

And God said: "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering... --- Gen. 22:2

The Bible tells us that this is Jerusalem, and that the Temple was built there: *Then Solomon began to build the House of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah... (II Chronicles 3:1)* But what is the meaning of this name Moriah? Some of the answers the rabbis suggested are collected in Midrash Genesis Rabbah 55:7:

It alludes to the service of the Temple; it is called **Har ha-Moriah**, because the incense brought there had in it myrrh ("mor") and other spices.

It alludes to the word **ro'eh**, seeing, which is repeated later (*"Abraham raised his eyes and he saw the place from afar,"* v. 4; *"God will see the lamb for Himself..."* v.8; *"And Abraham called the name of the place, God will see..."* Thus it is called **Har ha-Moriah**, because it represents vision; it is "the place I (God) will show you."

Moriah alludes to the teaching (**hora'ah**) of Torah. (It may also be a feminine form of the word **moreh**, teacher.) Thus **Har ha-Moriah** is "the place from which teaching issued to the world."

*"Hear this, you rulers of the House of Jacob...
Who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight,
Who build Zion with crime, Jerusalem with iniquity!...
Assuredly, because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field,
And Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins..." --- Micah 3:9-12*

Why was Mount Moriah chosen to be the site on which to build the Temple and the Holy of Holies rather than Mount Sinai on which the Ten Commandments were given? The answer offered is that Mount Moriah was the site where Abraham sacrificed his beloved son, and the sanctity of sacrifice transcends the sanctity of the Commandments.

Infinitely greater than the sacrifice of Isaac was the martyrdom of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Treblinka, and others. The State of Israel was built on that martyrdom; its people are, to use a phrase of the prophet Zechariah (3:2), *a brand plucked from the fire*. --- Abraham Joshua Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity

The place where a Jew stretched forth his neck in order to be sacrificed is holier than the place where the Torah was given! There the Divine Presence appears; there, as it were, Torah is given once again. (Chasidic, attributed to Rabbi Chayim of Tsans)

(Isaac asked:) “*Here are the firestone and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?*” And Abraham said: “*God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son.*” And the two of them walked on together. --- Gen. 22:7f.

“Even though Isaac understood that he was going to be slaughtered, *the two of them walked on together*. (i.e., he continued to go willingly.” --- Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 56:4

Moriah alludes to the fear of God (**mora Yah**) which human beings developed through attachment to the holiness of this place; **Har ha-Moriah** is “the place from which fear (of God) emanated to the world.” (The term **yirah** is not easily translatable; some render it as “reverence”.) Similarly, Saadia Gaon translates it as: the land of worship.

Moriah refers to the light (**orah**) which emanates from Jerusalem. We see Jerusalem as a source of light and blessing which nourishes our sense of mission as a “*light unto the nations*” (Is. 42:6, 49:6) More than that, “Zion is not another spot in the world. It is the capital of the world, the place from which the divine beatification of humanity proceeds.” --- Prof. Jon Levenson in Jewish Spirituality