

The Two Screens: On Mary Douglas's Proposal for a Literary Structure to the Book of Leviticus*

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In memoriam – Mary Douglas (1921–2007)

In the middle volume of her recent trio of monographs devoted to the priestly source in the Torah, Mary Douglas proposes that the book of Leviticus bears a literary structure that reflects the layout and configuration of the Tabernacle.¹ This short note is intended to supply further support to this proposal, though first I present a brief summary of the work, its major suppositions, and its principal finding.

The springboard for Douglas's assertion is the famous discovery of Ramban² (brought to the attention of modern scholars by Nahum Sarna³) that the tripartite division of the Tabernacle reflects the similar tripartite division of Mount Sinai. As laid out in Exodus 19 and 24, (a) the people as a whole occupied the lower slopes; (b) Aaron, his two sons, and the elders were permitted halfway up the mountain; and (c) only Moses was allowed on the summit. In like fashion, according to the priestly instructions in Exodus 25–40 and the book of Leviticus, (a) the people as a whole were allowed to enter the outer court of the Taberna-

* It was my distinct pleasure to deliver an oral version of this article at the Mary Douglas Seminar Series organized by the University of London in May 2005, in the presence of Professor Douglas and other distinguished colleagues. I also take the opportunity to thank my colleague Azzan Yadin for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

¹ M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The other two volumes are: *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (JSOTSS 158; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); and *Jacob's Tears: The Priestly Work of Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). All internal citations below refer to *Leviticus as Literature*.

² Ramban, commentary to Exod 25:1 and the introduction to Numbers.

³ N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1986), p. 203; and N. M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 105.

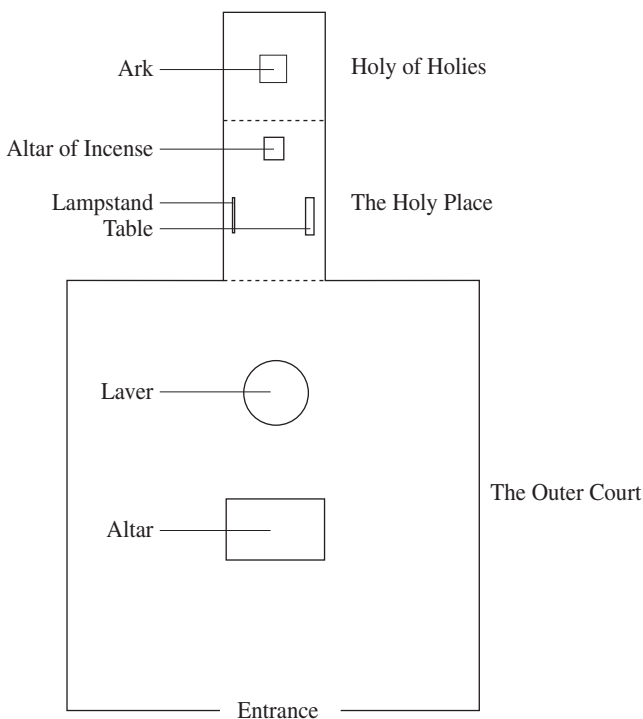


Figure 1. Furnishings of the tabernacle. (Adapted from Sarna 1991: 155).

cle, including the area surrounding the main altar and the laver; (b) the priests were permitted access to the sanctuary, which contained the table, the lampstand, and the incense altar; and (c) only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, which housed the ark of the covenant. See Figure 1 (from Douglas, p. 221, Figure 11.1) as a guide to the Tabernacle.

Douglas extends this structure in two directions: to the body of the sacrificial animal and to the layout of the book of Leviticus. The former may be summarized as follows (pp. 66–86): (a) the head and meat sections of the animal supplied the food for lay people and priest alike; (b) the midriff area, consisting most importantly of the suet, the liver lobe, and the kidneys, were burnt on the altar; and (c) the entrails, intestines, and genitals (washed) were placed on the top of the pile on the altar to be burnt. We see in this extension of the Sinai-Tabernacle triptych the

mind of the anthropologist at work, providing at long last the explanation to the enigmatic prohibition of the suet. In Douglas's view (pp. 79, 86), the thick fat is parallel to the dense cloud that envelopes both Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16, 24:15–18) and the Tabernacle (Exod 40:34–38) and which serves to delimit the second stage; in like manner the suet envelops the organs of the midriff and serves to confine them within the sacrificial system.

