

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XVII: Yitro (Ex. 18:1–20:23)

Essay 16. The five names of Sinai

פָּרַק ט' דְּשֵׁבֶת אָמַר ר' יוֹסִי בַר חֲנִינְיָא חֲמִשָּׁה שְׁמוֹת יֵשׁ לוֹ לְהַר סִינַי, מִדְּבַר-צָוֹן, שְׁנֶצֶטוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלָיו; מִדְּבַר קִדְשׁ, שְׁנִתְקַדְּשׁוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלָיו; מִדְּבַר קִדְמוֹת, שְׁנִיתְנָה קִדְמוֹתָה עָלָיו; מִדְּבַר פָּאֲרוֹן, שְׁפָרוּ וְרָבוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלֶיהָ; מִדְּבַר סִינַי, שְׁיִרְדָּה שְׁנֵאָה לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם עָלָיו. וּמָה שְׁמוֹ? "חֹרֵב" שְׁמוֹ. וּפְלִיגָא דְר' אַבְהוֹ, דְּאָמַר ר' אַבְהוֹ: "הַר סִינַי" שְׁמוֹ. וְלָמָּה נִקְרָא "הַר חֹרֵב", שְׁיִרְדָּה חֹרְבָה לְאוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם עָלָיו עַכ"ל.

The ninth chapter of tractate **Shabbat**:

As Rav Chisda and Rabba, son of Rav Huna, both said: What [is the reason it is called] Mount Sinai [סיני]? [Because it is] a mountain upon which hatred [*sina*] [שְׁנֵאָה] for the nations of the world descended [because they did not accept the Torah]. **Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Chanina, said: Mount Sinai has five names. The Zin Wilderness,**¹ [because] **the Jewish people were commanded** [נִצְטוּ] [*nitztavu*] **in it; the Kadesh Wilderness,**² [because] **the Jewish people were sanctified** [נִתְקַדְּשׁוּ] [*nitkadshu*] **in it; the Kedemot Wilderness,**³ [because the] **ancient** [קְדוּמָה] [*keduma*] [Torah, which preceded the world] **was given in it; the Paran Wilderness,**⁴ [because] **the Jewish people were fruitful** [פָּרוּ] [*paru*] **and multiplied in it; the Sinai Wilderness,**⁵ [because] **hatred descended upon the nations of the world on it** [on the mountain on which the Jewish people received the Torah]. **And what is [the mountain's true] name? Horeb** [חֹרֵב] [*chorev*] **is its name.**⁶ **And that disputes** [the opinion of] **Rabbi Abbahu, as he said: Mount Sinai is its name. And why is it called Mount Horeb?** [Because] **destruction** [חֹרְבָה] [*chorba*] **of the nations of the world descended upon it.**

- Shabbat 89a–89b

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¹ Num. 13:21, 20:1, 27:14, 33:26, 34:3; Deut. 32:51; Joshua 15:1; Isaiah 16:1, 51:3, 64:9.

² Ps. 29:8.

³ Deut. 2:26.

⁴ Num. 13:26; I Sam. 25:1.

⁵ Ex. 19:1, 19:2.

⁶ Ex. 33:6.

לש' לדקדק למה איצטריכו כל תמשה שמות אלו. ונראה שבשביל ארבעה טעמים אמרו בילקוט שניתנה התורה במדבר: ללמדך שאם אין אדם מפקיר עצמו כמדבר אינו זוכה לדברי תורה; ומה המדבר הזה אין לו סוף כדברי תורה אין להם סוף שגאמר "ארצה מארץ מדה" וכו'; וכשם שאין לה סוף כד אין סוף למתן שכרה שגאמר "מה רב טובך" וכו'; ועוד אמרו שם בסמוך "ניתנו במדבר" שאילו ניתנה תורה בארץ ישראל היו אומרים לאמות העולם אין לכם חלק בה, אלא ניתנה במדבר דיימוס פרהסיא במקום הפקר, כל הרוצה לקבל יבא ויקבל.

