

Parsha Ponders

Ki Sisa | February 17, 2022 | 17 Adar I 5782

*Monumental mountain manipulation*¹

למה יאמרו מצרים לאמר ברעה הוציאם להרג אתם בהרים וגו'

Why should Egypt say that [Hashem] brought [the Jews] out of Egypt with evil [intent], to kill them in the mountains?...²

The episode of the Sin of the Golden Calf is an unfortunately famous one. Forty days after a National Revelation of G-d, the Jews created and worshipped a foreign idol. Hashem told Moshe that the Jews would be annihilated as a result of their betrayal. Moshe valiantly defended them, saving them from a sure destruction. One of his defenses was a concern for what the Egyptians would say. Hashem went through all this trouble to redeem the Jewish people from slavery, and for what? To kill them in the desert? What's interesting is the way Moshe describes what Egypt would say. He specified surprise that Hashem would kill the Jews "in the mountains". What was he adding with this specification? Besides the question of what Moshe was adding, we could ask a more basic question. What mountains was he referring to³? The Jews were in the desert.

Why would Hashem kill the Jews? Simply put, because they didn't keep the Torah. We know that when the Jews were given the Torah, it says that they stood בתחתית ההר, at the foot of Mount Sinai⁴.

However, read literally, it says that they stood *under* the mountain. Our Sages learn⁵ from here that Hashem took Mount Sinai, flipped it over their heads like a vat, and told them: If you accept the Torah, great. If not, this⁶ will be your burial place. This can be the explanation for להרג אותם בהרים. Usually this would be understood to mean that Hashem would kill the Jews *in* the mountains. However, בהרים can also mean *with* the mountains. If the Jews failed to keep the Torah, they would be crushed by Mount Sinai. They would thus be killed with the mountains⁷. The problem with this approach is why is the word "mountains" in plural? According to this, Moshe should have said that Hashem would kill the Jews with *the* mountain, i.e. Mount Sinai.

Our Sages say⁸ that at the time of the acceptance of the Torah, all the mountains in the world came to the desert. They all wanted the merit to be the mountain upon which G-d gave the Torah. Perhaps we can say that this is the intent behind Hashem killing the Jews with "the mountains"⁹. However, at the end of the day, Mount Sinai was chosen amongst all the mountains. It alone got the merit to be the

¹ Based on a *shiur* by Rav Daniel Glatstein, accessible at <https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=176498>

² Exodus 32:12

³ Cf. Targum "Yonasan" and Targum Yerushalmi *ad. loc.*, who write: לקטלא יתהון ביני טווריא תבור וחרמון ושיריון וסיני. This seems to be a reference to Megillah 29a, which will be cited below, that all the mountains came to Mount Sinai. Cf. as well Rabboseinu Ba'alei HaTosafos and Riva *ad. loc.*

⁴ Exodus 19:17

⁵ Shabbos 88a; Mechilta Masechta D'BC'hodesh § 3; Mechilta D'Rashbi *ad. loc.*; Midrash Tanchuma Noach § 3; ibid Shoftim § 8. It's also mentioned in passing in Avoda Zarah 2b

⁶ Most of the sources say שם תהא קבורתכם, literally: "there" will be your burial place. The commentators are bothered by this expression and have various approaches to explain why it is phrased this way. However, the version in Mechilta D'Rashbi *loc. cit.* says "here" will be your burial place

⁷ Rav Glatstein cited this approach from the *sefer* Lachsos B'Noam Hashem, in turn citing Rav Yechiya Sheli

⁸ Megillah *loc. cit.* See note 3

⁹ Rav Glatstein cited this again from Lachsos B'Noam Hashem

mountain upon which the Torah was given, and it was the mountain which Hashem put over the Jews' heads. As such, we need a better explanation for Moshe's use of the word "mountains".