The present article, however, is more interested in Douglas's second extension of the Ramban-Sarna schema. In this case (as well as in other recent studies) Douglas applies less of the strictly anthropological approach that characterizes most of her life work, and instead operates within the arena of literary-structural studies.⁴ In her analysis (pp. 218–31), the entire book of Leviticus is laid out on the pattern of the Tabernacle, that is to say, once more a tripartite division arises: (a) chapters 1–17 correspond to the outer court; (b) chapters 18–24 correspond to the sanctuary; and (c) chapters 25–27 correspond to the holy of holies. Note further that each chunk of literature corresponds in relative size to the different parts of the Tabernacle, with (a) the largest, (b) the middle-sized, and (c) the smallest. See Figure 2 (from Douglas, p. 222, Figure 11.2) as a way of envisioning these proportions, with an additional focus on the two screens that divide the Tabernacle into its component parts.

It is not simply the relative sizes of the three parts of Leviticus that match the sections of the Tabernacle, but their contents as well. Thus, for example, section (a) deals with the sacrifices (chapters 1–7), which were performed in the outer court, and the laws of purity (chapters 12–15), which governed who could enter the Tabernacle; section (b) includes laws specific to the priests (chapters 21–22), who alone could enter the sanctuary, and details concerning the lampstand and table (24:1–9), which were located therein; and section (c) focuses on the blessings and curses that will arise if Israel either observes or disobeys the covenant (chapter 26), which is embodied by the ark housed in the innermost sanctum.

In light of the above, Douglas proposes that the individual chapters of Leviticus be placed on the Tabernacle floorplan, thereby providing the reader with a virtual tour of the desert shrine as one proceeds through the book. The layout, according to Douglas (p. 223, Figure

⁴ See also M. Douglas, "Poetic Structure in Leviticus," in D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz, eds., *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 239–256.

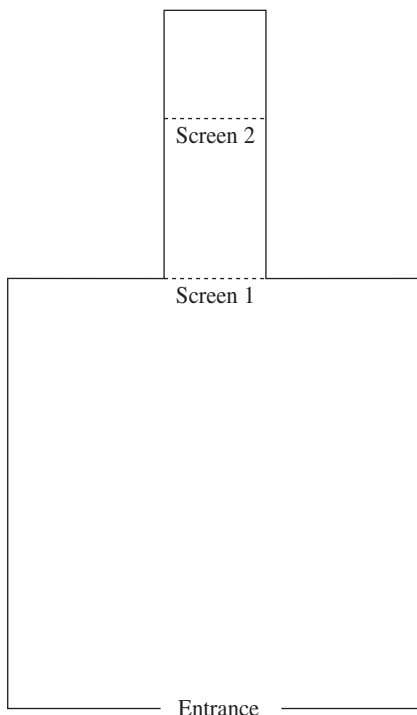


Figure 2. The proportions of the tabernacle. (Adapted from Milgrom 1991: 135).

11.3), looks like this (see Figure 3). In such fashion the two narrative units of Leviticus stand before the two screens that divide the Tabernacle into three parts. Chapters 8–10 relate the investiture of Aaron and his sons (chs. 8–9) and the strange fire that consumed Nadab and Abihu (ch. 10); while Lev 24:10–23 is the rather extraordinary tale about the blasphemer.⁵ The larger of these two is situated before the screen that separates the outer court and the sanctuary, called the *māsāk* (Exod 26:36–37, 36:37–38); while the smaller of these units is positioned before the screen that separates the sanctuary from the holy of holies, called the *pārōket* (Exod 26:31–35, 36:35–36).

⁵ Douglas's diagram reads Lev 24:10–22, though the proper reference should be Lev 24:10–23.

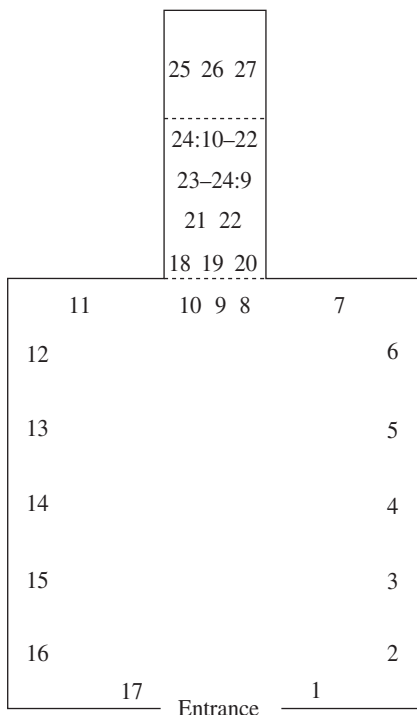


Figure 3. Leviticus projected on the grand plan of the tabernacle.

