



# Likkutei Sichos

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## Did Sinai Have it All?

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## 1.

“ON MOUNT SINAI”

At the beginning of our *parshah*, Rashi quotes the words,<sup>1</sup> “at Mount Sinai,” and comments:

What is the relevance of the subject of *shemita*<sup>2</sup> to Mount Sinai? Were not all commandments given at Sinai? This {association} teaches that just as the general principles and finer details of *shemita* were all conveyed at Sinai, so, too, the principles and details of all the other *mitzvos* were also conveyed at Sinai.

Meaning, the Torah states explicitly that Hashem conveyed the law of *shemita* at Mount Sinai (even though “**all** *mitzvos* were given at Sinai”)<sup>3</sup> to teach us a lesson from *shemita* that applies to all other *mitzvos*. That is, just as the principles and details of *shemita* were all given at Sinai, so, too, the principles and details of all the other *mitzvos* were also given at Sinai.

Rashi continues:

Thus it is taught in *Toras Kohanim*.<sup>4</sup> It appears to me that this is its explanation: Since in the book of *Devarim*, we do not find that the laws of *shemita* of the land were reiterated on the plains of Moav,<sup>5</sup> we can infer that its principles and details must have been conveyed at Sinai. {Why, then, does the verse state explicitly that the laws of *shemita* were given at Sinai?} Scripture comes to teach that every commandment was conveyed

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<sup>1</sup> *Vayikra* 25:1. {“Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying.” The verse then continues on to discuss the laws of *shemita*.}

<sup>2</sup> {The sabbatical year in which the fields of Israel must lie fallow.}

<sup>3</sup> The commentators on Rashi write: “The final verse of *Vayikra* [27:34], “These are the commandments... at Mount Sinai” (or alternatively, *ibid.*, 26:46, “These are the rules, ordinances and laws that Hashem gave between Himself and the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, through Moshe”) appears to be the source for this fact.” However, Rashi does not mention either of these verses (which only appear **after** our verse). Thus, Rashi must have a source in an **earlier** verse. Perhaps Rashi understands this fact to be evident from *pshuto shel mikra*; for if not, what did Moshe do atop the mountain for 40 days?

<sup>4</sup> 25:1.

<sup>5</sup> {At the plains of Moav, Moshe reiterated the majority of the laws of the Torah to the Jewish people before their entry into the land of Israel. This reiteration comprises most of the book of *Devarim*. Cf. *Devarim* 34:1.}

to Moshe at Sinai, including their principles and details; subsequently, these commandments were repeated and reviewed on the plains of Moav.

Meaning, Rashi here attempts to address the following problem:<sup>6</sup> Only regarding the principles of the *mitzvos* do we know that “**all** *mitzvos* were conveyed at Sinai,” but for the details, we need proof. We prove this, in fact, from *shemita*. However, this solution is problematic: How do we know that the phrase, “at Mount Sinai,” written regarding *shemita* is intended to inform us about (even the details of) all the **other** *mitzvos* (i.e., they were conveyed at Sinai)? This verse only discusses *shemita*!

Therefore, Rashi adds: Because the Torah does not teach the {details of the} laws of *shemita* in the book of *Devarim*, even had the Torah not added the phrase, “at Mount Sinai” here, we would have known that the details of *shemita* must have been also given at Sinai. Consequently, a question arises: What does the Torah want to teach us by writing, “at Mount Sinai”? This question compels us to say that “Scripture says this here in order to teach” does not refer to *shemita*, i.e., Hashem conveyed the laws of *shemita* at Mount Sinai. Rather, it teaches that “every commandment conveyed to Moshe was given to him at Sinai, together with their general principles and finer details. Subsequently, these commandments were repeated and reviewed on the plains of Moav.”

## 2.

### QUESTIONING RASHI'S CONTENT

The following emerges from a straightforward understanding of Rashi's remarks, as many commentators on Rashi also note:

- a. Rashi addresses the **same** question as *Toras Kohanim*: When discussing *shemita*, what prompts the Torah to say that *shemita* was conveyed at Mount Sinai?