One of the Shabbos songs that we sing is called "*Yom Shabbason*"¹⁰. One of the stanzas has the words דבר בקדשו בהר המור, Hashem spoke in His holiness, on the Mountain of *Mor*. This seems to be referring to the giving of the Torah, but what is the Mountain of *Mor*? At first glance this is a reference to Mount Moriah, which is associated with the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. If so, what is the song saying? The Torah wasn't given in Jerusalem! It was given in the Sinai Desert, on Mount Sinai?!

Our Sages tell us¹¹ that the reason Mount Moriah is called by this name is because this is where fear was spread to the nations of the world. One explanation for this is referring to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as the grandeur of the Jews when they are in their land intimidates the nations of the world. However, another explanation is that Mount Moriah can be a name for Mount Sinai, as when the Jews received the Torah, all the nations of the world trembled¹². According to this, it makes perfect sense to sing the words that Hashem spoke to the Jews and gave them the Torah on Mount Moriah. This really is a reference to Mount Sinai¹³.

However, we can suggest a different explanation for the intent of this Shabbos song. There's a *Midrash* which says¹⁴ that Hashem wanted the Torah to be given on Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, yet the Jews were in the wilderness. Therefore, he uprooted Mount Moriah, and brought that lofty place to Mount Sinai. If that's true, that could be the intent of דבר בקדשו בהר המור. Furthermore, that means the Jews were sandwiched between Mount Moriah and Mount Sinai¹⁵. This would then be the explanation for Moshe's defense for the Jewish people. If Hashem were to kill the Jews, Egypt would say that He took them out solely to kill them with the mountains. Which mountains? Mount Moriah and Mount Sinai. Good Shabbos

¹⁰ Composed by Rav Yehudah HaLevi

¹¹ *Ta'anis* 16a. The other opinion there says הר שיצא ממנו הוראה לישראל

¹² "*Rashi*" *ad. loc. s.v. מורא לעובדי* and *Tosafos ad. loc. s.v. הר שיצאה ממנו הוראה*

¹³ *Rav Glatstein* cited this explanation from *Rav Chaim Kanievsky's sefer on Zemiros*. I would add that *Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:8 says explicitly that one of the six names of Mount Sinai is הר מוריה. However, *Mattanos Kehunah ad. loc.* points out that in *Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar* § 684, *Tehillim* § 796, and *Midrash Tanchuma Bamidbar* § 7, it says instead הר חמד. Indeed, *Bamidbar Rabbah* proceeds to explain all the names of Mount Sinai, and explains הר חמד without explaining הר מוריה. *Rashash* and *Imrei Yosher ad. loc. concur*. *Mattanos Kehunah* adds that לא מצינו הר מוריה (although *Rashash* cites *Rashi* and *Tosafos loc. cit.*). He also says that in *Shemos Rabbah* 2:4 it says that there are five names for Mount Sinai, and it leaves out both הר מוריה and הר חמד. *Maharzu ad. loc.* seems to have had הר חמד in *Bamidbar Rabbah*. *Anaf Yosef ad. loc.* also understood that it's a typo in *Bamidbar Rabbah*. *Etz Yosef* to *Midrash Tanchuma* cites the *Mattanos Kehunah*, and then cites the *Yefei Toar* to *Shemos Rabbah loc. cit.*, who suggests that Mount Sinai can be called Mount Moriah because Mount Sinai **was uprooted from its location in the wilderness and brought to Jerusalem**, an astounding innovation

¹⁴ Brought by *Yalkut Reuveni* to *Exodus* 19:2 *s.v. בשעת*. *Rav Glatstein* heard of this *Yalkut Reuveni* from *Rav Noach Isaac Oelbaum shlita*. Cf. the *Yefei Toar* cited in the previous note

¹⁵ *Rav Glatstein* suggested that this was the intent of the *Ba'al HaTurim* to *Exodus* 19:17,18, who writes: מלמד הר שנתלש ההר ממקומו ונעשה כהר על גבי הר. However, the commentary on *Ba'al HaTurim* called *Iteros Adar ad. loc.* says this is merely an allusion to what it says in *Mechilta ad. loc.*: [ונכפף] ממקומו ההר שנתלש ההר ועמדו תחת ההר, whereas *Rav Glatstein's* approach does