

Two mountains...

Re'eh 5782/2022

There are two mountains in the West Bank, they are pretty insignificant within the landscape, and yet they occupy a central element of this week's Parasha. Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the places where blessings and curses will be stated upon the Jewish people's entry into the land of Israel¹.

For the modern mind, the idea of divine blessings and curses, seems to be the antithesis of rational understanding. While I do not see this as a showering of riches, or a bolt of lightning, there is something in the symbolism of the two diametrically opposing ideas, being understood and agreed upon in a specific location, with a very formulaic procedure.

The Rabbis actually comment that these blessings and curses are not recited because they will come about, but rather because they show a specific path for the Jewish people – go left, this happens, go right, this will³. The Rabbis posit it as a choice – and the physical symbols reinforce the idea of that choice⁴.

Moses gives very specific instructions of where the mountains are, and what to do while there. In fact, the level of detail is quite surprising. Surely this ceremony could happen anywhere.

Obviously, Judaism needs to be a little more complex and provoke a few extra questions. In this case the symbolism runs deeper than just choosing right or left, it aims to bring us back to our roots, and project an aspirational future.

The Jerusalem Talmud responds to the former, by establishing the specific geographic location as the same location of Abraham's sojourning⁴. It is as if God and Moses are reminding the Jewish people of their historic links, not just by saying *the land of your forefathers, or the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, but walking them through the geography.

Further, Rabbi Sacks, acknowledges that the entire process is similar to that of Sinai⁵. Moving the symbolism to not only revolve around geography, but also theology.

The procedure also aspires forward, as noted by Dena Rock, that it not only reflects back at the Sinai experience, but it is set up (as is the whole of the book of Devarim) to be this generation's Sinai experience⁶. Finally, the Jewish people are entering the land of their forefathers, but the procedure screams 'This is your land, because this is where your forefathers lived, and this is where you are establishing your future'.

Two mountains weaving together the tapestry of the past, for the people in the present, looking forward to the gifts of the future!

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**