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**DERECH B'YAM  
HATALMUD**

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**WHY DID HASHEM LIFT THE  
MOUNTAIN OVER OUR  
HEADS?**

**A guided approach to understanding  
the events of Shavuos**

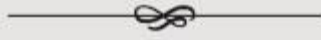
**From the Gemara (Shabbos 88a)**

**L'refuah shleimah Moshe Zelig ben Raizel**

**By Rabbi Michoel Gros**

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## SECTION ONE



### Lifting Up the Mountain Like a Barrel

#### OVERVIEW

*The Gemara in Shabbos 88a relates several of the events which occurred on Shavuos when Hashem gave us the Torah. It teaches that He lifted Har Sinai over our heads כגגית – like a barrel.*

*Numerous questions need to be answered to understand this statement, including:*

- *How does the Gemara know that Hashem lifted up the mountain?*
- *Why was this necessary? If it was to make sure we would accept the Torah, we had already done so when we said "נעשה ונשמע".*

*Significantly, 'תוס' and the 'מהר"ל differ on the reason that Hashem lifted Har Sinai above our heads, and what we learn from this.*

#### מראה מקומות

- **גמרא שבת פח. מ.** – "ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר" עד "ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם"
- **מדרש תנחומא** – פרשת נח פרק ג' (מ) – "ולא קבלו ישראל את התורה" עד "ובכל מאדך"
- **בן יהוידע** – שבת (ד"ה שם מלמד שכפה עליהם)
- **תוס'** – שבת (ד"ה כפה עליהן הר כגיגית) עד "שיצאתה נשמתן"
- **מהר"ל** – **גור אריה על התורה** (שמות יט:יז)

#### Summary of the Gemara

The Gemara in Mesechtas Shabbos describes the events of the giving of the Torah on Shavuos.

It begins on daf 86a with a dispute regarding whether Matan Torah occurred on the sixth or seventh of Sivan. (Here, we follow the opinion that it was on the sixth, the day of Shavuos.)

On daf 88a, the Gemara relates some of the events which occurred at Har Sinai on Shavuos.

*"ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר"* – The Gemara quotes the verse (Shemos 19:17) – "(Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward Hashem) and they stood under the mountain."

-**Rashi** (ד"ה תחתית ההר) says they stood **ממש** **תחת ההר** – literally under the mountain.

*א"ר אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא* – The Gemara quotes **Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa** who says, *מלמד שכפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כגגית*, – "the verse teaches that HaKadosh Baruch Hu lifted the mountain over their heads like a barrel."

-**Rashi** (ד"ה גיגית) says that a **גיגית** is a vessel used to make beer.

-The **Aruch** says it refers to a woven basket.

*ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה, מוטב. ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם.* – And Hashem said, "If you accept the Torah, fine. But if not, here will be your burial spot."

**QUESTION:** How does the Gemara know that the phrase "בתחתית ההר" means that Hashem lifted up the mountain? The simplest meaning of these words is that the Jews stood at the foot of the mountain.

The **Maharsha** (ד"ה שפכה עליהן ההר) says that the Gemara knows that Hashem held the mountain over our heads because the verse says **בתחתית ההר** – within the mountain, and not **תחת ההר** – under the mountain.

He explains that the word **בתחתית** means "within its insides." This refers to an item surrounded on all sides, such as by a barrel or a grave.

The **Parparos L'chochma** notes that the gematria of the word **גיגית** is 426, the numerical equivalent of the word **תכו** – within. This indicates that Hashem held the mountain directly over our heads and we were within its insides.

(Brought by the **Eitz Yosef** on the [מס' עבודה זרה ב: ד"ה בתחתית ההר]. The **Ben Ish Chai** says similarly in [עבודה זרה ד"ה מלמד שכפה].)

**Understanding the statement that Hashem lifted the mountain like a barrel**

**QUESTION:** Why did Hashem lift Har Sinai above our heads? We had already demonstrated our willingness to accept the Torah one day prior when we said "Naaseh V'Nishma". Were

**we reconfirming our prior acceptance, this time under duress, or was there a difference between the two acceptances?**

Several commentators explain the statement of the Gemara that Hashem lifted the mountain like a גיגית, based on the Midrash Tanchuma.

The **Midrash Tanchuma** (פרשת נח פרק ג') teaches various lessons regarding the תורה שבעל פה (the Oral Torah, referring to the Gemara), including the serious, ongoing effort necessary to learn it. It says that the תורה שבעל פה is the specific merit we possess which holds up the world.

From the words וּלֹא קִבְּלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, the Midrash describes the events of Hashem lifting up the mountain.

**ואם תאמר** – The Midrash says that on Shavuot morning when Hashem picked up the mountain, He forced us to accept only the תורה שבעל פה.

