



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS

## **Sicha Summary**

Chelek 15 | Yisro | Sichah 4

### **Verse One:**

G-d descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, and G-d summoned Moshe to the top of the mountain, and Moshe ascended. (*Shemos* 19:20)

### **The Rashi:**

*G-d descended upon Mount Sinai* — I may think that He actually descended upon it. Therefore, Scripture says: “You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you” (*Shemos* 20:19). This teaches that He did descend; although He was still in the heavens, He bent the upper and lower heavens, and spread them upon the mountain like a bedspread on a bed, and the Throne of Glory descended upon them [the upper and lower heavens].

### **Verse Two:**

G-d said to Moses, “So shall you say to the children of Israel, ‘You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken with you.’” (*Shemos* 20:19)

### **The Rashi:**

*From the heavens I have spoken* — But another verse states: “G-d descended upon Mount Sinai.” The third verse comes and harmonizes them: “From the heavens He let you hear His voice in order to discipline you, and on earth He showed you His great fire” (*Devarim* 4:36). His glory was in heaven; His fire and His power were on the earth. Alternatively, He bent the heavens and the highest heavens and spread them out upon the mountain. So Scripture says: “And He bent the heavens, and He came down” (*Tehillim* 18:10).

## **The Questions:**

- 1) The contradiction between the verses only becomes apparent when we read the later verse in chapter 20 that relates that G-d spoke from the heavens. Why does Rashi address this contradiction in chapter 19, before we have reached the later verse?
- 2) How does Rashi derive that “He bent the upper and lower heavens and spread them upon the mountain like a bedspread on a bed, and the Throne of Glory descended upon them” based on a straightforward reading of the verse?
- 3) Why does Rashi suddenly provide an additional explanation in his remarks on the verse in chapter 20 that he did not offer earlier — that “His glory was in Heaven and His fire... was on earth”?
- 4) And why does Rashi modify the explanation he offered in chapter 19 by changing his wording from “the upper and lower heavens” to, “the heavens and the highest heavens” in chapter 20?

## **The Explanation:**

The context provided in chapter 19, even before we read chapter 20, leads to uncertainty regarding G-d’s presence on the mountain. In verse 18 we read how “Mount Sinai was covered in smoke, for G-d descended upon it with fire.” This implies that smoke shrouded the mountain because of the proximity of G-d’s fire, but not that G-d’s fire itself was upon the mountain. For if it were, the mountain itself would be burning. Thus, it seems from this verse that G-d did not literally descend upon the mountain. This leads to the question posed by Rashi, “I may think that He actually descended upon it.” However, based on verse 20, it seems that G-d actually descended upon the mountain; yet verse 18 implies that He did not.

To address this difficulty, Rashi explains that “He bent the upper and lower heavens and spread them upon the mountain like a bedspread on a bed, and the Throne of Glory descended upon them.” The purpose of this explanation is to reconcile this verse’s dominant thrust, that “G-d

descended upon Mount Sinai” with verse 18, which implies that G-d was not literally on the mountain.

To do this, Rashi says that G-d marshaled the upper heavens, drawing them progressively lower until they were together with the lower heavens, and then blanketed them over the mountain like a bedspread. A bedspread is not something that has any significance without a bed; it is part and parcel of the bed and it makes the bed usable. With this metaphor, Rashi explains that G-d’s presence was so close to the mountain it was as if they were one, even though there was still some semblance of separation. With this, Rashi keeps true to the theme of the verse which accentuates G-d’s presence on earth, while still acknowledging the context of this chapter which implies that there was some separation between G-d and the mountain.

The thrust of chapter 20, however, is to highlight how G-d spoke to the people from an awe-inspiring place of transcendence. Hence, immediately following this account, G-d commanded, “You shall not make images of anything that is with Me: You shall not make a likeness of my servants who serve Me on high.” (Rashi to *Shemos* 20:20)

Therefore, in reconciling the contradiction between chapters 19 and 20, Rashi stresses how distant G-d was: “His glory was in heaven, His fire and His power were on the earth” — His essential self, His glory, remained in heaven, only His external expression, “fire and power,” were felt on the mountain.

And yet, to account for the verse in chapter 19 that implies that G-d was actually *on* the mountain, Rashi again cites the explanation that “He bent the heavens and the highest heavens and spread them out upon the mountain,” but here, Rashi emphasizes G-d’s remoteness. Rashi does not cite the metaphor of the bed-spread which highlights G-d’s proximity, and instead of saying “upper and lower heavens,” he says “the heavens and the highest heavens,” again stressing the exaltedness of G-d. In this way, Rashi resolves the contradiction, but gives primacy to this verse, which points to G-d’s transcendence.

### **The Deeper Dimension:**

There is a deep allusion to the fact that chapter 19 verse 20 suggests G-d's closeness and chapter 20 verse 19 suggests His exaltedness. The number 19 alludes to the Divine faculty of *malchus* whose role is to give expression to all of the Divine influence that precedes it (19 is the numerical value of the additional letters when G-d's name is spelled phonetically). The number 20 alludes to G-d's "crown," His essential transcendence from creation. (The letter *kaf*, which has the numerical value of 20, is the first letter of *keter* — crown.)

Thus, chapter 19 verse 20 highlights how the loftiest dimension of G-d, the "crown/20," is expressed and revealed within the world through "malchus/19." And chapter 20 verse 19 highlights how G-d is essentially removed from creation — even when He is in the mode of expression/*malchus*/19, it is within the context of "crown/20" the exalted essence of G-d.