While one commends Douglas for her ability to see structure where others have failed, the question remains: Is this Douglas's cleverness? Or is this pattern inherent in the text that has come down to us from ancient Israel? In other terms, is this a case of eisegesis or exegesis? Though Douglas herself does not argue the point at this juncture in her book, I would invoke her statement regarding the aforementioned explanation of the prohibition of the suet: "In the search for understanding the same choice keeps recurring for the reader in almost every chapter of Leviticus. The solemn prohibition of the suet fat ... can remain uninterpreted. Should we be content to leave it shrouded in mystery? If not, the reader can follow the path of the three paradigms. The rules for suet construct a coherent tripartite model of tabernacle/carcass/mountain" (p. 86); and I then would transfer these words to the present point under discussion. All who have read Leviticus have been puzzled and bewildered by the

inclusion of the short tale concerning the blasphemer⁶ (less so in the case of chapters 8–10, which at least fits the context to some extent, though this section too has raised eyebrows). Douglas is the first to provide an explanation for the inclusion of Lev 24:10–23 – and not only its inclusion, but its placement as well – and I for one am ready to accept her position. To paraphrase Douglas’s words cited above, “Should we be content to leave the inclusion and placement of the two narratives in mystery? If not, the reader can follow the path of the three paradigms. The two narratives serve to construct a coherent tripartite model for the book of Leviticus, functioning as a parallel to the tripartite nature of the Tabernacle with its two screens separating the three sections.”

Still, one would hope that there is more to this than simply proclaiming that Douglas’s solution is the first and therefore should be accorded correctness. In that spirit, it is the purpose of this short note to build on Douglas’s insightful scholarship and to demonstrate support for her discovery.

To my mind, if the structure of Leviticus truly displays the design of the Tabernacle, then the text of the book should provide additional clues. Seek and you shall find. Note the following.

First, the narrative of Leviticus 8–10 includes four references to the screen and the general area that separates the outer court and the sanctuary. I refer specifically to the following passages:

- (a) 8:31–36, where we read that Aaron and his sons remained at the *petah ’ohel mō’ēd*, that is, in the area between the first screen and the altar,⁷ for seven days;
- (b) 9:23, where Moses and Aaron entered and exited the *’ohel mō’ēd*, that is, they went through the first screen and then back out again⁸;
- (c) 9:24, with reference to the fire that ‘came forth from before YHWH’, which clearly must have emerged from the sanctuary,⁹ that is, through the first screen; and finally

⁶ By way of example, see R. E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 399: “It is curious that this single story occurs here in a section fifteen chapters long that otherwise simply states the law without any accompanying narratives.” I assume that Friedman’s “section fifteen chapters long” refers to Leviticus 11–25, though one cannot be sure.

⁷ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 393, in conjunction with p. 534.

⁸ Note Milgrom’s comment: “For what purpose did Moses and Aaron enter the Tent? None is cited, and it can only be conjectured” (*ibid.*, p. 588), after which several suggestions are given. To which I would now add: to allow a passage through the first screen.

⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 590.

(d) 10:2, with reference to the second fire that ‘came forth from before YHWH’, this time the destructive one that consumed Nadab and Abihu and which once more clearly must have emerged from the sanctuary,¹⁰ that is, again passing through the first screen.

Such a concentration of passages focusing on this particular locus within the greater Tabernacle structure cannot be a coincidence. Their placement here in chs. 8–10 accords with Douglas’s view that the reader of this narrative is, so to speak, walking the perimeter of the outer court and halts for a moment in front of the first screen, or *māsāk*, which separates the outer court from the sanctuary.

