




# UNSCROLLED



## READING GUIDE



REBOOT



# UNSCROLLED

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE A READING GUIDE WITH QUESTIONS TO HELP SPARK CONVERSATION AROUND *UNSCROLLED*. WITH ALL THE TORAH PORTIONS AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS, THE FIRST QUESTION THAT SHOULD BE ASKED IS “HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE TEXT FROM THE TORAH?” WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO BREAK OUT YOUR COPY OF THE PENTATEUCH AND COMPARE THE DIFFERENT TEXTS. UNSCROLLED IS SIMPLY THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE OF COMMENTARIES. JOIN US AT UNSCROLLED.ORG FOR A WEEKLY UNSCROLLED CONVERSATION WHERE WE KEEP IT SIMPLE AND GO DEEP. FOLLOW UNSCROLLED AND #TORAHINI40 TO BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION. EXPLORE. HAVE FUN. UNSCROLL.



# GENESIS

## ◆ B'REISHIT / "GENESIS" ◆

1. Josh Radnor explores the idea of guilt. How does guilt relate to your religious perceptions?
2. The Torah states that Adam was created in God's image. Radnor writes "We have created You in our image." How can these two concepts be reconciled? Should they be reconciled?

## ◆ NOAH / "NOAH" ◆

1. Aimee Bender paints the scene of the Tower of Babel. How do you think the conversations continued after all the languages were changed?
2. Can you name a time when you struggled to communicate?

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◆ **LEKH L'KHA / "GO"** ◆

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1. Jill Soloway explores the relationship of Avi, Aggie and Sarah in contemporary New York City. Why do you think she chose this place and time?
2. Soloway ends with the voice of Izzy. How does the child's voice transform the piece? If Yitzchak had a voice when Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, what would it sound like?

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◆ **VAYEARA / "AND HE APPEARED"** ◆

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1. Damon Lindelof explores Abraham's post-binding behavior. Do you think the conversation should be different? If so, what would you add?
2. Why did Abraham not consult Sarah? Do you think he should have discussed this with his wife?

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◆ **HAYYEI SARAH / "THE LIFE OF SARAH"** ◆

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1. How does Rebecca Dana's Rebecca view Eliezer? How does this differ from the original text?
2. How is Laban portrayed in Rebecca Dana's interpretation? Is there an allusion to this portrayal in the parasha?

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◆ **TOL'DOT / "GENERATIONS"** ◆

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1. How does Foer perceive Esau?
2. What role does intermarriage play in your life or community?

◆ **VA-YETZEI / "AND HE LEFT"** ◆

1. Mansbach takes issue with Laban and Leah's treatment of Jacob.  
Do you think they could have acted differently?
2. What do you think of people renaming places in the Torah?  
If you could rename the place where you live, what would you call it?

◆ **VA-YISHLAH / "AND HE SENT"** ◆

1. Split up and act out Watkins' screenplay. What do your interpretations add to the story?
2. How does the role of the Jewish mother affect how you think about the story? Do you think there were yentas in the time of Jacob?

◆ **VA-YEISHEV / "AND HE DWELT"** ◆

1. Who do you think was right in the story of Judah and Tamar?
2. Do you think the story of Joseph relates to this subplot? What do you think of Auburn's connection of the two?

◆ **MI-KETZ / "AT THE END"** ◆

1. What does Rosenberg's piece say about Joseph's role in Pharaoh's court?
2. Do you think Joseph was a misunderstood creative? In this light, how would the rest of the Joseph story be interpreted?

— ◆ **VA-YIGGASH/“THEN HE DREW NEAR”** ◆ —

1. How does Knafo explain Jacob and Joseph’s relationship?
2. Can you think of other father-son relationships that are described in this matter in our history/culture?

— ◆ **VA-Y’HI/“AND HE LIVED”** ◆ —

1. Is Berman’s blessing a letter or a prayer? Is there a difference?
2. How does Berman use the tribal names in his essay?
3. Do you think names create the child or is the child his own creation?



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# EXODUS

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## ◆ SH'MOT/"NAMES" ◆

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1. How does Susan Dominus view Miriam's need to protect her brother?
2. What is Pharaoh's daughter's role in this story?

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## ◆ VA-ERA/"AND I APPEARED" ◆

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1. What do you make of Pharaoh's web search? How do his magicians relate to the internet?
2. Did Pharaoh act on free will or were his actions imposed by God?

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## ◆ BO/"GO" ◆

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1. Steve Bodow explores the parasha with his wife. Why do you think he chose to have a dialogue?
2. Bodow is very uncomfortable with God's role in the Exodus story. Do any parts of the story make you uncomfortable?

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◆ **B'SHALLAH / "WHEN HE LET GO"** ◆

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1. How is Moses portrayed in Joel Stein's piece?
2. How does Stein portray Joseph's bones? Has there ever been something in your life that you lugged around?