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<sup>6</sup> *Devek Toy; Nimmukei Shmuel; Sifsei Chachomim*. See also, *Re'eim, and Maskil L'David*.

- b. Rashi's answer to this question — that according to *Toras Kohanim*, the phrase “at Mount Sinai” teaches us that all *mitzvos* (including their general principles and finer details) were conveyed at Sinai — was said in order to negate Rabbi Yishmael's opinion.<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Yishmael maintained that “general principles were said at Sinai... the details {of the *mitzvos*} were said in the Tent of Meeting.”<sup>8</sup> Rashi adopts Rabbi Akiva's position that both “general principles and **details** were said at Sinai.”

On this basis, we need to clarify:

- a. Since Rashi addresses why the Torah says “at Mount Sinai” in the context of ***shemittah***, Rashi should have quoted in his caption not only the words “at Mount Sinai,” but also the words that serve as the **basis** of this question regarding *shemittah*. That is, Rashi should have also quoted from the second verse regarding *shemittah* (or he should at least have concluded his citation with “etc.” {alluding to the following verse}). For Rashi to expand his citation in his caption would be justified because the problem he addresses does not arise from the words “at Mount Sinai”; rather, the problem arises from the Torah use of this phrase when discussing the laws of ***shemittah***.
- b. The solution is that the details of all the *mitzvos* were (said at Mount Sinai, and) not said “in the Tent of Meeting,” as Rabbi Yishmael maintained. As such, how can Rashi support his position with the logic, “since we do not find... that they were reiterated on **the plains of Moav**”? This fact does not negate the possibility that the *mitzvos* were conveyed in the Tent of Meeting!

Rashi should have at least written, “Since we do not find... that they were reiterated in the Tent of Meeting and on the plains of Moav.”

- c. Similarly, Rashi concludes, “these commandments were repeated and reviewed on the plains of Moav.” This seems strange. Rashi struggles with

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<sup>7</sup> *Chagigah* 6a; *Sotah* 37b; *Zevachim* 115b.

<sup>8</sup> {The *Mishkan*, or “Tabernacle.”}

the question, “Were the details of the *mitzvos* conveyed at Mount Sinai or in the Tent of Meeting?” Thus, Rashi should conclude, “these commandments were repeated and reviewed in the Tent of Meeting”!

- d. What is the reason for Rashi’s verbosity, “It appears to me that this is how it should be explained: Since we do not find...”? This difficulty is especially pronounced as Rashi’s usual practice is not to clarify and explain the *Toras Kohanim*.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, we must conclude that the *Toras Kohanim*’s explanation could be understood differently. Rashi would **not** have quoted this alternate understanding in his commentary (for this alternate understanding of the *Toras Kohanim* does not accord with *pshuto shel mikra*). Therefore, Rashi writes, “It appears to me that this is how it should be explained,” for according to his interpretation, the *Toras Kohanim*’s words relate to *pshuto shel mikra*. We need to clarify how *Toras Kohanim*’s explanation could be understood in a manner incompatible with *pshuto shel mikra* such that Rashi must negate it, offering his own understanding of *Toras Kohanim*.

### 3.

#### QUESTIONING RASHI’S WORDS

Additionally, amongst the noteworthy nuances in Rashi’s wording are the following:

- a. At the beginning of his comments, Rashi writes, “What relevance does the subject of *shemidah* have to **Mount** Sinai?” But later, he repeatedly uses the term “from Sinai,” omitting the word “mount.”

- b. When Rashi says that “Scripture comes to teach us that every commandment... came from Sinai,” he adds, “(every commandment) **that was conveyed to Moshe.**” Seemingly, this is superfluous, especially since the *Toras Kohanim*, which Rashi interprets {in his own way} (“It appears to me that this is

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<sup>9</sup> Although Rashi needs to explain, “Since we do not find...,” Rashi’s **terminology** indicates that he intends to negate another possible interpretation of the *Toras Kohanim*.

how it should be explained”), writes, “so, too... of all the other *mitzvos*,” and does not add “that were conveyed to Moshe.”