In the second case, within the much shorter narrative of Lev 24:10–23, there are no references to the screen that separates the sanctuary from the holy of holies. But in the passage that immediately precedes this episode, there is a specific reference to the screen, and in the passage that immediately follows there is the most subtle of references thereto. The former of these is in Lev 24:3, where the word *pārōket* is specifically used, in fact, in a unique expression, *pārōket hā’ēdūt* ‘the curtain [= screen] of the Pact’. The scene, as Douglas has emphasized (pp. 227–28), places us within the sanctuary itself, as God commands Moses concerning the lampstand (vv. 2–4) and the table and its loaves (vv. 5–9).

The latter reference is the coup-de-grace of the author of our text. I refer to Lev 25:1 *wayədabbēr YHWH ‘el mōšē^h bəhar sīnay lē’mōr* ‘And YHWH spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai saying’, presenting another enigma that has puzzled scholars for centuries.¹¹ Why the inclusion of the expression *bəhar sīnay* at this point? Have not all of God’s instructions to Moses been on Mount Sinai according to the priestly source? Would not the standard introductory formula ‘And YHWH spoke to Moses saying’ (appearing 29x in Leviticus) suffice?¹² The best answer is the following. The reader will recall that the vertical Mount Sinai has been laid horizontally on the plan of the Tabernacle (as per Ramban and Sarna), and that the Tabernacle in turn has been displayed on the text of Leviticus (as per Douglas). Accordingly, at this very point in our text we enter the holy of holies, corresponding to the summit of Mount

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 599.

¹¹ For a survey of opinions, including the medievals and some moderns, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), pp. 2151–52. For more thorough treatment, see the Excursus below.

¹² See the convenient chart in W. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Biblical Interpretation Series; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 40–41.

Sinai, and thus the text brings Moses to that point, or returns him to that point, as it were, by stating explicitly that YHWH spoke to him *bəhar sīnay*. To reach ‘Mount Sinai’, Moses must have passed through the second screen!¹³

In the short narrative of Lev 24:10–23, there is no room for even a single reference to the screen or separation between the sanctuary and the holy of holies – in contrast to the extended narrative of Leviticus 8–10, which, as noted above, contains a series of references to the first screen. Nevertheless, the author of our text has managed to surround the short narrative with two reminders of where we are at this point in our journey through the Tabernacle, the one as explicit as can be (the word *pārōket*), the other as allusive as can be (the phrase *bəhar sīnay*).¹⁴

These references to the two screens – the five of them (in toto) explicit, or nearly so; and the sixth and last of them implicit – substantiate, in my opinion, Douglas’s discovery of the literary structure of the Torah’s most inscrutable book. She truly has uncovered the secret of Leviticus. We are all in her debt.

¹³ There are three other instances of the expression *bəhar sīnay* in Leviticus, a fact which demands further comment. They are at 7:38, 26:46, and 27:34. Several interpretations are possible. First, and most simply, all three occur at the *end* of major sections (chs. 1–7) or chapters (ch. 26, ch. 27), leaving Lev 25:1 as the *only* introductory formula that includes the phrase *bəhar sīnay*, which is to say, no further comment is needed. Alternatively, we may note the following. Lev 26:46 and 27:34 keep the reader on the summit of Mount Sinai at the end of the book, as further collaboration of Douglas’s proposal; whereas Lev 7:38 adds the phrase *bəmidbar sīnay* ‘in the wilderness of Sinai’, suggesting that we are not at the summit of the mountain but only in the wilderness of Sinai, that is, at the base of the mountain, again confirming Douglas’s proposal, since this passage occurs in the first section of the tripartite division of Leviticus. Still further, one notes that Lev 7:38 occurs immediately before we enter “the first screen,” that is, Leviticus 8–10, as a marker thereof. On the two expressions *bəhar sīnay* and *bəmidbar sīnay*, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 437–438; note that my latter suggestion in this footnote militates against Milgrom’s view that the incorporation of the words *bəmidbar sīnay* in v. 38b is “an editorial addition – and a most awkward one” (p. 438).

¹⁴ This is not to say that other explanations for the presence of *bəhar sīnay* in Lev 25:1 are to be automatically excluded or dismissed. I am especially impressed by John Hartley’s detection of a literary purpose for the mention of the expression in this verse, namely, that this is the *last* speech of God to Moses in the book (save for the appendix in ch. 27); in addition to which Yohanan Muffs and Matityahu Tsevat provided substantive reasons for the inclusion of the expression *bəhar sīnay* in our verse. The former noted the analogy between Yahweh on Sinai and the Mesopotamian kings’ ascending their thrones to proclaim *dərōr* or *andarāru*, respectively; while the latter noted the connection between Sinaitic covenant and sabbatical release. That is to say, multiple intents and purposes may lie behind an author’s use of a particular word or phrase, not only here, but elsewhere in the Bible and indeed in all of literature. For more on Hartley, Muffs, and Tsevat, including the bibliographic details, see the end of the Excursus below.