One must be careful to understand why all five of these names were necessary. It seems that it was said in the Yalkut Shimoni (parshat Yitro, remez 273) that for four reasons, the Torah was given in the wilderness:

- **To teach you that if a person does not make himself abandoned like the wilderness, he will not merit the words of Torah.**
- **Just as this wilderness has no end, so too, the words of Torah have no end, as it is said: “Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.”⁷**
- **And just as the wilderness has no end, so too, there is no end to [the Torah’s] reward, as it is said: “How abundant is the good that You have in store for those who fear You.”⁸**
- **Additionally, it is said there nearby (remez 275): “And they camped in the wilderness”⁹—that had the Torah been given in the Land of Israel, [the Jews] would have said to the nations of the world, “You have no portion in it.” Rather, it was given in the wilderness, which is a place of abandonment, public and open to all. Whoever wants to receive it, let him come and take it.**

וכדי לרמוז על ארבעה טעמים אלו ניתן למדבר הזה ד' שמות, מדבר-צן שגאמר ישראל עליו, נצטוו עליו לעשות עצמם כמדבר בשביל לזכות לתורה. מדבר קדש שגאמר ישראל עליו, שלא יהיו אומרים לאמות העולם אין לכם חלק בה, קא משמע לן שגאמר עליו במקום הפקר. מדבר קדמות שניתנה קדומה עליו, לרמוז כשם שהמדבר אין לו סוף, כד התורה אין לה סוף כשם שהיא קדומה. מדבר פארן שפרו ורבו עליה ישראל, לרמוז שכשם שאין לה סוף כד אין סוף למתן שכרה, ונהו שפרו ורבו עליה ושלפי רוב המעשים טובים של הבנים כן מתרבה תמיד שכר האבות בגן עדן, דקיימא לן ברא מופה אבא, ועוד כתיב "גול] גיל] יגיל אבי צדיק" גילה אחר גילה כדאיתא במדרש. ועיין לעיל בפ' תולדות בארץ על זה.

To hint at these four reasons, the wilderness was given four of the listed five names:

- 1. The Zin Wilderness, for which Israel was commanded, to make themselves like the wilderness in order to merit the Torah.**
- 2. The Kadesh Wilderness, because Israel was sanctified through it, so that they wouldn't say to the nations of the world, “You have no portion in it.” It teaches us that they were sanctified in a place of abandonment, a public and open place for all.**
- 3. The Kedemot Wilderness, because the Ancient Torah was given on it, to hint that just as the wilderness has no end, so too the Torah has no end, just as it is eternal.**

⁷ Job 11:9.

⁸ Ps. 31:20.

⁹ Ex. 19:2.

4. **The Paran Wilderness, where Israel increased and multiplied upon it, to hint that just as the wilderness has no end, so too there is no end to its reward. This is what is meant by the multiplication of Israel upon it: that the greater the good deeds of the children, the more the reward of the fathers increases in the World-to-Come. As we have learned, “The son confers merit upon the father.”¹⁰ It is also written, “The father of a righteous man will exult,”¹¹ meaning that joy follows after joy, as is brought in the Midrash.¹² See above in parshat Toldot, Essay 2, at length on this.**

וְאֶפְשָׁר שְׂרֵשׁ"י רָמַז עַל זֶה בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ הַתְּמוּהָ, שֶׁפָּרוּ וּרְבוּ וְשָׁכַל אֶחָד נִתְעַבְּרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַיִּלְדָּה זָכָר וְלֹא יָדְעָנָא הֵיכָא רְמִיזָא עַב"ל. דְּמָה רָצָה לֹאמַר וְלֹא יָדְעָנָא הֵיכָא רְמִיזָא. אֲמַנָּם בְּמָה שֶׁפִּירְשָׁנוּ הָאֲרֻבָּעָה שְׁמוֹת פְּנִיגַד הָאֲרֻבָּעָה טַעְמִים הֵנ"ל, אִם כֵּן טַעַם הָרְבִיעִי דָּאִין סוּף לְמַתָּן שְׂכָרָה הוּא לְעֵתִיד לְבָא, אֲבָל שָׁכַל אֶחָד תִּתְעַבֵּר אִשְׁתּוֹ שְׂכָר פְּרֻטִי זֶה לֹא יָדְעָנָא הֵיכָא רְמִיזָא.

