

OzTORAH

Writing the Torah

Towards the end of this week's sidra, God tells Moshe to come up upon the mountain to receive the Torah and commandments which He had written (Sh'mot 24:12).

So when was the Torah written? In advance? After the event?

Maimonides (in the introduction to his commentary on the Mishna) thinks it was at the end of the 40 years in the wilderness.

Nachmanides thinks Moshe wrote the first section (from Creation up to the building of the Mishkan) when he came down from Mount Sinai and finished the Torah at the end of the 40 years.

What about the idea in our verse that God had already written the Torah?

Nachmanides suggests that what God was talking about was the Ten Commandments.

S'forno says God had written the whole Torah but decided to delay giving it to Moshe and the Israelites because of the sin of the Golden Calf.

Rashi has a compromise view, that in truth God was talking about the Ten Commandments but He had actually already written the whole Torah since all the 613 mitzvot are linked up to and implicit in the ten principles of the Decalogue.

A fascinating interpretation is given

by the Meshech Chochmah of Rav Me'ir Simchah of Dvinsk. His idea is that in a spiritual sense the Torah was already written on the hearts of all the people of Israel.

Rabbi Apple served for 32 years as the chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, Australia's oldest and most prestigious congregation. He was Australia's highest profile rabbi and held many public roles. He is now retired and lives in Jerusalem. Rabbi Apple is president of the RCA Israel Region. He blogs at www.oztorah.com