Excursus: A Survey of the Secondary Literature on Lev 25:1

The present article has been written purposefully in streamlined fashion, unencumbered by a thorough review of the secondary literature on the relevant passages cited herein. I take this opportunity, however, to include a survey of comments by previous scholars concerning the last of the passages treated above, namely, Lev 25:1, especially since the presence of the expression *bəhar śinay* in that verse is so central to my analysis.

Not surprisingly the early rabbis noted the oddity in this verse and posed the question: מה עיניין שמיטה לעינין הר סיני (Sifra Behar 1:1)¹⁵ – to which they responded that the biblical verse teaches that all the commandments and their particulars (דיקדוקיה) were commanded at Sinai. This position, however, stands in contrast to the view expressed by R. Ishmael that the general aspects of the commandments were delivered at Sinai and the specifics (פרטות) were related in the Tent of Meeting (B. Zevaḥim 115b).¹⁶

These divergent views do not suggest a reason why *bəhar śinay* appears specifically here at Lev 25:1, but it is of interest to note that the two opinions served as the basis for the debate on this issue in the medieval period. Rashi, for example, concurred with the view expressed by the Sifra, namely, that the mention of *bəhar śinay* in Lev 25:1 is a reminder to the reader that all of the law – both its general principles and its finer details – were revealed at Mount Sinai. His grandson Rashbam claimed exactly the opposite, stating that that the phrase means that the laws of this chapter specifically were presented in the first year of the wandering, that is, at Sinai – while the other laws in Leviticus and elsewhere in the Torah were given at later times during the wandering.¹⁷

¹⁵ I cite the Sifra here from the *Ma'agarim (ha-Millon ha-Histori)* database, though I have not been to determine which manuscript was utilized by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in this project. MS Vatican 66 has a large inkspot at this exact location; thus all that is legible is מה עיניין (see L. Finkelstein, *Sifra, Torat Kohanim: 'al pi ketav-yad Romi menuqqad [Assmani mispar 66]* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1956], p. תסח). Incidentally, Rashi (on whom see below) cites the text slightly differently.

¹⁶ Note, however, that R. Ishmael's approach is immediately followed by that of R. Aqiva, which is more consonant with that of the Sifra. For general discussion, see G. Galil, ["Leviticus 25:1,"] in M. Weinfeld, ed., *Wayyiqra': 'Olam ha-Tanakh* (Tel-Aviv: Davidson-Ittay, 1993), pp. 180–181.

¹⁷ See M. I. Lockshin, *Rashbam's Commentary on Leviticus and Numbers* (Brown Judaic Studies; Providence: Brown University Press, 2001), p. 131, n. 1.

A digest of the views expressed by ibn Ezra, Abравanel, and Ramban, all of whom delved further into this issue than Rashi and Rashbam, may be found in Milgrom's extensive commentary.¹⁸ To the material presented by Milgrom, I would add but one point of interest, namely, that ibn Ezra labeled our verse an instance of *אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה*, with the note that the *parasha* of Behar precedes the *parasha* of Wayyiqra' and all subsequent *parashot* in the book. Milgrom also summarized the views of several modern scholars, some of whom we too will cite below, though as the following indicates, the range of modern interpretations is much more varied.¹⁹

A number of modern scholars seem to follow in the footsteps of the rabbinic commentators, that is, they too believe that the expression *bəhar sīnay* serves as a chronological and/or geographical indicator of some sort. W. H. Bellinger stated simply, "The first verse also reminds the reader that the setting is still at Sinai,"²⁰ which might suggest a view akin to that of Rashi. Bernard Bamberger expressed a view similar to that of Rashbam (and see the other medievals summarized by Milgrom): "On Mount Sinai. These words are a surprise; most of the laws in Leviticus were revealed in the Tent of Meeting (1:1 and elsewhere) ... The law, presumably, was given to Moses at Sinai and, for some reason, written down in a later passage."²¹

Menahem Boleh agreed: *הפרשה הבאה לא נאמרה באהל מועד, אלא עוד, כשמששה שהה עדין בראש ההר לפני הקמתו*.²² He then went on to suggest a very plausible reason for the connection between Leviticus 26 (at least)

¹⁸ Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, pp. 2151–52.

