YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Geulat Yisrael**

**Rav Moshe Taragin**

**Shiur #03: The "Israeli" Har Sinai**

Torah is eternal and exists outside of time and outside of space. For this reason, it was delivered in a barren desert landscape beyond human civilization. Similarly, its date of delivery is concealed – at least by the Torah itself. The word of God is incumbent upon Jews regardless of *where* we live or *when* we live. The delivery of His will is not geo-tagged, nor is the event clearly pinned to a particular date.

Nevertheless, although God’s autonomous word exists outside of any particular place, it does resonate differently in His land. For this reason, it was crucial to re-enact the epic Sinai experience upon arrival in Israel. Soon after entering the land, the Jews restaged Sinai upon the two northern mountains of Gerizim and Eival. Settling Israel without recreating Har Sinai and reinforcing its fundamentals would have been inconceivable. Our warrant to this land is our embrace of God’s will and the historic agenda of broadcasting God's word from the land of Israel. Upon first entering our home, the warrant for our residence had to be reaffirmed and an “Israeli Har Sinai” staged.

However, the Israeli Har Sinai was dramatically different from the original desert ceremony. At Har Sinai, the Jews were passive – they listened attentively and embraced what they heard enthusiastically, but they were completely reactive. The pyrotechnics at Sinai were so fearsome that, by some accounts, the Jews even fled the scene, only to be forcibly retrieved by Moshe. On that desert morning only one voice was to be heard, and it emanated from Heaven, descending upon Mankind.

By contrast, at the Israeli Har Sinai, Torah is distilled and presented by a human audience: six tribes ascended one mountain, and the others ascended the second. A faction of Levites stood in the valley between the two cliffs, announcing each commandment. Listening to these avowals, the respective groups upon the highlands responded by declaring “*Amen*!” Further accentuating the human role, the Israeli version of the *luchot* – the inscription of Torah on two large slabs of stone – was made by humans and not by the Divine hand. It is unclear what was engraved upon the stone slabs at the mountains of Gerizim and Eival. Did these slabs contain a selection of *mitzvot*, or possibly the entire Torah? Either way, there is a distinctly human tone to the Israeli "stones," as opposed to the desert *luchot*.

Though Torah predates time, it must be applied by humans to daily life and to a sometimes unaccommodating world. Nowhere is this application more challenging and all-inclusive than in the land of Israel. When directing broad affairs of State, it is difficult to shrink Torah to the protective horizons of the *beit midrash* or study halls. Torah’s spirit and law must be infused in every feature of human and national experience. This expansive application of Torah – amplified in Israel – was symbolized at these two mountains by empowering human beings as the anchors and authors.

Additionally, the Israeli Har Sinai concluded with a general appeal to uphold the *entirety* of Torah (“Cursed is one who will not uphold the words of this Torah” – *Devarim* 27:26). This general mandate – excluded from the original Har Sinai – reminded us that, upon entering Israel, we now possessed *lateral* responsibility for other Jews. The mandate of “*kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh*,” that all Jews are responsible for one another, only began when we entered the land and began forging a community. Unquestionably, lateral accountability for every Jew exists outside of Israel, but there it is primarily realized on an *individual* level – promoting individual religious experience for other Jews. Life in Israel demands a more *communal* *areivut* – concerning the religious and moral spirit of cities, communities, and society at large. “Sinai” in Israel took on an added dimension; human involvement implied both more proactive human authorship as well as more lateral social responsibility. It is true now as it was then.