

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 16

Mishpatim, Sicha 5

The Context:

In describing the events of Moshe preparing to receive the tablets from G-d, the Torah says:

“Moshe came within the cloud, and he went up to the mountain, and Moshe was upon the mountain forty days and forty nights.” (Shemos 24:14)

Rashi comments: Within the cloud — This cloud was a kind of smoke, and the Holy One, blessed is He, made a path within it.

The Question:

1. Why does Rashi need to alter the literal meaning of “cloud” and render it as “a kind of smoke”? What difficulty in this verse prompted Rashi’s non-literal interpretation?
2. Why does Rashi need to explain how Moshe passed through the cloud?

Previously, the Torah described Moshe as “draw[ing] near to the opaque darkness, where G-d was,” (Ibid 20:18) which Rashi interprets as “three partitions: darkness, cloud, and opaque darkness,” yet no explanation is offered as to how Moshe passed through the cloud!

The Explanation:

Previously in this narrative, the Torah reported, “Moshe went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.” (Ibid 24:15) Therefore, our verse’s opening, “And Moshe came within the cloud,” is entirely unnecessary, for if he “came upon the mountain,” then he obviously had to go “within the cloud.”

Rashi therefore concluded that the cloud spoken of in this verse is different from the cloud referenced earlier. “This cloud,” Rashi writes, as opposed to the previous cloud, “was a kind of smoke.” How did Rashi arrive at this description? In the previous verse, the Torah said, “the appearance of the glory

of G-d was like a consuming fire atop the mountain. (v. 17) Thus, Rashi deduced that the cloud of this verse was “a kind of smoke.”

Regarding the unusual description “a kind of smoke,” as opposed to simply, “smoke,” this can be explained by the fact that the mountaintop did not possess much vegetation and flammable material to fuel a fire with smoke. The fire and its smoke was therefore miraculous, a “kind of smoke.”

Because this cloud was different from the cloud above the mountain spoken of previously, that is why G-d had to pave a path for Moshe to pass through. Being that it was a cloud of smoke, it would be unbecoming of Moshe to become sullied with smoke prior to his encounter with G-d.

The Deeper Dimension:

Smoke is produced when fire takes hold of a substantive material object. The smoke of a thin paper being burned is not comparable to that of a tree. Spiritually, smoke alludes to the incineration of the egoistic properties of a given being. When the Torah was given on Sinai, “the entire Mount Sinai smoked because G-d had descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of the kiln,” (Ibid 19:18) alluding to the

resistance of the material world to Divine truth.

After the giving of the Torah, when Moshe ascended to receive the tablets, the world was already more refined, therefore there was only a “cloud” upon the mountain, not a spiral of smoke and ash. But Rashi still renders this cloud as “a kind of smoke.” Since Moshe was preparing to transmit the tablets hewn and inscribed by G-d to human beings living in this world, there was still “smoke” symbolizing that potential of Torah to neuter and refine the obstinate forces of this world.

The Lesson:

Every person has the responsibility to engage with the material “smoke” of the world to refine it and reveal the Divinity at its core. There is no reason to be afraid that this engagement will defile our soul and compromise our purity, because “G-d made a path within the smoke” for Moshe. Meaning, the resistance of the world is a mirage; G-d ensures that the “Moshe” within each soul will not be affected by the negativity of the world. But rather, we will be able to bring the Divine truth of Torah back to earth.