It is possible that Rashi in Shabbat 89b hinted at this with his puzzling language, “They increased and multiplied, that each man’s wife became pregnant and bore a male child, but I do not know where this is hinted [in Scripture].”

What did he mean by saying, “I do not know where this is hinted”? Actually, with the interpretation we provided of the four names corresponding to the four reasons mentioned earlier, the fourth reason refers to the ultimate reward, which will be in the future. But regarding each one’s wife becoming pregnant and bearing a male child, this specific reward, which relates to this world and not the future, we do not know where it is hinted at.

וְאִם עַל פִּי שְׂאֵמֶר תְּמַלְשֵׁה שְׁמוֹת יֵשׁ לּוֹ וַיֵּשׁ גַּם כֵּן סִינִי. מִדְּבַר סִינִי אֵינְךָ רִידָה לְגוֹפְיָהּ, וְעוֹד סִינִי נִקְרָא נְמִי הֵר וְאֵינְךָ רִידָה לְמֵאֵי דְאֶמְרִינָן עַל פְּסוּק "לְמָה תִּרְצָדוֹן הָרִים גְּבַנְנִים" וְכוּ'. וְעוֹד דִּישׁ פְּלוּגְתָא אִם סִינִי הוּא שֵׁם הָעֵצָם אוֹ אִם הוּא חוֹרֵב, וְלָכֵן אֵינּוּ דוֹמָה לְאַחֵרִים דְּנִדְּאֵי לְכֻלֵּי עֲלָמָא לְדִרְשָׁא אֲתוּ.

Even though it was said that there are five names, the Yalkut Shimoni only gave reasons for four of the names. But there is also Sinai. What is the reason for that name? The term “Sinai Wilderness” is needed for its own sake, because hatred descended upon the nations of the world on it.

Moreover, Sinai is also called a mountain, and [“Mount Sinai”] is needed for what is said regarding the verse, “Why so hostile, O jagged mountains, toward the mountain God desired as His dwelling?”¹³

Furthermore, there is a dispute whether Sinai is the proper noun for the mountain itself, or if it is Horeb, and therefore it is not like the other names, since everyone agrees that the others are derived from a teaching.

¹⁰ Sanhedrin 104a.

¹¹ Prov. 23:24.

¹² Gen. Rabbah 63:1.

¹³ Ps. 68:17.

ועוד יש לומר דההוא מרבנן דשאל לרב כהנא מי שמייע לך מאי "הר סיני"? אמר לו וכו', למה הנה שואלו דוקא על הר סיני לחודיה. אלא נדאי דאותם השאר הנה יודע טעמם, אבל זה שנקרא הר לא ידע הטעם.

Additionally, it can be said that the sage who asked Rav Kahana, "Did you hear what [is the reason that the mountain was called] Mount Sinai? [Rav Kahana] said to him: [It is because it is] a mountain upon which miracles [nissim] were performed for the Jewish people." When challenged, he proposed an alternative reason, that it was a good omen [siman] for the Jewish people.¹⁴ Why did [the sage] ask him specifically about Sinai? Surely, the other sages knew the reasons behind the other names, but regarding the one called "mountain," i.e., Sinai, they did not know the reason.

והתוספות שם על ההיא שפפה עליהם את ההר כגיגית מפאן מודעא רבה לאוריינתא, פתבו שאף על פי שפבר הקדימו נעשה לנשמע מכל מקום כשראו האש הגדולה חזרו בהם, ונמצאת קבלתם באונס. אבל ממדרש תנחומא שכתב שם הרי"ף נראה שהתורה שפכתב קבלוה ברצון והוצרכו האונס לתורה שבעל פה, ועוד תירץ שהתורה קבלוה ברצון אבל לא קבלו ברצון עוגש הביטול ועיי"ש.