#### 4.

AT MOUNT SINAI = IN THE SINAI DESERT

The explanation of all the above is as follows:

Rashi isn’t bothered by the Torah inclusion of the phrase, “at Mount Sinai,” in its discussion of *shemitah*. The difficulty is with the phrase itself, even without knowing which *mitzvah* the Torah refers to. [Thus, Rashi quotes the *Toras Kohanim*’s question, “What relevance does the subject of *shemitah* have with Mount Sinai?” only because by studying the *Toras Kohanim*’s question and answer, we will also be able to answer the question according to *pshuto shel mikra* — “of what significance is the phrase ‘at Mount Sinai?’”]

After the construction of the *Mishkan* was completed, Hashem spoke to Moshe not at Mount Sinai, but rather in the Tent of Meeting. As Rashi already mentioned earlier in his commentary (in *parshas Ki Sisa*),<sup>10</sup> “Once the *Mishkan* was erected, Hashem only spoke to Moshe from the Tent of Meeting.” This begs the question: Why, after all the earlier *parshiyos* of the book of *Vayikra* (which begins with,<sup>11</sup> “He called to Moshe... from the **Tent of Meeting**”), does the Torah say, “Hashem spoke... **at Mount Sinai**”?

A strained solution: Perhaps Hashem communicated this *parshah* before all the previous *parshiyos* in the book of *Vayikra*, and before the *Mishkan* was erected. The Torah only records this here because “the Torah does not follow chronological order”<sup>12</sup> (as in fact *Ibn Ezra*<sup>13</sup> maintains). However, this answer is altogether not smooth. We only employ this solution that “the Torah does not follow chronological order” when we have no choice (and there is some rationale

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<sup>10</sup> *Shemos* 33:11.

<sup>11</sup> *Vayikra* 1:1.

<sup>12</sup> Rashi mentions this principle many times throughout his commentary. *Bereishis* 6:3; *Bereishis* 35:29; and other places. See also *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, pg. 119.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*. See also *Daas Zekeinim*, *Baalei HaTosfos*, *Rashbam*, *Sforno*, and *Chizkuni*, all on this verse.

to do so). But, as much as possible, we try to interpret the *parshiyos* in chronological order, particularly according to *pshuto shel mikra*.

Another solution (offered by *Ramban*):<sup>14</sup> Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai (where He conveyed the entire *parshah* and all its details). However, the reason why this *parshah* is only written here (after *parshas Emor*) is because Moshe only transmitted this commandment (of *shemittah* and all its details) to the Jewish people at this time<sup>15</sup> (after the events surrounding the “son of the Israelite woman”).<sup>16</sup> This solution also does not accord with *pshuto shel mikra* because the simple meaning and order of the verse indicates that “Hashem **spoke** to Moshe”<sup>17</sup> after all the previous *parshiyos* and after *parshas Emor*.

In particular, it is difficult to explain that Moshe only transmitted this command to the Jewish people months after he received it. As **Rashi** pointed out earlier,<sup>18</sup> “Hashem punished Moshe” for not disseminating a message at the right time. However, we could differentiate between these scenarios: In that case, the instruction was of immediate practical significance.

Therefore, Rashi understands that Hashem only gave Moshe the commandments of *parshas Behar* after the narrative of “the son of the Israelite woman.” Why then does the Torah say, “at Mount Sinai”? It does so because the Jewish people at that time still remained at Mount Sinai, before “the Jewish people travelled on their journeys from the Sinai desert.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the Torah even refers to a commandment given at the Tent of Meeting as, “Hashem spoke... at Mount Sinai,” especially since the Torah calls the entire desert, “the Sinai desert,” since Mount Sinai was located there.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. See also *Abarbenel* here.

<sup>15</sup> This answer would be inconsistent with the way **Rashi** records Moshe’s behavior following *Matan Torah*. See Rashi, *Shemos* 19:14. See also Rashi commentators, *Shemos* 4:24.