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◆ **YITRO / "JETHRO"** ◆

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1. What do you think of Rebecca Odes and Sam Lipsyte's take on The Ten Commandments?
2. Why do you think they tell the story from Tziporah's perspective?

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◆ **MISHPATIM / "LAWS"** ◆

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1. Why does Ben Greenman choose a poker game to highlight the waiting aspect of Sinai?
2. What do you think of Greenman's take on Moses? Does it make you laugh? Feel uncomfortable? Remind you of people in your life?

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◆ **T'RUMAH / "OFFERING"** ◆

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1. Mark Kushner reimagines the Tabernacle in Bryant Park. How does it compare to the description in the Torah? Check out *The Tabernacle* by Moshe Levine. How do the images compare?
2. Does placing the Tabernacle in New York City make you uncomfortable? Is it a comment on life in the diaspora?
3. If you were putting the Tabernacle where you live, what would it look like? Are there regional details you would include?



◆ **T'TZAVVEH / "YOU COMMAND"** ◆

1. Mark Lamster imagines a conversation between Moses and God's tailor. What conversation do you think took place?
2. How does giving the tailor a voice add to the text?
3. If you could create your own breastplate—what would it look like?

◆ **KI TISSA / "WHEN YOU TAKE"** ◆

1. Why do you think Rich Cohen chooses to tell the Sin of the Golden Calf from Aaron's perspective?
2. How does Cohen's interpretation relate to the text?
3. How do you view imagery in Judaism? Do you think we are past the second commandment?

◆ **VA-YAK•HEL / "AND HE ASSEMBLED"** ◆

1. What is Ross Martin's overarching question in this piece? What do you think about this?
2. Why do you think Martin chooses to use a newspaper story to reinterpret this parasha?

◆ **P'KUDEI / "AMOUNTS OF"** ◆

1. Why does Josh Kun choose to write the Tabernacle as a real estate listing?
2. What does this interpretation say about our times?
3. What do you think are the best features of the Tabernacle?



# PART THREE

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# LEVITICUS

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## ◆ VA'YIKRA/ "AND HE CALLED" ◆

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1. Why do you think Michelle Quint chose to turn sacrifices into a recipe?
2. What does it add to the portion for you?

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## ◆ TZAV/ "COMMAND" ◆

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1. How does Rachel Levin turn a physical sacrifice into a metaphorical sacrifice?
2. Have there been sacrifices you made for your community?
3. Does this passage help you appreciate your clergy more?

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## ◆ SH' MINI/ "EIGHTH" ◆

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1. Are there edible or non-edible items that you deem *treif*?
2. How does *Kashrut* affect your life?

◆ TAZRI'A / "SHE CONCEIVES" ◆

1. Jamie Glassman experiences a modern day leprosy. Can you relate?
2. Why do you think leprosy, as opposed to other ailments, is a disease dealt with in the Torah?

◆ M'TZORA / "BEING DISEASED" ◆

1. Why do you think Tim Samuels writes a prescription for leprosy?
2. What do you think of his long-term side effect? Do you think this is true?

◆ AHAREI MOT / "AFTER DEATH" ◆

1. Amichai Lau Lavie re-writes his Bar Mitzvah speech as a coming out speech. How did reading this piece affect how you perceive the Torah?
2. What does the word abomination mean to you? How do you reconcile these rules in the 21st century?

◆ K'DOSHIM / "HOLY ONES" ◆

1. What does A.J. Jacobs commentary add to the idea of *shatnez*?
2. Why do you think there are laws that we cannot understand/ comprehend/ defy human logic?
3. If you could write the laws of *shatnez*, what would they be?

◆ EMOR/“SPEAK” ◆

1. For generations, rabbis have discussed what “an eye for an eye” means. Is it monetary, physical, emotional? Why do you think Dana Adam Shapiro simplifies it into a rhyme?
2. How can you turn “an eye for an eye” to “an I for an I” in your life?

◆ B’HAR/“ON THE MOUNT” ◆

1. Name a time that you took a “sabbatical” from something.
2. Are there things in your life that you wish you could take a sabbatical from?

◆ B’HUKKOTAI/“BY MY DECREES” ◆

1. Why do you think Christopher Noxon chooses to illustrate the rewards and punishments?
2. If you could add your own rewards and punishments, what would they be?



# PART FOUR

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# NUMBERS

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## ◆ B' MIDBAR / "IN THE DESERT" ◆

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1. Eli Horowitz explores what a boring passage about a census can mean to our lives. How does it relate to your life?
2. What is your favorite way to take stock of objects, people and things?

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## ◆ NASO / "LIFT UP" ◆

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1. Justin Rocket Silverman explores the concept of a *sotah*, through a more personal lens. What do you make of his description? Is it true to the text? What does it add?
2. What are the implications for a *sotah* in our society today?

