

Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 29b

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When Moses went up to the heights [to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai] he found the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting and putting *taggin* on the [following] letters [of the Torah: **צ**].

Moses said to God, "Master of the Universe, who delays your hand [and makes you take the time to write all these crowns on the letters, surely the Torah is complete and they are not necessary]?"

He said to him, "A person will come along in the future at the end of several generations and Akiba ben Yosef is his name. And in the future he will heap laws on every letter."

[Moses] said to the Master of the Universe, "Show him to me."

[God] said to him, "Turn around [and look]." [Moses] went [to Rabbi Akiva's class] and sat [in the back of the room,] at the end of eight rows, and he was unable to understand what they were talking about. He was befuddled until they came to a matter and [Rabbi Akiva's] students said [to him], "Rabbi, from whence do you [derive a certain law]?" He said to them, "This is a law [given] to Moses from [Mount] Sinai."

[Upon hearing this Moses] calmed down. [Then Moses] turned [back] and came before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, "Master of the Universe, You have such a person [as wise] as this one and [yet] you are giving the Torah through me?!"

[God] said to him, "Silence! This is how [I] have decided [it shall be]."

[Moses] said to the Master of the Universe, "You have shown me his Torah, now show me his reward."

[God] said to him, "Turn around."

He turned [and looked] behind him and saw them weighing [Akiva's] flesh in the meat markets [after dying a martyr's death at the hands of the Romans during the Hadrianic persecutions.]

[Moses] said to Him, "Master of the Universe, is this Torah and this its reward?!"

[God] said to him, "Silence! This is how [I] have decided [it shall be]."

Said Rava, "Seven letters need three strokes and these are they: **צ**."