

Parsha Ponders

Devarim | July 14, 2021 | 6 Av 5781

Having the proper perspective¹

יקוק אלקינו דבר אלינו בחרב לאמר רב-לכם שבת בהר הזה: פנו וסעו לכם ובאו הר האמרי וגו'
Hashem, our God, spoke to us on Chorev (Mount Sinai) saying: “*Rav lachem* dwelling on this mountain.
Turn and travel and come to the Ammorite mountain...”²

Moshe, as part of his goodbye speech to the people, described the various events which got them to where they were now holding. Most of this speech was intended to act as a rebuke towards the people for their shortcomings throughout their journeys. One episode he described was that after spending over a year at Mount Sinai learning Torah, Hashem told them *rav lachem*. Literally He said, it is too much for you to dwell further on this mountain. It sounds like they wanted to stay longer, but Hashem told them it was time to move on. However, this seems to contradict a teaching of our Sages³ that the Jews ran away from Mount Sinai like schoolchildren who run away from their classes. It sounds like they didn't need much pressure from Hashem to leave. Which was it?

One approach is to read the verse as not supporting the teaching of the Sages. Really, the Jews didn't want to leave Mount Sinai. However, rather than being something praiseworthy, this verse is included in Moshe's rebuke of the people. Moshe was telling them that the Torah isn't meant to simply be a theoretical intellectual pursuit. It's supposed to be actualized with *mitzvah* performance⁴. Since the main way to fulfill the Torah is in the land of Israel, they should have been actively awaiting such an opportunity. Instead, they simply wanted to stay at Mount Sinai forever, basking in the light of the Torah and never actually fulfilling it properly. They were informed that this was the incorrect approach.

Another interpretation is indeed they ran away from Mount Sinai. Our verse in fact can be read to support this teaching. Moshe, before his death, decided to rebuke the people for their attitude towards learning the Torah. When Hashem told the people *rav lachem*, it wasn't that Hashem was telling them that they've been at Sinai too long. “Too much for you” can be interpreted differently. Hashem was informing the people the problem with their attitude. They felt that their time at Sinai was “too much”. That's why Hashem stressed that this was the case, “for you”, but not for Me. You found it long and dreary, and at points too difficult to bear. This attitude is what caused the Jews to run away from Sinai like schoolchildren.

The continuation of Moshe's speech to the people referenced their sin with the spies. Instead of trusting in Hashem and believing the land of Israel could be conquered, they listened to the wicked spies who gave a bad report. As a result, they were punished with wandering the wilderness for forty years. Perhaps the juxtaposition of the two rebukes shows that they are connected. Moshe was telling the people that since they weren't as interested in spiritual pursuits as they should have been, it led to their downfall. They were more interested in this physical world, which gave them the idea of sending the spies in the first place. They didn't want to live in a miraculous reality, but rather according to the laws of the physical world. One thing led to another, until tragedy struck. Everyone in that generation was sentenced to die in the wilderness, and only their children would merit to enter the land.

¹ Based on [Kli Yakar](#) and [Chasam Sofer's](#) [Toras Moshe](#) I to [Deuteronomy](#) 1:6

² [Deuteronomy](#) 1:6,7

³ [Yalkut Shimoni](#) § 729, brought by [Ramban](#) to [Numbers](#) 10:35 and [Tosafos](#) to [Shabbos](#) 116a s.v. פורענות. See [Torah Sheleimah](#) to [Numbers](#) Chapter 10 § 110. See also [Yerushalmi Ta'anis](#) 4:5

⁴ See [Avos](#) 1:17

This is hinted to in the verse we started with. After telling the Jews that *rav lachem* dwelling on Mount Sinai, Hashem proceeds to tell the Jews to travel to the Ammorite mountain. Our Sages tell us⁵ that Eisav, the brother of Yaakov, was associated with the Ammorites. Eisav's *modus operandi* was this physical world that we are in. Hashem was hinting to the people that they are better suited to associate with Eisav, considering their distain for Torah learning. At that time their focus was on this world, just like their cousin Eisav.

May we always merit to have the proper attitude towards Hashem's Torah, and ensure that our priorities are where they are supposed to be.

Good Shabbos

⁵ Bereishis Rabbah 97:6, brought by Rashi to Genesis 48:22