

ON THE LOOK-OUT

1. Two mountains loom large in the history of our people and the traditions of our faith. One is Mt. Sinai, from which Moses came down with the Ten Commandments. The other is Mt. Moriah which Abraham ascended in order to bind his son Isaac and offer him up as a sacrifice until G-d bade him stop at the last moment. Both these mountains are prominent in the history of the civilized world. And yet one wonders at the difference between them. One wonders why, when it came to building the BEIS HA'MIKDASH, the Temple, it was Mt. Moriah which was so honored and which became sacred in Jewish Law and life, whereas Mt. Sinai retains only historic significance but is of no importance religiously. Why is it that Mt. Moriah has become the geographic center of Judaism, the place to which we turn in our prayers, and Mt. Sinai is just another little hill in the great barrenness called Sinai Desert.
2. In the answer to that question lies a whole philosophy, the essence of the Jewish approach to G-d and the kernel of the Torah world-view.

The answer, in fact, can be expressed in the study ^{a parallel} in contrast of two historic personalities whose names are associated with these mountains. They are: Moses and Abraham. The name of Moses is inextricably bound up with Sinai, and Abraham with ~~that~~ Moriah.

Moses, of course, is the prophet par excellence of Judaism. He is the Lawgiver and the man whom G-d chose to redeem Israel from Egypt. He reached the highest rung any man can ever hope to reach. But the early history of Moses is one of ease and facility. There are struggles, but not great struggles. There are difficulties, but no tormenting ones. He was a man who was chosen to lead and to prophecy, and his very birth was accompanied by signs of greatness. He was tending his flock in the land of Midian one fine day when he heard a voice call out of a bush which burnt was not consumed. It was the Voice of G-d summoning him to his great role in history. It happened so suddenly, so quickly. It seemed that he just "had it in him". And when, years later, he assembled his people about the mountain called Sinai, they too seemed just "naturals" for the word of G-d. There is even a tradition that they slept late that historic day and had to be awakened to hear the Ten Commandments issued by the Divine Voice. With folded arms they stayed at the foot of the mountain, while the Torah was given to them. That is the character of Sinai - a passive awaiting of G-d's word. Man waits while G-d seeks him out.

Abraham represents the exact reverse. He was a precocious tot of 3 - or according to Maimonides a man of 43 - when he first conceived of the idea of One G-d. G-d did not reveal Himself to Abraham. But Abraham, having come to the conclusion that there must be such a personal transcendent G-d, began to look for G-d. He spent the better part of his life trying to reach him. He braved the ridicule and the mockery of his idolatrous society because of his queer belief in and search for an invisible G-d. Not once in many, many years did G-d make himself available to the searching patriarch. Only after many heart-breaking decades did the word of G-d come to Abraham: LECH*LECHA...and then he was - 75 years old! It was a successful and vindicating venture, this search for G-d, but it was a difficult, hard, often frustrating striving.

only because it was a Search -

But if this long search was a hard one, how much more so Abraham's trek up Mt. Moriah. Here he was, in his old age, a father of one son born to him in his late years. And now G-d had called upon him to sacrifice this son atop the mountain. His religious nature responded affirmatively at once. His humanitarian side rebelled. His only real son, the one and only to his old mother. And yet, torn by this inner conflict, Abraham climbed the mountain, every step filled with pain and foreboding with a fire raging in his soul. He climbed up to G-d, and he finally reached the summit - he was going to follow the G-dly voice! And he did, until the angel ordered him to desist, and told him that he had passed the test. That is the character of Moriah - a powerful looking for G-d, a dynamic active search by man for G-d.

3. That is what accounts for the holiness of Moriah and the religious insignificance of Sinai. Holiness is not a generous gift bestowed by G-d on prima-donna souls. It is wrested from G-d by the sweat of the brow and the mighty wrangling of the heart. A Temple is not built by religious wall-flowers. It is sanctified by searchers, by men always on the look-out for G-d. That is why Mt.Moriah is crowned by the Holy Temple, whereas Sinai has nothing Jewish associated with it - on the contrary, on its summit today there is a Christian monastery.

Those who pray carefully might sometimes wonder: we often refer to G-d as ELOKEI AVRAHAM, never as ELOKEI MOSHE. Why? Because it was Abraham, not Moses, who searched the harder. And ELOKEI AVRAHAM means the G-d of Abraham in the possessive sense, that Abraham actually "owns" a part of G-d. Rabbi Soloveitchik offers an interesting Halachic explanation. The Halacha discusses the case of one who finds an object in the street - an object of value but which has no identifying marks. In such case, the law is "finder's keepers". But what is the legal reason for the transfer of the property from the previous owner to the finder? The reason, according to the Talmud, is: YI'USH BAALIM, the fact that the previous owners (knowing that it bears no identifying marks) renounce ownership because they despair of its return. In the same way - so to speak - did Abraham become possessive of G-d. There was no one who had any prior claim on G-d. Men had despaired of reaching him. There was YI'USH BAALIM. But Abraham went on the look-out. He searched for this Divine METZIAN, and he found Him - hence: ELOKEI AVRAHAM, the G-d of Abraham. Abraham looked for G-d, and so G-d was Abraham's. But G-d was the one who looked for Moses and found him - and so he is known as MOSHE, EVED HA'SHEM, Moses the servant of G-d - Moses was found by G-d and hence belongs to G-d.