<sup>16</sup> {*Vayikra* 24:10, immediately preceding *parshas Behar*. This refers to the account of the person who cursed Hashem and as a result was stoned.}

<sup>17</sup> {Opening verse of *parshas Behar*.}

<sup>18</sup> *Shemos* 16:22.

<sup>19</sup> *Bamidbar* 10:12.

However, it is a novel approach to suggest that when Torah writes, “at **Mount Sinai**,” it actually means at the Tent of Meeting, {but calls the place *Mount Sinai*} because the Jewish people were still encamped in the Sinai desert near the **mountain**. Therefore, Rashi quotes the *Toras Kohanim* {as support}. For on the basis of Rashi’s interpretation of the *Toras Kohanim* — “It appears to me that this is how it should be explained” — there is compelling proof that here, the phrase, “at Mount Sinai” means the Sinai desert, as we will explain.

## 5.

### MOUNT SINAI AND SINAI DESERT

*Toras Kohanim* says that the phrase “at Mount Sinai,” written in the context of *shemita*, teaches us also regarding **all** other *mitzvos* that “the general principles and finer details were conveyed at Sinai.” The phrase “at Mount Sinai,” written in the context of *shemita*, provides us with no new information, as Rashi explains. For even without these words, we would have known “(that) the general principles and finer details of *shemita* were all conveyed at Sinai.” Therefore, we must conclude that the Torah says “at Mount Sinai” (not to teach us something about *shemita*, but rather) to “teach us that **every** commandment...”

How does Rashi know, with such obvious certainty (without inferring so from the words, “at Mount Sinai”) that the details and principles of *shemita* itself were conveyed at Sinai? This depends on how we understand the words “at Mount Sinai.” If “at Mount Sinai” means **on the mountain** of Sinai, then the phrase “at Mount Sinai” must be said in order to be applied to the subject of *shemita* itself. For without the words “at Mount Sinai,” we would have assumed — since Torah records this *parshah* after the building of the *Mishkan* — that this subject was communicated in **the Tent of Meeting**. [For the fact that “we do not find... {the laws of *shemita*} reiterated at the plains of Moav” is no proof that the laws of *shemita* were given at **Mount Sinai**, as explained in section 2.] Since the phrase “at Mount Sinai” is needed to inform us about *shemita* itself, we cannot apply this phrase to all the other *mitzvos*.



Therefore, perforce, the phrase “at Mount Sinai” means **the desert** of Sinai according to the *Toras Kohanim*. And that the principles and details of *shemita* were conveyed in the Sinai **desert** (i.e., either at **Mount** Sinai or in the Tent of Meeting) we would know even without the phrase, “at Mount Sinai” [because “we do not find that the laws of *shemita* of the land were reiterated on the plains of Moav”]. We must conclude that the phrase “at Mount Sinai” was stated in order to be applied to all the other *mitzvos*. That is, they, too, were communicated in the Sinai (desert), just like *shemita*.

[And both Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva would agree that the details of the *mitzvos* were conveyed ({to Moshe} not **on Mount** Sinai, but rather) in the Tent of Meeting, in the Sinai desert.]

## 6.

### NEGATING MOAV

On the basis that “at Mount Sinai” means *in the Sinai desert*, of what great significance is the teaching that the principles and details of all the *mitzvos* were all conveyed at Sinai? What {erroneous interpretation} are we precluding? Rashi addresses this question, indicating by his remarks that we are precluding {an interpretation that the details of the *mitzvos* were conveyed at} the plains of Moav. Since many *mitzvos* were given “{as recorded} in the book of *Devarim*... on the plains of Moav,” we could have posited that Moshe **only** taught the details of these *mitzvos* at the plains of Moav. The phrase, “at Mount Sinai” said in the context of *shemita* teaches us that “the general principles and finer details of all the *mitzvos* were conveyed at Sinai, even the *mitzvos* given at the plains on Moav (were not conveyed there for the first time). (The reason they appear again in the book of *Devarim* is that) “these commandments were **repeated** and reviewed on the plains of Moav.”

