** Covenants provide moral and ethical guidelines for living. The Mosaic Covenant, with its laws and Commandments, offers a comprehensive guide for righteous living (Exodus 19-24).

- **Hope and Redemption:** Covenants offer hope and a promise of redemption. The Abrahamic Covenant promises blessings and a future for Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:1-3), while the New Covenant foretells a time of forgiveness and a renewed relationship with God (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Dispensationalism: Origin and Contradictions

Dispensationalism is a theological framework that emerged in the 19th century, primarily through the teachings of John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. It gained popularity in the United States through the efforts of evangelists and the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible².

Key Features of Dispensationalism

- **Distinct Dispensations:** Dispensationalism divides history into distinct periods or "dispensations," each characterized by a different way in which God interacts with humanity.
- **Literal Interpretation:** Dispensationalists advocate for a literal interpretation of the Bible, particularly regarding prophecy and eschatology.
- **Distinction Between Israel and the Church:** Dispensationalism maintains a clear distinction between Israel and the Church, viewing them as separate entities with different roles in God's plan.

Contradictions with Covenants in Hebrew Scriptures

- **Continuity vs. Discontinuity:** The Covenants in the Hebrew Scriptures emphasize continuity in God's relationship with His people. Dispensationalism, however, introduces a discontinuity by separating God's dealings with Israel and the Church.
- **Unified People of God:** The Covenants, particularly the New Covenant, suggest a unified people of God. Dispensationalism's distinction between Israel and the Church contradicts this idea, proposing two separate peoples of God.
- **Eschatological Expectations:** Dispensationalism's eschatological framework, including the pre-tribulation rapture and millennial kingdom, differs from the Covenantal promises of restoration and renewal found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In summary, while dispensationalism offers a distinct way of interpreting the Bible, it often stands in contrast to the Covenantal framework of the Hebrew Scriptures. Understanding the Covenants from God provides a deeper insight into His unchanging nature and His redemptive plan for humanity, emphasizing continuity and unity in His relationship with His people.

Questions to Ponder

What is the difference between a Covenant and a contract—and why does it matter in our relationship with YHWH?

Answer:

A Covenant (b^{er}it in Hebrew) is a relational and moral obligation, often sealed with blood and witnessed by heaven. It binds two parties in shared destiny and responsibility. A contract, by contrast, is a legal agreement based on mutual benefit and often designed to protect self-interest. Covenants involve identity and loyalty — not just obligation. With YHWH, Covenant isn't about terms we negotiate. It's about surrender, trust, and alignment with His eternal will. That's why it matters: our walk with Him is not a transaction, but a sacred trust.

If YHWH never breaks His covenant, what does that say about those who claim it has been “done away with”?

Answer:

It exposes a tragic misunderstanding. Scripture declares repeatedly that YHWH does not lie, forget, or revoke His Covenants (Deut. 7:9, Ps. 89:34, Jer. 31:35–36). When religious systems teach that the Torah Covenant has been abolished, they are—knowingly or not—accusing YHWH of unfaithfulness. But the fault never lies with Him. It is we who break Covenant. The so-called “abolishment” is not divine; it is doctrinal. YHWH calls His people to return, not to reinvent the terms.

Which Covenant are you walking in today—one built on obedience and faithfulness, or one based on assumptions and traditions?

Answer:

Many today walk in the shadow of a Covenant they do not truly know. Rather than following the everlasting Instructions (Torah) of YHWH, they follow man-made traditions passed down through centuries of syncretism. The true Covenant demands a response of obedience, not selective belief. If we are not walking in alignment with what YHWH originally gave to Israel, then we are walking in a different Covenant — one He never made.

When the Scriptures speak of a “new covenant,” is it truly new... or is it a renewal of the original?

Answer:

The Hebrew word *chadash* can mean “new” or “renewed.” In context (Jeremiah 31:31–33), the Covenant is being renewed — not replaced — with the Torah written on hearts instead of stone.

YHWH did not discard the old to make room for something foreign. He promised to bring the same covenant closer, internalized within a repentant people. The newness is in location (the heart), not in content. The Instructions remain — but now they are embraced by love, not just obligation.

Have we inherited beliefs that reframe the Covenants of YHWH through a Greco-Roman lens instead of a Hebrew one?

Answer:

Yes, overwhelmingly. From the early centuries of Christianity, Hellenistic thought began to redefine biblical concepts: grace vs. law, spiritual vs. physical, faith vs. obedience. This created false dichotomies foreign to Hebraic understanding. The Covenants were recast as obsolete, and Torah was portrayed as a burden rather than a blessing. To reclaim the original meaning, we must strip away the layers of philosophical reinterpretation and return to the Hebraic worldview — where Covenant meant unity with YHWH's righteous way.

How do the ancient covenant signs (like the Sabbath, circumcision, blood, and salt) still speak today?

Answer:

They are not archaic relics — they are living testimonies. The Sabbath remains a sign between YHWH and His people forever (Ex. 31:16–17). Circumcision, while not a matter of salvation, still marks identity and commitment. Blood signifies life and atonement, while salt represents preservation and loyalty in covenant. These signs are reminders that YHWH's ways are enduring, and His covenants are marked in both body and time. We may not be under the same physical priesthood, but the signs still speak to His unchanging holiness.

If covenant means relationship and responsibility, are we treating it like a living bond—or a one-sided blessing?

Answer:

Many treat the Covenant like a benefits package — expecting blessings without walking in obedience. But Covenant always includes two sides: the faithfulness of YHWH and the obedience of His people. Without loyalty, there is no relationship. Without obedience, there is no Covenant. We are not invited into a casual arrangement but into a sacred bond that demands we uphold our side. Grace is real, but so is responsibility. Relationship without responsibility is not Covenant — it's fantasy.

Have you made a Covenant with YHWH on His terms... or on your own?

Answer:

This may be the most important question of all. Many claim to follow God, but they do so based on emotional conviction, tradition, or denominational teaching — not on the terms laid out by YHWH in His Word. His terms are found in the Torah: love Him, obey His voice, walk in His ways. Anything else is man's version of Covenant, not His. If we're honest, many have entered into a "relationship" with a version of God that doesn't require holiness, sacrifice, or loyalty. But YHWH has not changed. The call today is to return — not to what's convenient, but to what is true.

As Blood is to the Body – So Torah is to the Soul