



PARSHAS TZAV / PURIM – HODU AND KUSH – M.D. SPITZER

“Achashverosh – who ruled from Hodu to Kush”. Where are Hodu and Kush? Hodu is accepted to be India. Kush is generally translated as Ethiopia – but I recently came across an interesting Rashi which might point us in another direction.

In Yuma 81b, the gemora mentions a place called “בי הַנְּדוּאִי”, “Bei Hindui”. Where is this “Bei Hindui”? Probably the most obvious translation of “Hindui” is India. However, Rashi translates “Bei Hindui” as “the land of Kush”. But how did Rashi know this? What has “Hindu” to do with “Kush”?

The Hindu Kush

Well, on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, there is an extension of the Himalayas, a 500 mile long mountain range called the Hindu Kush. Some basic research reveals that in the region there once ruled a Kushan Empire (though several centuries after the events of Purim).

So might it be that there were actually two places called Kush: (1) Ethiopia, and (2) the Hindu Kush in the Afghanistan/Pakistan area?

From Hodu to Kush

This could explain a well-known gemora in Megilla (11a), an argument between Rav and Shmuel:

One says: Hodu was at one end of the world, and Kush at the other end of the world

One says: Hodu and Kush neighboured each other.

As some meforshim ask, it is a little difficult to say that they argue over a factual matter – the geographic location of Kush.

But with our suggestion that there were *two* places called Kush – they were simply arguing as to *which* Kush the megilla refers. One says the megilla refers to Ethiopia (India and Ethiopia were the two limits of the inhabited world – “Achashverosh ruled from one end of the world to the other”), and the other says Achashverosh ruled from India to the Hindu Kush, which of course neighbour each other. (I was pleased to find a similar explanation of this gemora given by Rav Yaakov Emden in his notes to Megilla 11a.)

Another Kush – in the Arabian Peninsula

A similar explanation appears in the Tevuos Haaretz (a history and geography of Eretz Yisroel and the Middle East written in the mid-19th century, by Rav Yosef Schwartz – referenced by the Maharsham, notes to Megilla). He also proposes that there were two places called Kush: (1) Ethiopia, and (2) Yemen, at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula – across the Red Sea, not far from Ethiopia. (Amongst his proofs: the Targum Yonason (Noach 10:6) writes that Kush established a country called “Arabia”.)

He continues to discuss the wife of Moshe, who was Kushite (as stated in Behaalosecha, 12:1). Many meforshim ask that Moshe’s wife Tzipora came from Midian – which was in Arabia, nowhere near Ethiopia! (They are therefore forced into different explanations – for example, the Rashbam writes that this Kushite woman was a different wife). However, if there was indeed a Kush in Arabia, Tzipora the Midianite might well have been referred to as “Kushite”.

[Interestingly, the Tevuos Haaretz also half-suggests that “Hodu” refers to the islands of the West Indies – on the basis of the Targum Sheni, which states that Hodu was in the west. But as he admits, this is probably stretching a little too far.]