



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Where is Mt. Sinai

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Emil W. Herman  who loved and supported Torah learning.

Shavuos Day 2

The Kosher Army

Everyone knows that the Jewish Nation got the Torah at Mt. Sinai. But does anyone here know exactly where Mt. Sinai is?

There is an ancient debate among all kinds of experts over where Mt. Sinai exactly is. It's certainly located somewhere in the Sinai Desert not far from Egypt. But when it comes to which mountain is Mt. Sinai, there are various opinions. The truth is, nobody has a real "tradition" that one specific mountain or another is the actual place upon which the Torah was given.

There are Bedouins who say that a certain mountain called Jebel Musa (Mt. Moshe) is the actual mountain upon which the Torah was given. There's even a bit of proof for it: rocks from that mountain all have the image of a bush on them, and if you break a rock from this mountain in two, both new faces will each have the image of a bush on them. And no matter how many rocks you split it into, each little new rock will also have a little bush on it. This is something you can see.

Over 700 years ago, Jewish leaders wrote about this reported phenomenon.

In the year 1956, a Jew visited the late Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, with a strange story to tell.

The Jew said that he was a shofar-maker by trade, and that one night, he dreamt that he was to travel to Turkey and there purchase a very large ram's horn. (Turkey is the native home to some very large rams.) He was to bring this horn to Israel and there turn it into a long shofar to bring to Rabbi Goren—so that he could blow it at Mt. Sinai, on the same Jebel Musa we just mentioned.

And indeed, the man fulfilled his dream. He traveled to Turkey, bought a ram's horn, came back to Israel, made it into a shofar, and now had come to the Rabbi's house to bring him the shofar. In those days, however, no one dreamed that Israel would conquer the Sinai Desert.

A short time later, during the Kadesh Campaign, Israel indeed conquered the Sinai. The moment Rabbi Goren heard about it, he immediately got onto a jeep and headed in the direction of Mt. Sinai. Even though he didn't have permission to do so, he decided to climb Jebel Musa with the shofar.

But it wasn't as easy as it sounds. Jebel Musa is 2285 meters in elevation, and to get to the top, you have climb 3,300 steps—which is about the number of years since the giving of the Torah.

Still, Rabbi Goren decided to climb up, and he made his way up the mountain. He later related that towards the end, he literally was on all four, but ultimately got to the top and blew the

shofar. When he did, he felt that he was closing a circle of close to 3,300 years since the Giving of the Torah, with the sound of the shofar being heard on the mountain again.

The first time a shofar was heard on Mt. Sinai, we read about that in the Torah in the Book of Shmos, in the portion of Yisro, at the time of the Giving of the Torah: “And the sound of the shofar went forth very strongly,” and Rashi says, “The conventional wisdom is that the longer one blows, the more one’s sound gets weaker, but here, it continued getting stronger.” This was the sound of G-d’s Shofar. When a human being blows a shofar, at first it’s strong, and the longer he blows, the weaker it gets, but when G-d blows, then it gets stronger and louder. This is what happened immediately before the hearing of the Ten Commandments.

Not only that, but that shofar woke up the people sleeping in the camp. Likewise, “And it was when it came morning, and there was thunder and lightning... and the sound of the shofar going forth very strong, and all the people in the camp trembled.”

But there’s another shofar sound in the story of Mt. Sinai.

A little earlier, during the preparations for the Giving of the Torah, we are told that G-d commanded Moshe to warn the Jewish Nation that no one should even think of getting close to the mountain: “Take heed for yourselves against going up on the mountain or touching its edges,” and, “When the yovel sounds a long, drawn out blast, they shall go up on the mountain.” Rashi says, “When the shofar sounds one very long blast, it’s a sign of the departure of the Divine Presence; with the stoppage of the sound at the passing of the Divine Presence, they have permission to go up.” And Rashi continues: “The yovel is a ram’s horn” (Shmos 19:13).

In his commentary on the verse, the Chizzkuni brings down something very interesting. He says, “‘When the yovel sounds a long, drawn out blast’ does not refer to the shofar of the Giving of the Torah; this ‘long, drawn out blast’ occurred after the Mishkan was erected, and then Moshe blew the shofar and gave the people permission to go up. So says Rabbi Saadya Gaon.

What Rabbi Saadya Gaon says is that there was another shofar blowing in addition to the famous shofar-blowing at the Giving of the Torah, and this blowing was to serve as a sign of the departure of the Shechina and permission to climb Mt. Sinai.

Now with regards to blowing the shofar, there are two holidays on which we blow the shofar—once on Rosh Hashanah with all the to-do, and the second time at the end of Yom Kippur at the end of the Neilah prayer.

These two shofar-blowings symbolize the two shofar-blowings that occurred at the Giving of the Torah: the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashahan symbolizes and reminds us of the “great sound of the shofar” of the Giving of the Torah. And the blowing of the shofar at the end of Yom Kippur symbolizes the second blowing of the shofar, as the Alter Rebbe writes in his Shulchan Aruch: “And the reason for this blowing is to symbolize the departure of the Shechinah above, just like it occurred at the Giving of the Torah—when the Shechinah rose up, it is said, ‘When the yovel sounds a long, drawn out blast,’ etc.” (Laws of Yom Kippur 623:14). (See Hisvaduyos 5745 Vol. I, pg. 186.)

But after having said all the above, we can still ask the question: Why indeed did G-d not sanctify Mt. Sinai? What is the reason we don’t even know today where Mt. Sinai is? We know where Mt. Moriah is! So why don’t we know where the Torah was given?

The Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:3) tells us, “Rabbi Eliezer’s study hall was built like a sort of an eyelash, and he had one stone there designated as a seat. Once Rabbi Yehoshua entered and began kissing the stone, saying that the stone was like Mt. Sinai and the person who sat on it was like the Ark of the Covenant.”

What we learn from this story is that Mt. Sinai is not a geographical location. Rather, every place where Jews study Torah is Mt. Sinai. And when Jews gather to hear the reading of the Torah in synagogues everywhere, each and every synagogue becomes Mt. Sinai.