

Why was Matan Torah NOT in Jerusalem

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Yom Yerushalayim, which is actually first mentioned in Tehillim 137:7, is just a few days before Chag Matan Torah. So wouldn't it have been appropriate for G-d to give us the Torah in His Holy City of Jerusalem, DC (David's Capital). As Yeshayahu 2:3 states, "...For the Torah shall go out from Zion and the Word of G-d from Jerusalem." (also Micha 4:2)

Thus, why did G-d give the Torah in the Sinai Desert rather than in the Holy Land? The Talmud explains that G-d wanted to demonstrate that the Torah didn't belong to one nation alone or even to one country. A desert is halachically designated as a MAKOM HEFKER (an ownerless place). The Torah was not given in the Land of Israel for that would have meant that it was to be uniquely for the HOLY LAND.

The Torah was given in a space and place accessible to all humanity. The purpose of The Revelation at Sinai was to turn a world without Torah, which by definition is a barren desert, into a blooming and productive place for human existence.

Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, is the name of the Parsha in which we read the account of the most important event in Jewish history, the Giving of the Torah. It is remarkable that this Parsha has as its title, the name of someone who was not even born a Jew. Yitro was a pagan idol worshiper, but only later in life abandoned his paganism and recognized the One, True G-d.

Why was Yitro chosen to have the Parsha of MATAN TORAH named after him?

It is because Yitro is the greatest illustration of what the Torah is meant to accomplish. The Torah's goal is to transform idolaters into believers and pagans into the worshipers of the One True G-d. Judaism is not a restrictive club for born Jews only. Any non-Jew who sincerely desires to embrace Torah true Judaism is welcome.

When the Jewish People stood at Mount Sinai and were prepared to accept the Torah, G-d defined their mission by telling them, "If you will listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own, special treasure from among all nations, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation" (Sh'mot 19).

Yehuda HaLevi wonders about the phrase MAMLECHET KOHANIM. Surely the Jewish People will not all be Kohanim. The 12 Tribes were divided into Kohanim, Levites and Israelites. Most Jews are simply Israelites. Why does G-d say that the Jewish People in its entirety will become a "Kingdom of Kohanim"?

Yehuda HaLevi answers that just as the Kohanim were to be the teachers and leaders for the rest of the Jewish People, so too the Jews have to become the leaders and teachers of the rest of the world. That is the meaning of "... You shall be My own special treasure from among all nations...".

We are to be the Kohanim, who will insure that all nations eventually will acknowledge the One True G-d. That's why G-d says "...for all the earth is Mine".

We Jews perform our G-d-given task in 2 ways - Judaism for Jews and those who want to sincerely convert to Judaism, and the Torah's 7 Noahide Laws for the gentiles. Our motto to non-Jews is "Keep the 7 and go to Heaven!"

This Divine Plan is used by the Talmud to explain why Jews throughout history have been exiled around the globe. The Talmud offers the rationale that the punishment of our exile may have a totally different purpose. "G-d did not exile Israel among the nations but only so converts might join them, as is written, 'And I, (G-d), will plant her for Me in the land'... (Hoshea 2:25). "Surely a man plants a SE'AH (a biblical measure) in order to harvest many KOR" (an even greater measure). (Pesachim 87b).

Our mission as Jews is to spread the knowledge of the One True G-d, as the prophet Yeshayahu says, "We are to be a light unto the nations". But before we can be a light unto the nations, we must first be a light to each other. 