

Shabbat Mishpatim

Exodus 24:1-18

KEY KOSHI:

WHAT DOES ISRAEL'S/MOSES' GOD-MEETING MOMENT TEACH US ABOUT GOD'S REVELATION IN OUR LIVES?
HOW DOES THIS MOUNTAIN-MEETING GUIDE US IN THE SACRED ENCOUNTER OF OUR ☆SPIRITUALITY

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

24:1] Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel, and bow low from afar. 2] Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but the others shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him."

3] Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of the Lord and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, "All the things that the Lord has commanded we will do!" 4] Moses then wrote down all the commands of the Lord.

Early in the morning, he set up an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. 5] He designated some young men among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to the Lord. 6] Moses took one part of the blood and put it in basins, and the other part of the blood he dashed against the altar. 7] Then he took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will faithfully do!"^a 8] Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord now makes with you concerning all these commands." 9] Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended; 10] and they saw the God of Israel: under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity. 11] Yet He did not raise His hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

12] The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them." 13] So Moses and his attendant Joshua arose, and Moses ascended the mountain of God. 14] To the elders had said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. You have Aaron and Hur with you; let anyone who has a legal matter approach them."

15] When Moses had ascended the mountain, the cloud covered the mountain. 16] The Presence of the Lord abode on Mount Sinai, and the cloud hid it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.

17] Now the Presence of the Lord appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain. 18] Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain; and Moses remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

1 וְאֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֶה אֵלַי הַהָר וְאֶתְּהוּ וְאֶתְּהוּ
נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרֹחֵק : 2 וְנִגַּשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבַדּוֹ אֶל־
יְהוָה וְהֵם לֹא יִגָּשׁוּ וְהָעָם לֹא יַעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ : 3 וַיָּבֵא
מֹשֶׁה וַיְסַפֵּר לָעָם אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה וְאֵת כָּל־
הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וַיַּעַן כָּל־הָעָם קוֹל אֶחָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־
הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה : 4 וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה
אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁכֵּם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיָּבִן מִזְבֵּחַ
תַּחַת הָהָר וּשְׁתַּיִם עֲשָׂרָה מִצְבֵּה לְשִׁנַּיִם עֲשׂר
שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל : 5 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־נְעָרָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּזְבְּחוּ זִבְחִים שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה
פָּרִים : 6 וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה חֲצִי הַדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאַגְנֹת
וְחֲצִי הַדָּם זָרַק עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ : 7 וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר
הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר־
דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע : 8 וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־
הַדָּם וַיִּזְרַק עַל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה דָם הַבְּרִית
אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם עַל כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה :
9 וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶתְּהוּ נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים
מִזְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל : 10 וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְתַחַת רַגְלָיו כַּמַּעֲשָׂה לְבִנְת הַסַּפִּיר וַיִּכְעַס
הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר : 11 וְאֶל־אֲצִילֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא
שָׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּחְזֹו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ :
12 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֶה אֵלַי הַהָרָה
וְהָיִה־שָׁם וְאֶתְּנָה לְךָ אֶת־לְחֹת הָאֲבֹן וְהַתּוֹרָה
וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתֶם : 13 וַיִּקַּם מֹשֶׁה
וַיְהוּשַׁע מִשְׁרָתוֹ וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָהָר הָאֵלֶּהִים :
14 וְאֶל־הַזְּקֵנִים אָמַר שְׁבוּ־לָנוּ בָּזָה עַד אֲשֶׁר־
נָשׁוּב אֵלֵיכֶם וְהִנֵּה אֶתְּהוּ וְחֹר עִמָּכֶם מִי־בַעַל
דְּבָרִים יִגָּשׁ אֲלֵהֶם : [מִפְטִיר] 15 וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה אֶל־
הָהָר וַיִּבֶס הָעָנָן אֶת־הָהָר : 15 וַיִּשְׁכֹּן כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה
עֲלֵהָר סִינַי וַיִּכְסְהוּ הָעָנָן שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים וַיִּקְרָא
אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִתּוֹךְ הָעָנָן : 17 וּמִרְאֵה
כְּבוֹד יְהוָה כָּאֵשׁ אֲכַלְתָּ בְּרֹאשׁ הָהָר לְעֵינַי בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל : 18 וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הָעָנָן וַיַּעַל אֶל־
הָהָר וַיְהִי מֹשֶׁה בְּהָר אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים
לַיְלָה :

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS...