¹⁹ For the sake of bibliographical completeness, I note that the following commentaries (among others) offer no remark at all: D. Hoffmann, *Das Buch Leviticus* (Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1906); N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (The Century Bible; London: Thomas Nelson, 1967); G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979); and B. A. Levine, *Leviticus* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989). The same is true of the studies by M. Paran, *Darkhe ha-Signon ha-Kohani ba-Tora* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989); K. Grünwaldt, *Das Heiligkeitgesetz Leviticus 17–26* (BZAW 271; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999); and B. Schwartz, *Torat ha-Qedusha* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999). Of these three works, only Paran referred to Lev 25:1 (on p. 33), though he did so without commenting on the phrase *bəhar sīnay*.

²⁰ W. H. Bellinger, *Leviticus and Numbers* (New International Biblical Commentary; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), p. 148.

²¹ B. J. Bamberger, *Leviticus* (The Torah: A Modern Commentary III; New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979), p. 277. By "the law," I assume that Bamberger meant the sabbatical law, and perhaps the jubilee law too, the subject(s) of Leviticus 25.

²² M. Boleh, *Sefer Wayyiqra'* (Da'at Miqra'; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1991), p. 177.

and the Sinai pericope of Exodus 20–24, namely, that the blessings and curses of the former are the natural follow-up of the latter, as comparison to Deuteronomy demonstrates. While there is much to commend this suggestion, Boleh still could not explain the displacement of the blessings-and-curses pericope from the “expected” place after Exodus 24 to its current location at the end of Leviticus, nor could he connect the sabbatical and jubilees laws to his approach.

Walter Kaiser detected a very specific chronological indication in the mention of *bəhar šīnay*: “The introduction to v. 1 notes that this legislation came to Moses while he was on Mount Sinai. Israel had remained for one year at Sinai and did not move on until the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after their exodus from Egypt (see Num 10:11–12). All that is related here in Leviticus probably took place in the first month of the second year, immediately after the setting up of the tabernacle (see Exod 40:17).”²³

Baruch Schwartz would agree, apparently, as reflected in his comment that in this case the expression means “‘at (not on) Mount Sinai,’ i. e., [in the Tabernacle which stood] at [the foot of] Mount Sinai.”²⁴ And a similar stance seems to underlie Milgrom’s remark included in his commentary to our verse: “The possibility must also be considered that the placement of these chapters here implies that Moses relayed YHWH’s Sinaitic instructions to Israel at this juncture in the wilderness.”²⁵

Of a different ilk are the comments by Martin Noth and S. K. Sherwood. The former described “die Nennung des Berges Sinai [als] ungewöhnlich und bemerkenswert und wohl ein Hinweis auf das Fundamentale der folgenden Ordnungen ist”;²⁶ while the latter stated, “The mention of Sinai gives these laws a certain emphasis.”²⁷ Neither Noth nor Sherwood, however, followed these simple declarations with further comment, for example, by attempting to explain what was so crucial about the laws of chapter 25 that demanded the inclusion of the introductory notice *bəhar šīnay*.

²³ W. C. Kaiser, “Leviticus” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), p. 1171.

²⁴ B. J. Schwartz, “Leviticus,” in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 269.

²⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, p. 2152.

²⁶ M. Noth, *Das dritte Buch Mose: Leviticus* (ATD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), p. 162 = M. Noth, *Leviticus* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), p. 185.

²⁷ S. K. Sherwood, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 83.

Lloyd Bailey had a similar explanation: “This chapter, containing some of the most theologically sensitive concerns in the Bible, is set apart as a self-contained unit not only by its distinctive themes but also by a formal introduction (‘The LORD spoke to Moses ...’) and conclusion (‘I am the LORD your God’). The introduction is made more striking (and unique) by the remark that, on the occasion, ‘The LORD spoke ... on Mount Sinai,’ whereas previous regulations have originated at ‘the tent of meeting’ (1:1) near the foot of the mountain”²⁸ – though once again the reader comes away desiring more, for example, to know in what way are the laws of Leviticus 25 more “theologically sensitive” than other material in the Torah.

