



### **Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Exodus 19.28, 20.2 [Biblical Commentary]**

Why was the Torah not given in the Land of Israel? In order that the nations of the world should not have the excuse for saying, "Because it was given in Israel's land, therefore we have not accepted it." Another reason: to avoid causing dissension among the [Israelite] tribes. Else one might have said, "In my territory the Torah was given." And the other might have said, "In my territory the Torah was given." Therefore, the Torah was given in the desert, publicly and openly, in a place belonging to no one. To three things the Torah is likened: to the desert, to fire, and to water. This is to tell you that just as these three things are free to all who come into the world, so also are the words of the Torah free to all who come into the world.

The Torah was given in public, openly in a free place. For had the Torah been given in the Land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: "You have no share in it." But now that it was given in the wilderness publicly and openly in a place that is free for all, everyone wishing to accept it could come and accept it. One might suppose that it was given at night, but Scripture says, "On the third day, as morning dawned..." (Exodus 19:16). One might suppose that it was given in silence, but Scripture says: "...there was thunder and lightning..." (ibid.). One might suppose that they could not hear the voice of God, but Scripture says: "The voice of Adonai is powerful; the voice of Adonai is full of majesty" (Psalms 29:4).

### **Thought Questions:**

1. To whom does the Torah belong?
2. Do we announce good or bad news? Both? Differently?
3. What is the last thing that you did purposefully in public so that as many people could see or hear you as possible?
4. When you see searchlights or a loud announcement, how do you respond?
5. When do you ignore announcements?

### **Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 88a**

“And they took their places under the mount” (Exodus 19:17). Rabbi Abdimi ben Hama ben Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be God, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them, “If you accept the Torah, all is well; if not, this shall be your burial.”

#### **Thought Questions:**

1. What does this text imply about us really choosing or accepting Torah?
2. When is a choice not really a choice?
3. Do you know anyone who feels that religion is not a choice?
4. If the Torah is so great, why would God need to convince us to accept it?

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