

Exodus 20:15-16

וְכָל-הָעָם רָאוּ אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת-הַלַּפִּידִם וְאֵת קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר וְאֶת-הַהָר עֹשֶׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר-אַתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל-יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן-נָמוּת:
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם אֶל-תִּירְאוּ כִּי לִבְעִבּוֹר נְסוּת אֶתְכֶם בָּא הָאֱלֹהִים
וּבְעִבּוֹר תִּהְיֶה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל-פְּנֵיכֶם לְבַלְתִּי תַחֲטְאוּ:

All the people saw the voices and lightning, the sound of the shofar,
and the mountain smoking;
and the people saw and they moved and stood at a distance.
They said to Moses, “you speak with us, and we will listen,
But let God not speak with us, lest we die.”

And Moses said to the people: “Do not fear, for in order *l’nasot* [test, lift up] you God has come
And in order that His fear [*yirato*] be upon you, so that you do not offend.”

Midrash Shemot Rabbah (composed Iraq/land of Israel, date uncertain) 29:4

אָמַר רַבִּי לְוִי, שְׂנֵי דְבָרִים שָׁאַלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִלְּפָנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא,
שִׁירְאוּ כְבוֹדוֹ וְנִשְׁמְעוּ קוֹלוֹ, וְהָיוּ רוֹאִין אֶת כְּבוֹדוֹ וְשׁוֹמְעִין אֶת קוֹלוֹ,
שְׂנֵי אָמַר (דְּבָרִים ה, כא); וְתֹאמְרוּ הֵן הָרָאנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת כְּבוֹדוֹ וְאֵת גְּדֻלוֹ,
וְכָתִיב (דְּבָרִים ה, כא): וְאֵת קְלוֹ שְׁמַעְנוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ, וְלֹא הָיָה בָהֶם כַּח לַעֲמֹד,
שְׂכִינֹן שְׂבָאוֹ לְסִינֵי וְנִגְלָה לָהֶם, פָּרְחָה נִשְׁמַתָּם עַל שִׁדְבָר עֲמָהֶם,
שְׂנֵי אָמַר (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ה, ו): נַפְשִׁי יִצָּאָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ.
אֲבָל הַתּוֹרָה בִּקְשָׁה עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמִים מִלְּפָנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא,
יֵשׁ מְלֶאֶךְ מַשִּׂיא בֵּיתוֹ וְהוֹרֵג אַנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ, כָּל הָעוֹלָם כָּלוּ שְׂמִיחִים וּבְנִיף מִתִּים,
מִיַּד חֲזָרָה נִשְׁמַתָּו, שְׂנֵי אָמַר (תְּהִלִּים יט, ח): תּוֹרַת ה' תִּמְיָמָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ

Rabbi Levi said: Two things Israel requested from God—to see His glory and to hear His voice.
And they did see His glory and they did hear his voice, as it is said:

See, the Eternal our God has shown us His glory and His greatness (Deuteronomy 5:21)

And it is written: *And His voice we have heard out of the midst of the fire (ibid).*

But they did not have the strength to stand,

for when they came to Sinai and He was revealed to them,
their souls flew away when He spoke with them, as it is said:

My soul left me when he spoke (Song of Songs 5:6)

But the Torah asked God for mercy for them:

“Does a king marry off his daughter and kill his household?
The entire world is rejoicing and Your children die!”

Immediately, their soul returned,

as it says *The Torah of God is perfect, restoring the soul” (Ps 19:8)*

RaSHI (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, Troyes France 1040-1105). on Ex 20:15, 17

ויעמדו מרחק.

היו נרתעוין לאחוריהם שנים עשר מיל, כארץ מחנייהם,
ומלאכי השרת באין ומסיעין אותן להחזירם,

They stood at a distance

They recoiled twelve miles to the rear—the whole length of their camp—
And the ministering angels came and helped restore them to their place

לבעבור נסות אתכם.

לְגַדֵּל אֶתְכֶם בְּעוֹלָם, שְׂיֵצֵא לְכֶם שֵׁם בְּאֻמוֹת שֶׁהוּא בְּכֹבֹדוֹ נִגְלָה עֲלֵיכֶם :
נסות. לשון הַרְמָה וְגִדְלָה,

In order L'nasot you

In order to exalt you in the world, so that your name will go forth among the nations,
That He in His glory was revealed to you.

L'nasot means “lifting up” and “greatness”

RaMBaN (Rabbi Mosheh ben Nachman,

לשון רש"י. (רש"י על שמות כ': י"ז) ואיננו נכון.
אבל יתכן שיאמר, כי לבעבור הרגילכם באמונתו בא האלהים,
שכיון שהראה לכם גלוי השכינה נכנסה אמונתו בלבבכם לדבקה בו,
ולא תפרד נפשכם ממנה לעולם,

RaMBaN begins by quoting Rashi's entire comment, then:

And this is not correct.

Rather, it may mean “God comes in order to accustom you to faith in Him [*emunato*]”

For when He showed you the revelation of the *Shechina* [Divine Presence]

Faith in Him entered into your hearts, to cleave to Him,

and your soul would never be separated from Him, forever”

Haamek Davar (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, Russia, 1816-1893)

ופי' נסות כפרש"י לשון גדולה. אבל לא כמו שכתב לגדל אתכם בעולם שיצא לכם שם באומות. ויפה כ'
הרמב"ן ע"ז שאינו נכון. דמאין ידעו האומות שכן היה. ובעיקר אינו תכלית כ"כ אלא עיקר הכונה להגביה
מעלת הנפש. והוא אי' מאופני הנסיון שביארנו בשם חז"ל ברבה. שהוא כפשתן טוב שמכים אותו הרבה כדי
להעלותו ולהשביחו. ומזה בא הנסיון של א"א בשעת עקידה כמו שביארנו בס' בראש"י שם. כך בא זה המעמד
להגביה נפשם לעמוד בתמצית כחם בשביל קיום התורה בעת הצורך שנדרש למסירת נפש.

And the meaning of *L'nasot* is, as Rashi says, related to “greatness.”

But not, as he wrote, to make you great in the world, that your name go out among the nations.

And RaMBaN wrote well about this that “it is not correct.”

For how would the nations know about this?

And at any rate it is not the essential purpose.

Rather, the essential purpose is to lift up the level of the soul,

which is one of the purposes of a test which was described by *ChaZaL* in Midrash Rabah.

For the soul is like fine linen, which is pounded extensively to make it excellent.

And for this reason our father Abraham was tested in the hour of the Binding of Isaac.

Similarly, this “standing” came to elevate their souls, to stand at the very limit of their strength,

For the sake of the survival of the Torah in the hour of need,

When it might require giving up their lives.

Zornberg on Haamek Davar's comment (*The Particulars of Rapture, p. 264*)

The implications of this reading are quite radical: the purpose of Revelation is to develop *human* qualities. What is enacted at Sinai is the revelation of the *human* being in larger range and strength. A new consciousness is born in this revelation; the Israelites endure an initiation that ensures them against the extremities of history. God comes at Sinai, so that the human may come fully into its own.