

# [The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash](#)

## **The Eliyahu Narratives Yeshivat Har Etzion**

---

### **Shiur #51: Chorev**

#### **Part 3: The Double Revelation of God's Angel to Eliyahu (5-8) (continued)**

**By Rav Elchanan Samet**

### **3. Eliyahu in the Footsteps of Moshe**

We cannot ignore the deliberate manner in which our narrative draws a clear parallel between Eliyahu and Moshe. Let us examine the similarities, in the order in which they appear in our chapter:

A. Even before we find out Eliyahu's ultimate destination in the wilderness, we already sense the parallel between the two prophets: (8) "...and he went on the strength of that eating for forty days and forty nights."

Concerning Moshe we read: "He was there with God for forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread nor did he drink water." (*Shemot* 34:28)

B. The actual arrival at Mount Chorev is also recorded in language reminiscent of Moshe, but this time the parallel recalls Moshe's first visit to the mountain, while he was shepherding the flock of Yitro, his father-in-law:

Moshe: "He came to the mountain of God, to Chorev." (*Shemot* 3:1)

Eliyahu: (8) "He went... up to the mountain of God at Chorev."

The name of this mountain – Chorev – appears seventeen times in *Tanakh*, but only in the above two instances is the additional appellation, "the mountain of God," attached.

C. Immediately thereafter, we are told concerning Eliyahu:

(9) "He came there to the cave, and he slept over there."

This verse is reminiscent of verses 4-5 in our chapter, where the text describes Eliyahu's stay in the wilderness of Be'er Sheva:

"He came and dwelled under a certain broom tree... and he lay down and he slept under a certain broom tree."

It is specifically the similarity between the two sources that serves to emphasize the difference between them. At Mount Chorev we are not told, "He came there to A CERTAIN CAVE and he slept over there," but rather, "He came there to THE CAVE" – the text uses the definite article. Which cave is this that should be so familiar to Eliyahu – and to us, the readers? *Chazal*, in the *midrashim*, as well as the Aramaic translation and classical as well as modern commentators, identify this cave as the cleft in the rock that is mentioned in the context of Moshe's ascent of Mount Sinai following the sin of the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 33:21-23):

"God said: Behold, there is place by Me; you can stand upon the rock. And it shall be, when My Glory passes over, that I shall place you in a cleft of the rock, and I shall cover you with My hand until I have passed over. And I shall remove My hand and you shall see the back of Me; but My face shall not be seen."

There, in the cleft of the rock, God was revealed to Moshe in His goodness, with the thirteen traits of mercy. Indeed, the word "*nikra*" (which we translate here as "cleft") means a "*me'ara*" - cave, as Onkelos translates it, and as arises from the comparison of two verses found close to each other in chapter 2 of Yishayahu:

(19) "They shall come into the CAVES (*me'arot*) of rocks and into the tunnels of the earth for fear of God and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth...

(21) To come into THE CLEFTS (*nikrot*) of rocks and into the crevices of boulders for fear of God and for the glory of His majesty when He arises to shake the earth."

D. Adopting this identification, we find further comparisons between the two sources, pertaining to the revelations experienced by these two prophets at this cave.

1. Moshe is told, "You can stand upon the rock" (33:21), and further on we read, "You shall stand with Me there, at the top of the mountain" (34:2); Eliyahu is told, "Go out and stand on the mountain before God" (11).

2. Moshe is told, "And it shall be, when My glory passes over" (33:22), while Eliyahu is told, "Behold, God is passing over" (11).

3. Moshe is told, "I shall place My hand upon you until I have passed over" (*Ibid.*), and the first time he comes to Chorev we are told, "Moshe hid his face for he feared to look at the Lord" (*Shemot* 3:6); while concerning Eliyahu we read; "And it was, when Eliyahu heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle" (13).

It appears, then, that all of Moshe's ascents to Mount Chorev serve as the precedent for Eliyahu being led there. Moshe is the shepherd of Yitro's flocks when he first comes upon the burning bush, then he ascends later for the giving of the Torah, and again to ask forgiveness following the sin of the Golden Calf, and to receive the second set of Tablets. But what is the significance of Eliyahu walking in the footsteps of Moshe? What is this meant to teach us – or him?

In the Midrash Eliyahu Zuta (chapter 8), quoted in the previous *shiur*, we find a sharp expression describing Eliyahu being led to Mount Chorev, hinting back to the argument between God and Eliyahu concerning the drought – an argument which, according to the Midrash, continues into our chapter:

"Not only that [that God sent Eliyahu to Achav so as to bring the drought to an end], but God then PUSHED ELIYAHU to the place where the forefathers of Israel asked for mercy for their descendants."

Despite the use of the term "forefathers" (*avot*), the Midrash would appear to be referring to Moshe's request for mercy for the nation at Mount Sinai following the sin of the Golden Calf. Indeed, most of the parallels that we noted above between Eliyahu and Moshe involve chapters 33-34 of *Sefer Shemot*, in which Moshe tries to renew the covenant between God and Israel after it has been violated by the Golden Calf. Moshe pleads that the covenant should be renewed and that Israel be granted complete forgiveness, after the end of the first forty days of his stay atop Mount Sinai, and after God notifying him of Israel's sin, Moshe prayed to keep punishment away from them, and was answered (32:11-14).

Now the purpose of bringing Eliyahu to Mount Chorev, in the footsteps of Moshe, is clear: Eliyahu is being asked to examine the ways of Moshe – the teacher of all prophets of Israel – for his ways are the proper ways of prophecy. Even when the prophet comes to convey stern reproof, when he is with God his task is to be a spokesperson for Israel's defense. When Moshe was atop Mount Chorev, he prayed for Israel and succeeded in canceling the decree of destruction that hung over them (32:14). When he descended from the mountain to the camp, he cast the Tablets from his hands and shattered them, and was ruthless in punishing the sinners. But afterwards, when he ascended the mountain once again, he retained nothing of his anger; he expressed only supplication on behalf of the nation – and even spoke brazenly to God (*Shemot* 32:32):

"And now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, please erase me from Your book which You have written."

All of this is reminiscent of Eliyahu's request, "Take my life" – but in the opposite direction: Moshe speaks as he does out of devotion to Israel, while Eliyahu asks to die out of despair at the nation. The Mekhilta (Introduction to *Parashat Bo*) notes this difference between Moshe and Eliyahu. As to the former, the Mekhilta teaches:

This we find: the forefathers and the prophets were devoted to Israel. Moshe declares: "And now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, please erase me from Your book which You have written."

Eliyahu, in contrast, is noted by the Mekhilta as having the opposite intention:

Eliyahu stood up for the honor of the Father (God), rather than for the honor of the son (Israel), as it is written, "I have been greatly zealous for God, the Lord of Hosts...."

Translated by Kaeren Fish