Erhard Gerstenberger also noted the striking (“auffällig”) mention of *bəhar sīnay* in Lev 25:1, though he too offered little in the way of explanation, other than to note that its inclusion at this spot most likely was inspired by the common appearance of the expression in selected chapters of Exodus: “Er ist eingeleitet durch die üblichen Wortvermittlungsformeln (V. 1–2a); auffällig ist allerdings die Lokalisierung der Szene ‘auf dem Berg Sinai’. Das geschieht im Buche Leviticus ausdrücklich nur noch an drei weiteren Stellen: Lev 7,38; 26,46; 27,34 (vgl. Num 3,1). Massiert kommt her ‘Berg’ (Gottes) als Ort der Beauftragung Moses in Ex 19; 24; 32; 34 zur Sprache. Möglicherweise sind die Eintragungen im 3. Buch Mose von diesen Stellen inspiriert worden.”²⁹

To his credit, Samuel Ballentine offered something more constructive: “Leviticus 25–26 envisions a similar journey: from promises spoken by God ‘on Mount Sinai’ to the actualization of these promises in Canaan ... The inclusio that frames the unit – ‘on Mount Sinai’ (25:1; 26:46; see also 7:38 and 27:34) – provides a geographical reference point that effectively locates what follows as an integral part of the instructions that undergird God’s covenantal relationship with Israel.”³⁰ While he did not state so explicitly, I gather that Ballentine refers specifically to the sabbatical and jubilee laws, which are delivered *bəhar sīnay* but which can be observed only in the land of Canaan.

Quite possibly the same or similar view lies behind the words of R. K. Harrison, who stated rather matter-of-factly: “This legislation, given on

²⁸ L. R. Bailey, *Leviticus-Numbers* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), p. 299.

²⁹ E. S. Gerstenberger, *Das dritte Buch Mose: Leviticus* (ATD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), p. 342 = E. S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 374.

³⁰ S. E. Ballentine, *Leviticus* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), p. 193.

Mount Sinai, looks forward to the time when the Israelites would be in sedentary occupation of Palestine.”³¹

Next we turn to an interpretation offered a century ago by George Genung, even if the present author fails to see the logic of this position: “This is the only place in this book of Leviticus where a section is introduced by the specific note of the wilderness as the place where the revelation was given, though the statement repeatedly occurs in final subscriptions to the sections (see 7:38; 26:46; 27:34). The form of introduction not only sets off this section by itself, but gives the writer or final compiler an air of remoteness from the event, as if he lived in another age. There is no sign of any recognition of this law in Israel previous to the exile. It certainly was disregarded or not known during seventy sabbatical cycles, or four hundred and ninety years previous to the exile, which must have covered the whole period of the monarchy.”³² As indicated, I for one do not understand how the mention of *bəhar šinay* in Lev 25:1 suggests late authorship (that is, any more than the typical post-exilic dating of the priestly source), but I include Genung’s analysis nonetheless, if for no other reason than to provide as wide a range of scholarly views as possible.

B. Maarsingh explained the inclusion of *bəhar šinay* in Lev 25:1 as a scribal insertion, with an eye to the two later occurrences of the expression, though he provided no further details or explanation: “Opdracht van YHWH, bestemd voor alle Israëlieten. De tussenvoeging ‘op de berg Sinai’, die we ook aantreffen in 26:46 en 27:34, kan duiden op de hand van een zelfde schrijver.”³³

With all due respect, to my mind, the above suggestions are all rather unconvincing in their attempt to explain the presence of the phrase *bəhar šinay* in Lev 25:1. None of them, in my opinion, advances our understanding of the verse in any significant manner. As indicated in note 14 above, however, three scholars have made observations worthy of our consideration.

The first is the detection of a literary technique, as observed by John Hartley: “This is the only introductory formula with the element בְּהַר סִינַי ‘at Mount Sinai.’ It joins with this same phrase in the summary statement at 26:46 to frame this speech. This introductory formula is different because it is the final speech in Leviticus save for the appen-

³¹ R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1980), p. 224.

³² G. F. Genung, *The Book of Leviticus* (An American Commentary on the Old Testament; Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1906), p. 96.