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## ◆ B' HA'ALOT'KHA / "WHEN YOU STEP UP" ◆

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1. The people complained and got quailed on. Eddy Portnoy views complaining as a national Jewish pastime. Do you think this is true?
2. Where else do you find this Jewish stereotype of complainers in your world?

◆ SH' LAKH L' KHA / "SEND TO YOU" ◆

1. Caitlin Roper uses a metaphor of a broken marriage to understand God's anger over the spies. Would you add anything to her interpretation?
2. Do you think the crime fits the punishment?

◆ KORAH / "KORAH" ◆

1. Adam Levin portrays the Korah rebellion as an issue of who has access to God. Can this be applied to our world today?
2. Why do you think that Korah, Datan and Abiram got easier deaths than their followers?

◆ HUKKAT / "DECREES" ◆

1. Rachel Axler explores the Red Heifer from the point of view of the cow. What does it add to the text?
2. Why do you think there are laws surrounding purity? How does this apply or not apply to 21st century life?

◆ BALAK / "BALAK" ◆

1. How does Shoshana Berger perceive the story of Balaam?
2. Has there been a time in your life where you ignored your "inner donkey?"

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◆ **PINHAS / “PINHAS”** ◆

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1. What does Larry Smith’s essay have to do with Parashat Pinhas?
2. What do you think about Smith’s assertion of “hybrid vigor?”

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◆ **MATTOT / “TRIBES”** ◆

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1. Why do you think this portion deals with promises?
2. Why do you think women’s vows are different in the text?

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◆ **MASEI / “JOURNEYS”** ◆

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1. How does Rebecca Bortman’s infographic make you think about the 40 years in the desert?
2. If you could choose any parasha to make an infographic about—what would it be?



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# DEUTERONOMY

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## ◆ DEVARIM/“WORDS” ◆

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1. In Devarim, Moses reminisces about his time in the desert over 40 years. How does Jesse Aaron Cohen’s reminiscing add to the story?
2. If you could reminisce about *doikayt* (hereeness) what would you reminisce about?

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## ◆ VA-ETHANNAN/“AND I PLEADED” ◆

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1. Ariel Kaminer riffs on the idea that Moses was told he would not be able to enter the Land of Israel after 40 years of service. How do you feel about Moses being denied entrance?
2. Eating Manna every night is again called into question in this commentary. What do you make of Manna? Is it comparable to anything in your life?



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◆ **EIKEV/“IF YOU FOLLOW”** ◆

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1. Charles London meditates on the words of Eikev that are repeated a few times a day when Jews recite Shema. They are that you should teach your children and share these stories. Why does Charles London see this as such a strong message?
2. What parts of your heritage and history have been passed down to you and what do you plan on passing down or not passing down?

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◆ **RE'EH/“SEE”** ◆

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1. Samantha Shapiro reflects on a time in her life when she chose to keep kosher to the letter of the law. Is there a time in your life when you put a restriction on yourself?
2. Do you believe that food has the power to bring people together? If so, why do you think that is?
3. What food experiences have been very meaningful to you?

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◆ **SHOF'TIM/“JUDGES”** ◆

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1. David Katznelson talks about a prophet in his life. What does this have to do with the parasha?
2. Are there any prophets in your life right now?

◆ **KI TETZEI / "WHEN YOU GO"** ◆

1. What does Davy Rothbart's piece have to do with the parasha?
2. Does Rothbart's piece change how you think about the Holocaust and survivors?

◆ **KI TAVO / "WHEN YOU ENTER"** ◆

1. Is your God an NC-17 God?
2. What do you think is the most cinematic part of the Bible?

◆ **NITZAVIM / "ONCE STANDING"** ◆

1. What does Eli Attie accomplish by putting Moses in a board room?
2. Do you think Moses had a PR problem? If so, what do you think caused it?

◆ **VA-YE'LEKH / "THEN HE WENT OUT"** ◆

1. How do Gillian Laub's photos comment on Moses in Va-ye'lekh?
2. If snapshots were made of Moses towards the end of his life, what do you think they would look like?

◆ **HA'AZINU / "LISTEN"** ◆

1. Rick Meyerowitz portrays Moses as a Napoleon-esque dictator. Do you agree with this assessment?
2. What iconography does Rick Meyerowitz's cartoon conjure up?

— ♦ VEZOT HABERAKHA / “AND THIS IS THE BLESSING” ♦ —

1. Roger Bennett explores some of his favorite Torah stories in this final essay. What story was the most encapsulating for you?
2. Where have you seen allusions to the Bible in pop culture and in your everyday life?

Did you enjoy wrestling with the Torah? Join us at [unscrolled.org](https://unscrolled.org) for a weekly Unscrolled conversation where we Keep it Simple and Go Deep. Follow @unscrolled and #Torahin140 to be part of the conversation.