For this reason, Rashi says, “It appears to me that this is how it should be explained.” By saying this, Rashi rejects the interpretation that the details of *mitzvos* were conveyed for the first time at Mount Sinai and not in the Tent of Meeting (as many of the commentators on *Toras Kohanim* and Rashi opine.)

Rather, “at Mount Sinai” precludes {interpreting that the details of the *mitzvos* were conveyed at} the plains of Moav, as **Rashi himself** clarifies. In **his** explanation, Rashi originates the idea that “Since we do not find... **on the plains of Moav**... subsequently, these commandments were repeated and reviewed **on the plains of Moav**.”

## 7.

### SOLVING THE NUANCES

On this basis, we can also clarify the nuances in Rashi’s wording (mentioned earlier in section 3).

a) Rashi continuously writes “at Sinai,” and not “at Mount Sinai,” as is written in Scripture. By doing so, Rashi emphasizes that according to *pshuto shel mikra*, we only know that *this mitzvah* was conveyed at **Sinai**, either on the mountain (as Rabbi Akiva maintains) or not on **Mount Sinai**, but in the Tent of Meeting. [The *Toras Kohanim* and Rashi only say “at **Mount Sinai**” the first time they refer to it: “What relevance does the subject of *shemita* have to **Mount Sinai**?” For the question “What relevance” refers to the verse which states, “at **Mount Sinai**”; therefore, using the language of Scripture, they write “at Mount Sinai.”]

b) Rashi’s wording, “Scripture states... that every commandment **that was conveyed to Moshe**”: In writing this, Rashi emphasizes that the novelty of *Toras Kohanim*, “so, too, **all** the other *mitzvos*... from Sinai” (i.e., the Sinai **desert**, as mentioned), also applies to the *mitzvos* that were conveyed only **to Moshe** at the plains of Moav. Therefore, Rashi adds, “that they were conveyed **to Moshe**.” For here, the Torah refers to *mitzvos* that Hashem **only** told Moshe, and **not** the Jewish people; for everything Moshe told the Jewish people in the book of *Devarim* was conveyed “on his **own** accord,”<sup>20</sup> as the verse states, “Moshe spoke to all of Israel,” in the plains of Moav.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Megillah* 31b.

<sup>21</sup> *Devarim* 1:1. See Rashi, *ibid*.

## 8.

### THE MIDRASH ITSELF AND PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

As mentioned, Rashi's interpretation (in accordance with *pshuto shel mikra*) is in agreement with the positions of both Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva, i.e., Rashi demonstrates the *Toras Kohanim* also accords with Rabbi Yishmael ("general statements were said at Sinai... the details {of the *mitzvos*} were said in the Tent of Meeting"). On this basis, we have a greater appreciation as to why Rashi adds, "Thus it is taught in *Toras Kohanim*. It appears to me that this is how it should be explained."

The *Gemara*<sup>22</sup> promulgates a general rule: "An unattributed *Sifra*<sup>23</sup> follows the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda...,<sup>24</sup> and all of these {works} follow the opinion of **Rabbi Akiva**." As such, how can we interpret the teachings of the *Toras Kohanim* to be in accordance with Rabbi Yishmael? To address this, Rashi had to add, "Thus it is taught in *Toras Kohanim*. It appears to me that this is how it should be explained." Meaning to say, "this is how this issue is resolved in ***Toras Kohanim***"; nevertheless, we can interpret it here, within the framework of *pshuto shel mikra*, to also accord with the position of Rabbi Yishmael (as mentioned in section 5).

## 9.

### RABBI YISHMAEL FITS WITH PSHAT

We might posit that Rashi adopts Rabbi Yishmael's view only that "the details {of the *mitzvos*} were said in the Tent of Meeting," and alters the wording from "at Mount Sinai" to "at Sinai" in order to preclude {speculation that the details of the *mitzvos* were given} "at Mount Sinai." Perhaps Rashi does so because *pshat* supports **this** opinion more so than the other, and Rashi's commentary on Torah follows *pshat*.

