

Parsha Ponders

Shavuos / Bamidbar | June 2, 2022 | 4 Sivan 5782

The wedding canopy of Mount Sinai¹

ברוך אתה יקוק מקדש עמו ישראל על ידי חופה וקידושין...

...Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies His nation of Israel, through *Chuppah* and *Kiddushin*²

The blessing recited at every Jewish wedding, known as *birkas erusin*, ends with the idea that Hashem sanctifies His nation, through “*Chuppah*”, the wedding canopy, and “*Kiddushin*”, betrothal. How did Hashem sanctify us with *Chuppah* and *Kiddushin*? We could simply say that He sanctified us with the *mitzvah* of marriage through the process of *Kiddushin*, which is unique to Jews. However, some say³ that this is a reference to *Mattan Torah*, the National Revelation at Sinai, where we received the Torah. The verse says that תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב, Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov⁴. Our Sages read⁵ the word מורשה, inheritance, homiletically to be מאורסה, betrothed. Meaning, the Sinaitic experience was one of a marriage between the Jewish people and Hashem.

Continuing this theme, we can suggest⁶ that the blessing’s reference to *Chuppah*, the wedding canopy, is also referring to when we received the Torah. Our Sages pick up on the interesting wording of a verse which says that the Jewish people stood בתחתית ההר, literally underneath the Mountain⁷. They say⁸ that Hashem lifted Mount Sinai over the heads of the Jewish people. Many ask⁹ what the purpose of this was. Some suggest¹⁰ that the mountain was meant to symbolize a wedding canopy. Since this was the wedding of the Jewish people to Hashem, the mountain would be the *Chuppah*. This also provides a deeper understanding of the blessing’s phraseology of *Chuppah* and *Kiddushin*. It’s referring to the fact that under the wedding canopy of Mount Sinai, the Jewish people became betrothed to Hashem.

With this, we can glean new meaning to a confusing *Midrash* in *parshas Bamidbar*¹¹. When the Jews accepted the Torah, we are told the nations of the world became jealous. They asked incredulously: “What did Hashem see to bring these people closer¹² than the other nations?” Hashem silenced them by asking them to bring their ancestral documents. The assumption is that they were unable to trace back their lineage. Hashem then proceeded to count the Jewish people, delineating who descended from

¹ Based on *Hafla’ah* to *Kesubos* 7b s.v. מקדש (את עמו) ישראל ע”י חופה וקידושין

² *Birkas Erusin*

³ *Maharsha ad. loc.*

⁴ *Deuteronomy* 33:4

⁵ *Berachos* 57a; *Pesachim* 49b. See also *Shemos Rabbah* 43:1, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:10, and *Pesikta Rabbasi* s.v. יהי ביום כלות משה

⁶ The *Maharsha loc. cit.* says it’s a reference to השרת השכינה in the *Mishkan*, but the *Hafla’ah* applies it to כפה עליהם הר כגיגית

⁷ *Exodus* 19:17

⁸ *Shabbos* 88a

⁹ See *Tosafos ad. loc.*, *Midrash Tanchuma Noach* § 3, *Mechilta D’Rashbi ad. loc.*, and *Maharal’s* introduction to his *Ohr Chadash*

¹⁰ *Sefer HaRokeach* § 353; *Matteh Moshe Gemilus Chassadim Hachnassas Kallah* 3:1 s.v. והחופה הוא, brought by *Ta’amei HaMinhagim* § 963 and *Yalkut Yosef Sovah Semachos* 1:6 § 10; *HaEmek She’eilah* 16:6

¹¹ *Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar* § 884, cited as from *Midrash Asfah*

¹² I wasn’t quite sure how to translate: “מה ראו להתקרב”. I would have thought it meant what did *these* people see to make *themselves* come closer, but I don’t quite see what that has to do with jealousy. Also, the *Hafla’ah* seems to understand it how I ended up translating it

whom and how. The *Midrash* ends by citing verses that say that the Jews were commanded with the *mitzvos* at Mount Sinai, and that the census occurred at Mount Sinai¹³. What does Mount Sinai have to do with anything? Why is it even mentioned?

The Torah says¹⁴ that Hashem “came” from Mount Sinai, having “shined forth” from Mount Seir and “appearing” from Mount Paran. What is Mount Seir and Mount Paran referring to? Mount Seir is usually associated with the descendants of Eisav¹⁵, and Mount Paran is usually associated with the descendants of Yishmael¹⁶. Picking up on this, the *Midrash* explains¹⁷ the verse to be describing a historical backdrop to the accepting of the Torah. Hashem went to each of the nations and offered them the Torah, not just the Jews. If so, why are the nations claiming that the Jews were singled out by Hashem? All the nations were offered the Torah!

However, according to what we said, everything makes sense. Since Hashem put the mountain over the Jews heads when they were given the Torah, we already see a special relationship. The mountain over their heads was meant to be a *Chuppah*, singling out the Jewish people as Hashem’s bride. This is something no other nation was granted¹⁸. This special relationship is something the other nations noticed, and desired for themselves¹⁹.

If this is something the other nations took note of, then it’s something we have to make sure we don’t forget. Shavuos is the time of year to pay attention to our special relationship with Hashem and His Torah. We need to internalize the unique role we play in the world, and the tremendous opportunity, and responsibility, it entails. Shavuos is the time in the year when we became betrothed to Hashem. The way He did it was by putting a mountain over our heads, and giving us His Torah. Let’s get studying.

Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach!

¹³ Leviticus 26:46 and Numbers 1:1

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 33:2

¹⁵ See Genesis 36:8,9

¹⁶ See *ibid* 21:21

¹⁷ Sifrei Devarim § 343. See Targum “Yonasan” to Deuteronomy loc. cit.

¹⁸ The nations even exclaimed כגית ההר עלינו (Avodah Zarah 2b)

¹⁹ This is why Hashem demanded their יחסין ספר, since we rule לפסולות אין חופה (Yevamos 57b)