

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778  
 Parashat Bamidbar / פרשת במדבר / Shavuot / שבועות

## A Short Mountain

There are two mountains that take center stage in the Torah's narratives: Mount Sinai and Temple Mount. These are the sites of momentous and history changing events and places of Divine revelation to the Jewish people.

One might have assumed that the sites of breathtaking events would have awe-inspiring topography and have mountaintops that peaked in the heavens. However, surprisingly, this is not the case. As the midrash teaches us, Mount Sinai is rather short relative to other mountains.<sup>1</sup> Also, anyone who has visited Yerushalayim knows that Temple Mount does not stand out in terms of its altitude. Should not God have chosen taller mountains to reveal Himself to us?

This question, at least regarding Mount Sinai, is addressed by the above-cited Midrash. Chazal teach us that God avoided giving the Torah on a tall mountain due to the fact that such a choice would might have imparted a message of pride and arrogance. Rather, God specifically chose the shortest of mountains – “I only desire Sinai which is the lowliest amongst you”<sup>2</sup> - to underscore the significance of humility when receiving and learning the Torah.

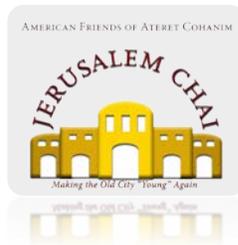
While this beautifully highlights a central message, the Lubavitcher Rebbe asked that the reason of the Midrash seems insufficient. If God wanted to teach us humility, then why give the Torah on a mountain at all? Would not have a valley, which avoids any semblance of aloofness, been an optimal choice?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe<sup>3</sup> responded that God was trying to teach us how to properly balance seemingly conflicting poles. On the one hand, humility in the face of God and the Torah is an essential quality for a Jew. However, the danger of such self-effacement is that it might also whittle

<sup>1</sup> Midrash Tehillim 68:7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Likkutei Sichos, 1, pg. 276.



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away at the proper backbone that a person needs to stand up for what is right and true. Therefore, instead of choosing a valley, God opted for a mountain – representing stiffness, sturdiness and principledness – while not the tallest mountain in order to highlight the trait of humility. Only when these traits are calibrated, can we properly receive and study the Torah.

Perhaps the same idea is true regarding the mountains of Yerushalayim. On the one hand, it is our capital city and should be elevated above the standard ground-level. We need to proudly live in Yerushalayim and tell the world of our rights to it. However, simultaneously, we need to approach Yerushalayim with the proper humility befitting the home of God. Therefore, the mountains of Yerushalayim are elevated but not towering over the surrounding terrain.

May we merit to attain the proper balanced posture towards the Torah and Yerushalayim!