

Behar: Sinai, Mount Sinai, and Behar



Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

From the Sichos in English Collection

The Torah portion of *Behar* begins with the statement:¹ “G-d spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai....” The Hebrew word for “on the mount” is *behar*, giving rise to the accepted title of this portion. Why was the title “*Behar*” chosen, without even stating that the mountain was Sinai?

The words “mount” and “Sinai” have opposite connotations. A mountain implies loftiness and height. In a spiritual sense, this means that at times a Jew is to act in a bold, forceful and expansive manner — “His heart was expansive in the ways of the L-rd.”²

The word *Sinai*, on the other hand — without speaking of a mountain — is rooted in the Hebrew word *s'neh*,³ or thorn-bush, and thus denotes humility and self-nullification.

In the context of a Jew's spiritual service, there are three levels: a) the level of Sinai — humility and self-nullification; b) the level of Mount Sinai — a combination of expansiveness and humility; and c) *behar* — the level of expansiveness. It is this final level that a person is to aspire to, and for which the Torah portion is named.

This will be better understood by considering a person who acts as another's agent, emissary and messenger, and contrasting this with a wholly devoted servant.

The *Gemara* states⁴ that “One's emissary is like the person himself.” Our Rabbis explain⁵ that there are three ways in which one can act as another's agent:

- a) The person empowers and authorizes his agent to act in his stead. In this instance, the action itself is accorded to the agent.
- b) Even the action is seen as being done by the person himself, albeit through the vehicle of an emissary;
- c) Not only are the actions considered to have been done by the person himself, but the emissary and agent become one at the time the mission is fulfilled.

Still, even with regard to the highest form of emissary, the agent still exists as an entity unto himself. This is why the phrase “One's emissary is like the person himself” applies only to those matters that directly relate to the agent's fulfillment of his mission.⁶

This is not so with regard to one's servant. A servant is not an entity unto himself; his whole being is that of his master. It is for this reason that “whatever is acquired by the servant is acquired by his master.”⁷

All the above also applies to the levels of Sinai, Mount Sinai, and *behar*:

At the very outset of man's spiritual service, when a person exists as an entity unto himself, he must act in complete humility and self-nullification — Sinai. At this stage, broadness and expansiveness have no place, for it would be emanating from his own ego, rather than from G-dliness and holiness.

This level of Sinai is similar to the first kind of emissary; the messenger is an entity unto himself; he merely negates himself and acts on behalf of the person who sent him.

A higher level of service is that of "Mount Sinai." At this stage, a person may already feel some of the height and expansiveness of a "mountain." This is because at this stage of his spiritual development, the person has so negated himself that the expansiveness is not an outgrowth of his own ego, but an expression of holiness.

Nevertheless, here too a person must possess the self-nullification of Sinai, for nullification has yet to wholly permeate him.

This is similar to the higher forms of emissary, wherein the agent gives over his power of action, or indeed his very being, to the one who sent him. Nevertheless, in this stage as well, there is still a difference between the emissary and the person who sent him.

The loftiest manner of service is that of *behar* — the person is so entirely negated to G-dliness that it is not even necessary to remind him of "Sinai" — there exists nothing for him other than G-d, just as the entire being of a servant is that of his master.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXII, pp. 159-163.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Vayikra* 25:1.
2. *Il Divrei HaYomim* 17:6.
3. See *Ramban*, *Devarim* 1:6; *Radak*, *Sherashim* s.v. *s'neh*; commentators on *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:66.
4. *Berachos* 34b, and places cited there.
5. See *Lekach Tov* by Rabbi Yosef Engel, Principle I.
6. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XX, p. 303.
7. *Pesachim* 88b; *Kiddushin* 23b. See also *Hemshech* 5666, pp. 326-7.

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