³³ B. Maarsingh, *Leviticus* (De Prediking van het Oude Testament; Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach, 1980), p. 225.

dix (chap. 27).”³⁴ Hartley did not refer to the seminal article of Aharon Mirsky, who noted that the final item in a list or series often is characterized by a slight change to indicate closure or conclusion.³⁵ Many more examples, in addition to those brought by Mirsky, can be cited, e. g., Numb 1:42 (note the lack of the preposition *li-* before *bnê naptālî* ‘sons of Naphtali’),³⁶ and I am happy to include Lev 25:1 as another instance. So not only is Hartley’s observation of this stylistic device very much on-target, to some extent it also serves as additional support for the view advocated by Douglas and supported herein – that is, the reader has reached the end of the book of Leviticus, the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle, *and* the summit of Mount Sinai.

The second contribution is of a substantive nature, namely, Yohanan Muffs’ recognition of a parallel between Yahweh atop Mount Sinai during the issuing of the sabbatical and jubilee laws, on the one hand, and the Mesopotamian kings’ proclaiming the *andurāru* (or ‘release’; cf. Hebrew *dārôr*) upon ascending the throne, on the other.³⁷ This too further confirms the view argued in the present article, for it places Yahweh upon the throne, which is not only atop Mount Sinai on the vertical plane, but also within the holy of holies, flanked by the cherubim, on the horizontal plane.

In addition, we may note here the related finding by Matityahu Tsevat, who observed that a series of biblical passages connect the covenant to the sabbatical release.³⁸ The most significant of these is Jer 34:13–15, which collocates the notions of *kārat bərîṭ* ‘establishing (lit. cutting) the covenant’ and *qārā’ dārôr* ‘proclaiming the release’.

As an interpreter of literature, I have no problem with multiple motivations for the presence of a particular word or phrase in a text. In the case of Lev 25:1, therefore, we may see three purposes underlying *bəhar*

³⁴ J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word Books, 1992), p. 433.

³⁵ A. Mirsky, “Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew,” *Semitics* 5 (1977), pp. 9–23.

³⁶ I continue to collect examples in the Bible and one day plan to present a thorough study of this device, building on the work of Mirsky.

³⁷ Y. Muffs, *Studies in Biblical Law II*, vol. 4: Lectures at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), pp. 10–11 (not available to me). See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, pp. 2151–2152; and R. Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 653.

³⁸ M. Tsevat, “Inyan Shemiṭa ‘ešel Har Sinai,” in Y. Aharoni, et al., eds., *Sefer Shmu‘el Yeivin* (Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1970), pp. 283–288. See also the condensed version: M. Tsevat, “Mah ‘Inyan Shemiṭa ‘ešel Har Sinai,” in M. Weinfeld, ed., *Wayyiqra’: ‘Olam ha-Tanakh* (Tel-Aviv: Davidson-Ittay, 1993), pp. 181–182.

sînay ‘on Mount Sinai’: the main point treated in the body of this article and the two items discussed in the preceding three paragraphs.

As an analogy, I submit the case of *lûz* ‘almond’ in Gen 30:37, the only place in the Bible where this word is used as a common noun, appearing here instead of the normal Hebrew word for ‘almond’, namely, *šāqēd*. The word was employed for three reasons: 1) As an Aramaic-like feature in the narrative (note that the Targumim regularly use *lûz* to render *šāqēd*), this lexeme serves as part of the style-switching technique utilized in Genesis 30–31; the story takes place in Aram, and the language reflects this throughout.³⁹ 2) The term enhances the alliteration in the string *maqal libne^h laḥ wəlûz wə^ʿermôn* ‘rods of fresh poplar and almond and plane’ (and see other words in the verse with *lamed*).⁴⁰ 3) The form *lûz* is fresh in the reader’s mind, since it was used earlier in Gen 28:19 as the former name of the city of Bethel, at a point in the narrative where Jacob begins his journey to Aram.

³⁹ See further J. C. Greenfield, “Aramaic Studies and the Bible,” in J. A. Emerton, ed., *Congress Volume Vienna 1980* (SVT 32; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp. 110–130, especially pp. 129–130; and G. A. Rendsburg, “Aramaic-like Features in the Pentateuch,” *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006), pp. 163–176, in particular p. 166.

⁴⁰ On alliteration as a feature of biblical narrative, including prose, see G. A. Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” in C. Cohen, V. A. Hurowitz, A. Hurvitz, Y. Muffs, B. J. Schwartz, and J. H. Tigay, eds., *Shalom Paul Festschrift* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).