It was only long after Sinai, after the Tablets there delivered were broken, that Moses changed his approach to G-d, that he announced HAREINI NA KVODECHA, G-d, I am out to discover Thy glory. It was only then that Moses rose to his eminent position in the history of humanity.

4. It is the same in Religion as in all life, except more so. You never get something for nothing. In Torah it is even deeper: you must work much harder, but the returns are much greater. Those who have not experienced true SIMCHA SHEL MITZVAH, the ecstatic joy of spiritual achievement have not lived.

I sometimes wonder at some of our Jews. I wish they would take their business shrewdness into the synagogue proper, not only to Board meetings. Which business-man would trust an agent who tries to tell him stock that supposedly requires very little investment, involves no risk and gives tremendous wind-fall profits, without a thorough examination? And yet these same people, so circumspect in finances, come into the synagogue and expect to invest three or visits a year, no risks of spiritual creativity and hardship, and expect G-d to jump every time they snap their fingers, expect to be "inspired". There is only one difference. In business, such speculative fly-by-night investment can cost you your shirt. In Religion, you can lose your soul. Torah does indeed offer terrific spiritual profits, but not without heavy capital investment - investment of your time and energy and faith and money and prestige. It requires being constantly on the look-out for G-d, being a Mt.Moriah Jew, not a Sinai Jew.

I wish people would not come into this synagogue to "be inspired" as one goes to a show to be entertained or to a steam-room to be massaged. This is neither a theatre nor a service-agency. The Rabbi is not an actor nor does he aspire to be a masseur. This is a workshop, a workshop of the human soul where you are both the artisan and the vessel, where G-d is both the boss who demands and the customer who must be satisfied, and where the "abbi is just another poor, hard laborer who merely seeks to give some friendly advice. No one can find G-d without looking for him, and it is just that the synagogue is the best place to look.

It is told of the great Hassidic teacher, Reb Baruch of Mezboz that his grandchild once came crying to him, and complained that he had been playing hide-and-seek with friends, and that he was hiding but his friend did not come to look for him. "Ah," exclaimed the Rabbi, "but G-d has the same complaint. No one comes to look for him."

5. If we religious Jews had taken that to heart fifty and sixty years ago in greater numbers and with more enthusiasm, the State of ¹srael today might have more genuine Jewishness in it, in place of the offensive secularism which sometimes tears at the heart. If only we had known then that Messiah would not come looking for us if we remained with folded arms. Messiah comes only when he is sought out, when he is looked for. Only then does one find AS'CHALTA DI'GE'ULAH. The modern Hebrew song, YERUSHALAYIM, has one beautiful refrain: ME'AL PISGAT HAR HA'TZOFIM ~~ESHACHAPEN LACH YER~~ SHALOM LACH YERUSHALAYIM, from the summit of Mt. Tzofim, peace unto thee, O Jerusalem. Those who know Hebrew know that "Tzofim" comes from the word which means to look, to search out. Only when Jews will begin to look for Jerusalem with love and devotion, when they will put their lives into the striving for the City of ^Beauty will peace come unto Jerusalem.
6. If parents would understand this difference between Moriah and Sinai, between Abraham and the early career of Moses, they would not be satisfied with the pitifully little they give their children. Parents who are happy with ~~a one-day-a-week~~ or even a three-day a week - education for their children are not providing them with the equipment with which to undertake the long and tough search for meaningfulness and holiness in life. Those who give their children a two-hour-a-week fling in things Jewish are not only not providing them, but I dare say are blindfolding their own children; if one of these ever finds meaningfulness it is sheer luck. Those parents who give their children full, maximum education, those who give them - let us not be afraid to say it openly - a good day-school education if it is available, they are the ones who help their children. ¹hat kind of teaching means providing children with spiritual binoculars in the search for G-d.
7. UVIKASHEM MI'SHAM ES HA'SHEM ELOKECHA UMATZASA KI SIDR'SHENU B'CHOL LVAVCHA UV'CHOL NAFSHECHA, And from there shall you seek the L-d your G-d, and you will find Him, if you will search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul. BA'TZAR LCHA UMETZAUCHA KOL HA'DVARIM HA'EILLA, In thy distress, when all these things come upon thee, ... when man is troubled by the sheer emptiness of his life, when he is worried and pained, when he feels caught in a vise and tossed about recklessly in the tempests of life, when in distress ~~man~~ then, G-d calls out, seek G-d, look for him, and you will most certainly find Him. KI EIL RACHUM HA'SHEM ELOKECHA, for the L-d thy G-d is a merciful G-d; He will not fail thee, not destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of they fathers which he swore unto them.