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<sup>22</sup> *Sanhedrin* 86a.

<sup>23</sup> {*Sifra* and *Toras Kohanim* are two different names that refer to the same compilation of *halachic* exegetical interpretations on the book of *Vayikra*.}

<sup>24</sup> {The *Gemara* continues: "and an unattributed *Sifrei* is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon."}

a) According to *pshat*, it is logical to suppose that the details of the *mitzvos* were conveyed to the Jewish people when the verse states so explicitly. Thus, since Torah does not write explicitly that the **details** of **all** the *mitzvos* were conveyed at **Mount Sinai**, we would need **proof from *pshat*** if this were the case. [Therefore, Rashi understands that the novel teaching of the *Toras Kohanim*, “all of them... at Sinai,” only refers to a) the *mitzvos* that were conveyed at **the plains of Moav**, and b) previously conveyed in the Sinai **desert.**]

[According to **this** interpretation of Rabbi Yishmael’s opinion, we can automatically resolve a difficulty that *Tosfos*<sup>25</sup> raises regarding Rabbi Akiva’s opinion: “General statements and details were said at Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, **and reiterated a third time on the plains of Moav.**” *Tosfos* asks: Why does Rabbi Akiva need to mention that they were reiterated a third time on the plains on Moav? Rabbi Yishmael did not mention the plains of Moav at all!”<sup>26</sup> (*Tosfos* answers that Rabbi Akiva mentioned it “for the conclusion of his statement....”)<sup>27</sup>

However, based on the above explanation, even the statement that they were “reiterated a third time on the plains of Moav” is relevant to their argument. For according to Rabbi Yishmael, just as the details of the *mitzvos* were not conveyed at Mount Sinai (for Torah does not explicitly write this), so, too, they were not conveyed on the plains of Moav.]

b) Most importantly: The Torah<sup>28</sup> already introduced the principles of *shemita* before Hashem’s command to build the *Mishkan*, at **Mount Sinai**:<sup>29</sup> “Six years shall you sow your land... and in the seventh you shall leave it untended....” Our *parshah*, in which Hashem spoke from the Tent of Meeting,

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<sup>25</sup> *Sotah* 37b, *Tosfos*, s.v. *V’nishtalshelu*.

<sup>26</sup> {I.e., Rabbi Yishmael said, “general statements were said at Sinai... the details {of the *mitzvos*} were said in the Tent of Meeting.” He did not mention the plains of Moav. Why does Rabbi Akiva, who wishes to disagree, introduce the plains of Moav?}

<sup>27</sup> {For he concludes, “And there is no *mitzvah* written in the Torah for which forty-eight covenants were not established.” See there.}

<sup>28</sup> *Shemos* 23:10,11.

<sup>29</sup> *Shemos* 23:10-11. See *Ramban*’s commentary, ad. loc.

offers the details. This proves that according to *pshat*, “general statements were said at Sinai... and the details {of the *mitzvos*} were said in the Tent of Meeting.”

## 10.

### TZADDIK VS. BAAL TESHUVAH

Although *pshuto shel mikra* fits in better according to the opinion Rabbi Yishmael, as explained, nonetheless (*halachically*) the law follows Rabbi Akiva, based on the principle:<sup>30</sup> “The *halachah* is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Akiva in his disputes with any individual Sage.”

We will appreciate this by first clarifying {the basis of} this dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael (in light of the inner dimension of Torah).

The difference between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva (as has been mentioned many times):<sup>31</sup> Rabbi Yishmael was a *Kohen (Gadol)*, and the *avodah* of *tzaddikim*<sup>32</sup> was his forte (“He was set apart... as holy of holies”).<sup>33</sup> Rabbi Akiva was a descendant of converts, and the *avodah* of a *baal teshuvah*<sup>34</sup> was his forte.

This also explains Rabbi Akiva’s statement:<sup>35</sup> “**All my days** I have been troubled.... When will the opportunity be afforded me to fulfill...?” Meaning, he lived **all his days** in a mode of self-sacrifice (not only while reciting *Shema* and reciting the word, “*echad* {one}”).

