

Mt. Horeb, Counting the Omer and the 'Nullification of Self'

It was on Mt. Sinai, also called Mt. Horeb, that Elijah hears the "still, small voice" of God.

1 Kings 19:12-13 - "When Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out..."

Wrapping his face and thereby discounting his natural senses of sight and hearing was a type of self-nullification as the rabbis call it, or as we would say, picking up the cross, abandoning self. It is essential for a true prophet of God.

Recall why Mt. Horeb or Sinai was important:

Three important events took place on Sinai (Mt. Horeb).

- Moses heard God speak from the burning bush (**Exodus 3**)
- The Giving of the Law (**Exodus 34**)
- Moses struck the rock for water (**Numbers 20**)

In **Exodus 3:12**, God tells Moses: "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain."

- **Deuteronomy 4:9-10** - "But guard yourselves, and carefully guard your souls, lest you forget... The day upon which you stood before God at Horeb!"

"Lest ye forget." But what was that day? No date is given to remember. It is linked to the waving of the first fruit offering "omer" 50 days previously. i.e. Pentecost is securely linked to Passover and specifically Jesus' resurrection, which occurred as the priests waved the barley loaf of the first fruit offering.

This also means that the glory and the spiritual fireworks of the outpoured Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost is never to be isolated from the suffering of the cross, the blood of Christ and His resurrection.

A Dispute Among the Mountains

Mt. Sinai and Mt. Moriah are said to be two sacred mountains, through whose virtue the world exists (Midr. Teh. to **Psalm 87:1** - "His foundation is in the holy mountains.")

According to rabbinical tradition, God had previously measured all the mountains [to see which was the most appropriate from which to give the Torah], and His choice fell on Sinai because it was lower than the others. Then the other mountains, particularly Tabor and Carmel, began to dispute among themselves, each claiming that it ought to be the

place of the delivery of the Torah. God, however, said to them: "Do not dispute; you are all unworthy of this occasion, as idols have been placed upon all of you except Sinai" (Soṭah 5a; Mek., Yitro, Baḥodesh, 4; Gen. R. xcix. 1; Lev. R. xiii. 2; Num. R. xiii. 5)

Again we see, idolatry appears as a huge issue. Our God is a jealous God. And being "lower" reflects humility.

In order to reconcile **Exodus 19:20** (where it is said that God descended upon the mountain) with **Exodus 20:22** (which declares that God spoke to the Israelites from heaven), the Rabbis hold that God lowered the heavens and spread them on Sinai (Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael l.c. 4). A similar statement occurs in Pirḳe R. Eliezer xli., namely, that the mountain was removed from its foundation and that the heavens were rent asunder, the summit of the mountain extending into the opening. Moses, while standing on Sinai, could thus see everything that was going on in the heavens.

Believers, like Moses, inhabit both spaces - with one foot in eternity and the other in this world.

- **Ephesians 2:6-7** - "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might display the surpassing riches of His grace, demonstrated by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

"After the arrival of the Messiah, God will bring Sinai, Carmel, and Tabor together, and will build the Temple on them; and all three will sing in chorus His praises" (Yalkut Shimoni, Isa. 391, quoting the Pesiqta, Midrash Tehillim. l.c.).

In other words, the Messiah will bring together the essence of what happened on all those mountains and fulfill them.

Mt. Carmel was where Elijah defeated the 450 prophets of Baal.

Mount Tabor is added because it is the site of the Battle of Mount Tabor between the Israelite army under the leadership of Barak and the army of the Canaanite king of Hazor, Jabin, commanded by Sisera (Judges 4:6). And where a woman drives a stake through Sisera's head.

- **Psalms 89:11-12** - "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name."

Mt. Hermon is mentioned here because it was to be the site of Christ's transfiguration.

<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13766-sinai-mount>

Messiah as a Mountain

- **Isaiah 52:13** - "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and

extolled, and be very high."

Mount Zion is used as a reference to the people of God. But the Messiah Himself is also referred to as a mountain.