V.1-2 *Then He said to Moses: Come up to the Lord with Aaron, Nadav & Avihu and the 70 elders of Israel, and bow low from afar. Moses alone shall come near*

FOX... To close out the account of Covenant-making which began in chapter 19, the text recounts a formalized ceremony which has many points of contact with what was generally done throughout the Near East when a Covenant was cut... This is no imposing of laws by a dictator, but a freely accepted agreement cemented by blood, the signifier of life itself. As representatives of the people, Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons and the 70 Elders ascend Mount Sinai, and, most remarkably, "see" God in some sort of vision—without, as one might expect, their being destroyed.

V.9-11 *Then Moses, Aaron, Nadav & Avihu and the 70 elders ascended, and they saw the God of Israel: Under His feet was the likeness of paved work of sapphire, clear as the Heavens. Yet He did not send His Hand against the leaders of Israel; they beheld God, they ate and they drank.*

RASHBAM... They saw Him as Moses was promised: "You may see My Back, but My Face must not be seen." Here, for the sake of making the Covenant, God did them the honor of appearing, as I explained in "Brit Beyn HaB'turim." [Gen 15:17]

RASHI... They looked and gazed, which earned them the death penalty, but the Holy One did not want to mar the joy of Revelation, so He delayed the deaths of Nadav & Avihu until day the Mishkan was dedicated, [Lev 10:2] and the elders until "the people took to complaining bitterly... The Lord was incensed and a fire broke out, ravaging the outskirts of the camp."

IBN EZRA... They did not "see" Him literally, but in a prophetic vision. The same is true of Isaiah's vision, "I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne." [Isa 6:1] Even though Isaiah says, "My own eyes have beheld the King, Lord of Hosts." [Isa 6:5] The "God of Israel" refers to the "Creator in whose hand is every living soul." The enlightened one will understand.

RAMBAN... IBN EZRA says they "saw Him" in a prophetic vision. The P'shat sense of this expression "God of Israel" is that the merit of Jacob gave them the privilege of seeing this vision. But, according to the true interpretation, since at the giving of Torah it begins "God spoke" [20:1]—which is related as "The Lord our God has shown us His Presence," [Deut 5:21] the text here makes clear how they "saw the God of Israel." The elders saw more in this vision than the rest of Israel down below, who saw only "the great fire." ONKELOS alludes to this by translating: "They saw the Presence of the God of Israel."

A.KAPLAN... "under His feet" Just as feet come in contact with the ground, so allegorically, God's feet are the attribute that connects with the level below. Therefore, they are the conduit of prophecy. [ZOHAR 2:104b] Others say that "feet" means their vision was the base of God's Throne of Glory.

RAMBAM... ONKELOS translates "raglav" as a figurative expression "under the Throne of His Glory." But consider this well and you will see that Onkelos keeps far from the idea of corporeality... for this is a demonstrative truth, an indispensable element to our faith... Accordingly, "tachat raglav" denotes "under that of which He is the cause." Therefore, they comprehended the real nature of prime matter, which emanated from Him, and of whose existence He is the only cause. [GUIDE, 1:28]

V.12-14 *Then Adonai said to Moses: Come up to Me on the mountain and be there, and I will give you the stone tablets... So Moses and Joshua arose, and Moses ascended the mountain of God. To the Elders he said: Wait here for us till we return to you. You have Aaron & Hur... Let anyone w/a legal matter approach them.*

R'MENACHEM MENDEL of KOTZK... There is a difficulty in the text: IF Moses came up the mountain, he would already "be there." Why would Torah add "Veh'yeh Sham"? From this redundancy we find proof that even one who strains himself to ascend a high peak, and is indeed able to reach the summit, may nevertheless still not be there. Though he may be standing at the highest peak, his head may be entirely somewhere else.

ABRAVANEL... Rather, "Be there," that is, be something new there, be ready to receive a new nature, like beings on high.

V.15-18 *When Moses ascended the mountain the cloud covered the mountain. The Presence of Adonai dwelt on Mt Sinai, and the cloud hid it for six days. On the 7th day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud... The Presence of Adonai appeared to all Israel as a consuming fire atop the mountain. Then Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain...*

RASHI... The cloud was like thick smoke through which the Holy One made a passage for Moses to be.

IBN EZRA... "the cloud hid it for six days." That is, the cloud hid "him," Moses, so no one could see him.

SA'ADIA points out that the six days could not have taken place after the Revelation, but prior...

ABRAVANEL... Rather, "hid him," to give Moses time to purge all the material remnants from his body, matching the six days of the original creation. Only after achieving this higher spiritual state was Moses ready

BRETTLER... "the cloud" in which God's Presence is manifest. "K'vod Adonai"—This Presence is the main manifestation of the divine in Priestly thought. The main thrust of the following chapters, 25-32, is the construction of the Mishkan, to which God will transfer His abode and accompany Israel wherever they go.