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<sup>30</sup> *Eruvin* 46b.

<sup>31</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, pg. 123, vol. 11, pg. 107.

<sup>32</sup> {Lit. ‘a righteous person,’ the term *tzaddik* in *Chassidic* literature refers to an individual who is completely righteous, will never sin, and has no evil inclination at all.}

<sup>33</sup> *Divrei Hayamim* 1 23:13.

<sup>34</sup> {Lit., “a master of return”; the term *baal teshuvah* refers to an individual who has sinned in the past, has regretted his behavior, and turned himself around, resolving never to repeat his sins.}

<sup>35</sup> *Berachos* 61b. {The full quote is as follows: When they took Rabbi Akiva out to be executed, it was time for the recitation of *Shema*. As his flesh was being raked with iron combs, he recited *Shema*, accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His students said to him: Our teacher, even now, as you suffer, you recite *Shema*!? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by the verse: *With all your soul*, meaning: Even if Hashem takes your life. I asked myself: When will the opportunity be afforded me to fulfill this verse? Now that the opportunity has been given to me, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged his uttering of the final word: “*echad*, One,” until his soul left his body. A voice descended from heaven and said: Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul left your body as you uttered: “*echad*, One.”}

The *avodah* of a *tzaddik* mandates a feeling of self-sacrifice at the beginning of a day, while reciting *Shema*.<sup>36</sup> However, during the course of the day a *tzaddik* performs *avodah* systematically and gradually. (Although an impression of his self-sacrifice must filter through his performance of Torah and *mitzvos*, but what is the nature of his *avodah*? It is the *avodah* of Torah study and the observance of *mitzvos*.) In contrast, the *avodah* of *teshuvah*, which is beyond measure and limitation,<sup>37</sup> entails constant self-sacrifice, whether a person is studying Torah, performing *mitzvos*, or engaged in any other permissible activity. This is what Rabbi Akiva meant by saying, “all my days” — the feeling of self-sacrifice permeated all of the details of his life.

## 11.

### SINAI VS. THE TENT OF MEETING

In this context, we can appreciate the basis of the dispute: Rabbi Yishmael maintains that the principles were given at Sinai; and the details, in the Tent of Meeting; Rabbi Akiva maintains that both the principles and the details were conveyed at Sinai.

The distinction between Sinai and the Tent of Meeting:

The Tent of Meeting had a structure consisting of walls, curtains, beams, etc., corresponding to *seder hishtaleshelus*,<sup>38</sup> as *Rema* writes in *Toras HaOlah*.<sup>39</sup> This alludes to an orderly *avodah* performed gradually.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> As the Alter Rebbe writes in *Tanya* [ch. 25]: “... to recite *Shema* twice daily; a *mitzvah* whose purpose is ‘to accept Hashem’s sovereign authority upon yourself’ to the point of martyrdom.”

<sup>37</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni*, “*Tehillim*,” *remez* 702.

<sup>38</sup> {*Seder Hishtaleshelus* refers to the chain-like descent of spiritual worlds until this world. Each spiritual world denotes a complete realm of existence, resulting from its general proximity to or distance from Divine revelation.}

<sup>39</sup> See also the *sichah* delivered on the 10th of Kislev, 5707 (*Likkutei Dibburim*, part 3., pp. 486a ff.); see loc. cit. (p. 487a) which also quotes *Toras HaOlah*.

<sup>40</sup> See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” p. 2d, 4d: “The Tent of Meeting alludes to the *avodah* of Torah and *mitzvos*.”

[However, it is true that in the *Mishkan*, the *kohanim* also performed the *avodah* of *ketores*<sup>41</sup>; moreover, once a year, the *Kohen Gadol* entered *the* Holy of Holies. However: a) this only occurred once a year, analogous to the once-a-day self-sacrifice {we are to experience} while reciting *Shema*; and b) only the *Kohen Gadol* entered *the* Holy of Holies. (He did so as every individual Jew's emissary, for "an agent is akin to the person who appointed him,"<sup>42</sup> analogous to the idea that every Jew has within himself an aspect of the spiritual stature exemplified by the *Kohen Gadol*.)]