We learn from the Gemara that [G-d] overturned the mountain above [them] like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Acha bar Ya'akov said: **From here there is a substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah.¹⁵ The Tosafot there wrote that although they had already said "we will do" before "we will listen" with regard to fulfilling the commandments,¹⁶ nevertheless, when they saw the great fire,¹⁷ they reconsidered, and their acceptance was under duress.**

However, from the Midrash Tanchuma, the Rif¹⁸ wrote there in *Meor Einayim*, his commentary on the *Ein Yaakov*, that it seems that they accepted the written Torah willingly, and the duress was needed for the Oral Torah. He further explained that they accepted the commandments of the Torah willingly, but they did not willingly accept the punishment associated with *bitul*, i.e., failing to observe the commandments, and see there.

ומעתה מאן דאמר שינדה שנאה וכו' סבירא ליה שישאל קבלו התורה ברצון, ומשום הכי הקב"ה שונא האומות שלא רצו לקבלה, וגם האומות שונאים את ישראל לפי שקבלו מה שלא רצו הם לקבל, וזה גרם להם שנאת הקב"ה. ומאן דאמר שינדה חורבה סבירא ליה שגם ישראל לא קבלוה ברצון ואף על פי כן קיימוה, וזהו חורבה שלהם שנידונו לחרבה ולשממה.

Now, what is the meaning of the one who said that the wilderness is called Sinai because hatred descended upon the nations of the world? He holds that the Israelites accepted the

¹⁴ Shabbat 89b.

¹⁵ Shabbat 88a.

¹⁶ Ex. 24:7.

¹⁷ Ex. 19:18: "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for the L-rd had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently."

¹⁸ Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto (1565–1648).

Torah willingly, and because of this, the Holy One, Blessed be He, hates the nations who did not want to accept it. Also, the nations hate Israel because [Israel] accepted what they themselves did not want to accept, and this caused the Holy One, Blessed be He, to hate [the nations].

But the one who says that the wilderness is called Horeb because destruction descended holds that even Israel did not accept [the Torah] willingly, so there is no need for G-d to hate the other nations. But yet [Israel] upheld it, and this is the destruction of the nations, that they were sentenced to destruction and desolation because they do not uphold the Torah.

ועוד יש לומר לפי מה שכתבו המפרשים שאם ישראל קבלוה ברצון אז אין האומות יכולים עוד להסתזיק בה, שהרי מתחלה סלקו ידיהם ממנה וישראל זכו בה מיד הם לבדם, אבל אם ישראל לא קבלוה ברצון אלא שאסר כף קיימוה, עדיין היו יכולים אף האומות לחזור ולנפות בה. ואם כן מאן דאמר שיירדה שנאה, לפי שהם קבלוה ברצון, ומאן דאמר שיירדה חורבה לפי שלא חזרו לנפות בה ולקיימה כמו שעשו ישראל.

Furthermore, one could say according to what the commentators wrote, that if Israel accepted [the Torah] willingly, then the nations can no longer claim it, since they initially withdrew from it, and Israel alone merited it from the beginning.

But if Israel had not accepted it willingly and only later upheld it, the nations could still have a chance to claim it. Therefore, the one who says that hatred descended upon the nations of the world holds that Israel accepted it willingly, and the one who says that destruction descended holds that they did not return to claim it and to uphold it as Israel did.

ועוד דייק לומר חורבה משום דקיימא לן שהבן נח אינו מצווה על קידוש השם, ודינו הוא שיעבור ואל יקרג, ואם לא רצה לעבור ונקרג הרי זה מתחייב בנפשו. אבל ישראל לפי שקבלו התורה מצוים על קידוש השם, ובמסירת עצמו על קידוש השם הוא מחליש פח הטומאה והקליפה וסותר כל בנינה כנודע, ומשום הכי דייק לומר שיירדה חורבה וכו'.

Furthermore, it's precise to say that “destruction” is used here because we hold (as the Rambam writes in the Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings, chapter 8, halacha 2 that a non-Jew is not commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d. The law of [the non-Jew] is that he should transgress rather than be killed, and if he does not wish to transgress and is killed, he is liable for his own death.

But Israel, since they accepted the Torah, are commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d. By giving themselves over for sanctification of the Name of G-d, they weaken the power of impurity and the forces of evil, demolishing all their construction, as is known to Kabbalists. Therefore, it is specifically emphasized to say that “destruction” descended to the other nations.

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