Yalkut Shimoni (a thirteenth-century compilation of earlier midrashic writings) applies Isaiah 52:13 to the Messiah, stating that the Messiah – called the great mountain according to Yalkut's interpretation of **Zechariah 4:7** – is "greater than the patriarchs... higher than Abraham...lifted up above Moses...and loftier than ministering angels" (2:571; see also 2:621)

"Who are you, O great mountain?" (**Zechariah 4:7**). This is the Messiah who is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, "Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted" (**Isaiah 52:13**). "High and lifted up" refers to Abraham, as it is written, "I have lifted up my hand" [edit. הִרְמֹתִי יָדַי "harimothi yadi"] (**Genesis 14:22**), "and greatly exalted" refers to Moses, as it is written, "Should you nurse it as a guardian carries a suckling, to the land which You swore to their fathers?" (**Numbers 11:12**). "And greater than the ministering angels" refers to the verse, "and their rims were lofty and awesome" (**Ezekiel 1:18**). Therefore, "Who are you, O great mountain?" [before Zerubbabel to the plain], and Zerubbabel is from whom? He is from David...

And he brought forth the headstone (**Zechariah 4:7**) of our father Jacob, as it is said, "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone" (**Genesis 28:18**). And similarly, Daniel says, "I was watching until a stone was cut out without hands" (**Daniel 2:34**). And from where does it come? Through the mountains, as it is said, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings" (**Isaiah 52:7**). At that time, Israel looks and says, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, from where shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (**Psalms 121:1-2**).

All the Meanings Combine

The mountains show different aspects of God's glory - Mt. Sinai, the Law revealing God's commandments and humankind's sin; Mt. Tabor, allowing settlement of the Promised Land; Mt. Carmel, the victory over idolatry; Mt. Zion in Jerusalem representing God's people at peace; Mt. Hermon as the site of the Transfiguration where Moses, Elijah and the voice of God meet in Jesus (**Matthew 17:1-8**). They spoke of his "exodus" which was to take place on the cross.

Ultimately, the "mountain" in all these examples combine to express one singular mountain that Daniel talks about in **Daniel 2**:

Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a great image portraying the great kingdoms of the world up to the time of Messiah.

- **Daniel 2:34-35** - "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was

the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

The stone - which Jesus said represents Himself, becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

The threshingfloor imagery points to a fulfillment at Pentecost, when the church was born in **Acts 2**.

- **Daniel 2:44** - "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

Mt. Carmel, Mt. Tabor, Mt. Hermon all combine in the image of Mt. Sinai, which in turn gives its significance to Mt. Zion as the people of God, which in turn is typified by the stone that becomes a mountain in the Messiah Himself.

Pentecost and the Counting of the Omer

See Counting the Omer - a discussion by former British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/42915/jewish/The-Morrow-of-the-Shabbat.htm

At the Transfiguration, we have seen, Moses and Elijah (and the Father?) were talking of Jesus' "exodus" at the cross.

The cross affects every believer. We are to "pick up our cross" and follow Him. Death to self is the hallmark of the inhabitants of this mountain, this kingdom that will fill the whole earth.

In the **Song of Songs 1:4**, there is a verse, "Draw me, we will run after you; the king has brought me into his chambers."

The Kabbalists see these three phrases as mystical references to the three stages of the departure from Egypt.

- "Draw me" is the Exodus from Egypt. "Draw me" is passive - it refers to the Israelites being taken out by God. Formerly the possession by the Pharaoh, they leave to become the possession of God. It is singular - "me" since everyone was told to experience Passover "as if he had personally come out of Egypt."

- "We will run after you" is the counting of the omer. "We will run after you" is both active and plural. Israel is now a people, a collective, and actively passes through the 49 gates

of impurity in preparation for the giving of the Law.

- "The king has brought me into his chambers" is the giving of the Torah. It's singular again, but this time seeing Israel not as a people but as one person. (In our understanding Israel is Christ. Or, in this case, as the Bride entering into chamber with the Bridegroom. Here both are active, she enters willingly but is "brought" in by the Bridegroom.

The Israelites are described as having fled from Egypt (**Exodus 14:5**). What they were running from was the evil within themselves, according to 18th-century Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi.