In contrast, "Sinai" was a desert — an uninhabited and untamed place. This symbolizes the *avodah* of surpassing order and gradation, i.e., self-sacrifice beyond limitation.

Therefore, upon "each and every utterance... {of Hashem, at Sinai}, the souls of the Jewish people fled from their bodies."<sup>43</sup> Ostensibly, we can appreciate why the Jewish people expired upon hearing the commandments, "I am your G-d" and "You shall have no other gods," for these *mitzvos* are in the category of those for which a person "must be killed and not transgress."<sup>44</sup> But regarding the commandments, "Honor your father...", "Do not steal," and the like, which are rational *mitzvos*, i.e., based on reason and understanding, why did the souls of the Jewish people take flight when they heard **these** *mitzvos*?

{The answer is:} This was the nature of "Sinai," a holy desert, a place beyond order and gradation. Therefore, every utterance issuing from Mount Sinai called forth self-sacrifice. [Similar what was explained above regarding Rabbi Akiva, who said that "**all my days**," everything he did manifested self-sacrifice.]

This explains the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael. For the *avodah* of *tzaddikim*, epitomized by Rabbi Yishmael, the general principles

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<sup>41</sup> {The incense offerings, an allusion to *avodah* that is beyond limitations.}

<sup>42</sup> {*Kiddushin* 41a.}

<sup>43</sup> *Shabbos* 86b; *Shemos Rabbah* 29:4. {This refers to Hashem speaking the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people.}

<sup>44</sup> *Sanhedrin* 74a; *Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*," ch. 5, par. 2; *Shulchan Aruch*, "*Yoreh Deah*," sec. 157, par. 1.

that came from Sinai were sufficient. With respect to the principles of the *mitzvos* (referring to each *mitzvah* individually, but only its general principle) they must be predicated on “Sinai”, i.e., self-sacrifice. However, the details of the *mitzvos* — the actual performance of Torah and *mitzvos* — require *avodah* to be done in an orderly fashion, symbolized by the Tent of Meeting.

Rabbi Akiva, who epitomized the *avodah* of *teshuvah*, maintained that: a) Since a person is involved with matters in need of “conversion” {matters that need to be elevated from the mundane to the holy} — being that Rabbi Akiva was a descendant of converts — he **must** have self-sacrifice even with respect to the particulars of the *mitzvos*. b) Since a person experiences *teshuvah* which is unconfined by any system, he **can** also relate to the details — “all my days” —with self-sacrifice.

## 12.

### TORAH'S PERSPECTIVE AND THE WAYS OF THE WORLD

On this basis, we can appreciate why Rashi, in expounding Scripture according to *pshat*, adopts the position Rabbi Yishmael, although the *halachah* follows the opinion of Rabbi Akiva.

From the perspective of *Matan Torah* (from Above), the Torah addresses the average person: “Your people are all *tzaddikim*,”<sup>45</sup> and so {the spiritual approach to engaging with the world reflects the view that} only the general principles came from Sinai. {Meaning, for the average Jew (who is righteous), focus on self-sacrifice at the beginning of the day suffices.}

But when it comes to ***halachah***, i.e., the framework of *avodah* concerned with **worldly affairs**,<sup>46</sup> we must interact with the world, i.e., with physical matters. (All the more so is this true in the times of exile when {Hashem’s} concealment is great.) To this end, we need to strengthen ourselves to refine the world — the idea of *teshuvah*. Therefore, the *halachah* follows Rabbi Akiva — the

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<sup>45</sup> *Yeshaya* 60:21.

<sup>46</sup> *Niddah* 73a.



details must also originate from Sinai. Meaning, in all matters (“all my days”), we must always possess a disposition of self-sacrifice.

Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Behar*, 5725 (1965)