The ANCHOR BIBLE... "six days" The reason for this time lapse is unspecified. EHRlich attractively suggests that YHVH spends six days making the model for the Mishkan, just as He spent six days making the world. One might suppose that Moses is purifying himself [CASSUTO] or that YHVH's glory is cauterizing Sinai... Although Moses approached the blazing fire, he is not consumed, rather, like the Bush that initiated his mission, he remains aglow with the holy flame...

ZOHAR... R' Shimon bar Yochai asked: How could Moses have survived in the presence of God's Majesty? It was only because he entered into the midst of the cloud and was entirely enveloped by it. When the soul comes into contact with this world, it is clothed in a covering called the body, and when it enters the upper spheres it must be clothed in a new protective covering which allows it to see and hear that which it could not possibly on earth. What seemed a consuming fire below was a sacred shield up above.

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

Rabbi LARRY KUSHNER...

Rabbi ELIYAHU KI-TOV, the Orthodox Israeli commentator, poses the problem in classic religious terms. We know that the Torah was given once and for all time at Sinai. Yet Torah's words are so important that our sages say, "Each and every day the Divine Voice issues forth from Sinai." [P.Avot, 6:2]

Not only then is Torah eternally unchanging, it is also always present, always able to be heard. Right here and now, the Holy One of Being is saying the very same words that were said at Sinai. This poses two problems: IF Torah is being spoken all the time, why can't we hear it? And, if Torah is being spoken all the time, then what's so special about Revelation at Sinai? KI-TOV answers both questions with a daring insight into the nature of consciousness.

The reason Sinai is so special and the reason we are unable to hear God's Torah, he suggests, is because the noise, static, and muzak of the world drown out the sound of God's Voice. Only at the time of the giving of Torah did God silence the roar. In the language of modern-day sound recording technology, God, you might say, switched on the Dolby noise reduction system. At Sinai we could hear what had been there [and continues to be here] all along.

God is the One who enables us to hear what is being spoken at the most primary levels of Reality. Each act of conscious focus is a miniature Sinai that can be in every place.

...The Midrash cites a teaching of Rabbi HUNA, who taught in the name of Rabbi AMMI, making a misreading into theology:

WHY do we change the name of the Holy One, and call God MAKOM—The PLACE?

Because God is the Place of the world and not the other way around. Rabbi Yossi bar Halafta said: We do not know whether God is the Place of the world or whether the world is God's Place, except from the verse: "Behold, there is a Place with Me." [Exod 33:21] It follows that YHVH is the Place of this world, but this world is not God's place. [B'REISHIT RABBAH 68:9]

...You are already where you need to be. You need ascend no mountain nor go anywhere...

Find a point an inch or so behind your sternum where your heart beats. That is where the MAKOM—The Place—is...In the words of Rabbi ARYEH LEIB of GER, "A person is able to awaken the Holiness of God in any/every place."

Rabbi MENACHEM MENDL observed that the verse in Exodus seems redundant. God says to Moses, "*Come up to Me on the Mountain and be there.*" [Ex 24:12] If Moses were to ascend the Mountain, why would God also bother to specify that he "be there"? Where else would he be? The answer, suggests the Kotzker, is that people often expend great effort in climbing the mountain, but once they get there, they're not there; they are somewhere else.

...Holy gates are everywhere....Sinai is not a mountain, but a moment...People comes who would sell us tickets to the holy places, who perhaps never were graced to witness or themselves ascend higher. Culture and organized religion conspire to trick us into believing that entrances to Holiness are only at predictable times and prearranged places. [Sometimes they are right.] Otherwise people would not pay their dues. And most of us professional holy people would have to set out again in search of the Nameless One.

...When people become convinced that the places and the things are themselves holy or that some people have the spiritual power, then it is time once more to set out for and rediscover the fundamental truth: Entrances to Holiness are everywhere and all the time.

[[Eyes Remade for Wonder](#), L.Kushner, pgs 14-21. Jewish Lights]

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place...Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

Rabbi MORDECHAI YOSEF of IZHBITZA—MEI HaSHILO'ACH.....

[1800-1854, Polish Hasidic master, student of Reb Simcha Bunem]

"And YHVH said to Moses: Ascend to Me, to the mountain, and I will be there."

"To the mountain" means to the end of the renewal of all levels. A person must first pass through all forms of wisdom on the journey of spiritual struggle in this world until he reaches true wisdom.

Then, *"and I will be there."* As in Bamidbar 21:17 *"ALEH Be'ER ANU-LAH...They went from there up to the Well"* The well—that is, the source of true wisdom. What we learn on going up the mountain is that all the forms of wisdom along the way are but stations on the journey, while the main point of your place is the end of all levels, simply called *"there."*