The omer was made of barley, food for animals.

When the animal nature in man is no longer at war with his spirit, but is sublimated to it, all its passionate intensity is transferred to the life of holiness. Thus "There is much increase by the strength of an ox" (**Proverbs 14:4**).

To do this, Israel had to pass through the 49 gates of impurity, shedding or actually transforming their animal/carnal/ evil inclination, before Israel could receive the Law.

Finally, at Mt. Sinai, "With every single word that went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the souls of Israel departed" (Talmud, Shabbat 88b). They were empty:[and dead, according to other rabbinical commentary] Their only reality was God.

The final extinction of self-consciousness (called *bittul bim'tziut* by the rabbis) is depicted during the Amidah prayer, when "like a slave before his master" we have no self with which to speak. We are empty of words. We say, "O Lord, open my lips."

This is why the scripture says: **Leviticus 23:11-15** - "And he [the priest] shall wave the Omer before God for your appeasement, on the morrow of the Shabbat shall the Kohen wave it." Why does it say "the morrow of the Shabbat" instead of just saying "after the Passover."

The Sabbath Rest still belongs to the week, and thus to time and the finite. "The morrow of the Shabbat" refers to the step beyond Shabbat, beyond time itself: A revelation higher than the world. The "eighth day" rest outside of time.

The *bittul bim'tziut* or "Death to Self"

- **Genesis 1:1-2** - "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form (*tohu*), and void (*bohu*); and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

According to the Kabbalah, in the world before this one, everything felt itself and its meaning in an absolute sense, exclusive of anything else. That world was incapable of fulfilling its purpose, and shattered from its own intensity. It became *tohu* which means

"without form, blasted, or chaos."

The fragments resulting from this *tohu* fell to our world, and our egos are one of its most exquisite artifacts.

Our souls are here to reassemble those *tohu* fragments into a world of Tikkun. Tikkun means "to repair, fix, amend." The World of Tikkun is one in which opposites coincide and balance one another in perfect harmony.

Tikkun might be better explained as a transformation.

For example, a "Tikkun book" is used to instruct scribes in how to chant or sing Hebrew scriptures. Each tikkun book contains two renditions of the Masoretic Text in Hebrew. The right side of each page is written with the cantillation marks and vowel points, while the left is written in unpointed Hebrew, just the consonants, as it appears in the actual scroll. It basically transforms the Hebrew into a form useful to the congregation.

In this view, evil itself is a leftover artifact of the *tohu*, essentially fictitious, arising from the temporary state of disorder. Or, as in Catholic doctrine, evil is the result of the absence of Divine love in the human heart. Reorder the world, and evil disappears as though it never was, the rabbis believed.

Elijah, the Zohar says, was expected to reveal these deepest truths in preparation for the light of Messiah at the end of days. In our understanding then, the spirit of Elijah in John the Baptist pointed to Jesus who would then be the healer of the world, the Tikkun, the One who can transform the fragments of our broken lives and the fallen world through His kingdom.

We participate in His mission as vessels for the Spirit by experiencing the *bittul bim'tziut* - i.e. becoming "an entity of nothingness." Or rather, a paradoxical state of somethingness/nothingness. We empty ourselves by picking up the cross. "I live, yet not I who live but Christ..."

This is the kenosis described in **Philippians 2:7** - "He emptied himself..."

The death of self idea is embedded in rabbinical tradition even at the time of Christ, but was unattainable until the Messiah came.

"You must be as nothing in your own eyes. Then you will be worthy of attaining true self-nullification (*bittul*) and your soul will be merged with its root. The whole universe will be merged with you in your Source. You and everything with you will be merged in the Unity of God."

- Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810)

Bottom Line: For Elijah, all these aspects of what God did at Mt. Sinai are present in the "still, small voice" of God's reassuring presence, the Spirit whispering to our hearts.

It looks forward to the work of Messiah and the New Covenant:

- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** - "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

See also: "What's the Difference Between Buddhist Nothingness and Jewish Nothingness?"

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1936781/jewish/Whats-the-Difference-Between-Buddhist-Nothingness-and-Jewish-Nothingness.htm