It was unnecessary for Hashem to force us to accept the תורה שבכתב (the Written Torah), because we had already done so on the previous day (the fifth day of Sivan) when we said, "נעשה ונשמע". The Midrash says that we accepted the תורה שבכתב willingly, since אין יגיעה וצער והיא מעט – since it does not require exertion and hard work to learn it, and it is small in size.

**אלא** – Rather, when Hashem lifted the mountain, He forced us to accept only the תורה שבעל פה. The Midrash says that He did so because the Torah contains numerous Mitzvos, each with a myriad of details, and fulfilling it requires tremendous effort and a great love of Hashem. He wishes to stress the seriousness with which we need to approach the תורה שבעל פה, to make sure that we would accept it properly.

The **Eitz Yosef** on the Midrash quotes the **Alshich** who comments on this, adding that the Jews' original hesitancy to accept the תורה שבעל פה was due to our great love for Hashem, since we were uncertain how we could fulfill all of its many details and learn it properly. Therefore, they said "נעשה ונשמע" because they thought it would be sufficient to accept the תורה שבכתב alone and keep it fully.

**QUESTION: Since Hashem wished to threaten us to accept the Torah, He could have done so in other ways. Why was it necessary for him to lift the mountain over our heads? Further, why does the Gemara compare Har Sinai to an empty barrel?**

**What do these elements reveal about our acceptance of the Torah?**

The **Ben Ish Chai** in (ד"ה שם מלמד שכפה עליהם) **בן יהוידע** says, based on the Midrash Tanchuma, that when the Jews originally said "נעשה ונשמע", we only accepted the תורה שבכתב and only according to its פשוט פשוט – basic understanding. We did not want

to accept the תורה שבעל פה because we recognized that on its every word, תולה בה תלי – hung copious amounts of laws – תלים של הלכות.

However, Hashem wished for us to accept the תורה שבעל פה with a full understanding of what we were accepting. Therefore, He held up the mountain like an empty barrel to show that every word of the Torah is like a barrel with a בית קיבול – utensil for putting items into.

The Ben Ish Chai is saying that our acceptance of the Torah was based on our knowledge of what we were receiving. We needed to accept the Torah with the knowledge that its every word contains endless depth.

**QUESTION: Why did Hashem coerce us to accept the Torah, and why did He threaten to destroy the entire Jewish nation if we did not?**

## **Two approaches from the commentators to explain the events of Matan Torah**

### **Approach One – Tosefos**

**Tosefos** (ד"ה כפה עליהן הר כגיגית) says that Hashem held the mountain over the Jews' heads, ואע"פ שכבר הקדימו – even though they preceded this event by saying נעשה ונשמע – "Naaseh V'Nishma – We will do and we will hear."<sup>1</sup>

Tosefos says that Hashem was concerned that even though the Jews had already accepted the Torah, we would be consumed with intense fear when we saw the fire surrounding Har Sinai, and when our souls left our bodies during Matan Torah (as the Gemara describes on 88b). Due to this, שמא יהיו חוזרים – perhaps the Jews will withdraw their commitment to accept the Torah.

Therefore, He held the mountain above us to threaten us, to make us guarantee that we would not backtrack on our commitment. The fear of immediate annihilation prevented us from doing this, and reinforced our commitment to observing the Torah.

### **Approach Two – The Maharal**

The **Maharal** in several places, including in **Gur Aryeh** on Shemos 19:17 (on the verse "ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר") challenges the approach of Tosefos. Among the questions he asks is why would we abandon our entire commitment simply due to the fear we felt during Matan Torah.

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<sup>1</sup> The Torah later records (Shemos 24:7) that the Jews said "Naaseh V'Nishma." However, the Gemara here and many of the commentators say that this event occurred on the fifth of Sivan, prior to Shavuot.

The Maharal suggests a different explanation of the Gemara and the events of Matan Torah. He says that Hashem lifted the mountain above our heads not to reinforce the commitment we made to accept the Torah, but to inform the Jews of the **מעלת התורה** – the fundamental value of the Torah.

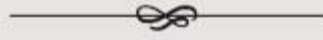
He explains that if the Jews had accepted the Torah only willingly (even though this is admirable), it might lead to a misunderstanding of the Torah. One might say that the Torah is a beneficial part of the world which enhances our lives, but not that it is critical to the existence of the entire universe.

Therefore, Hashem lifted the mountain to tell the Jews that you must accept the Torah. If you do not, the world will cease to exist.

It is impossible for the world to exist without the Torah (as the Gemara will say that the world would revert to **תוהו ובוהו** – emptiness – had we not accepted it). You need to accept it knowing that it is the foundation of the entire universe.

The Maharal adds in (פרק ל"ב) **תפארת ישראל** that Hashem lifted the mountain to inform the Jews that the **תורה** is the **מציאות** – the reality of the world. He wished to teach us that the **השלמת העולם** – the completion of the entire world – was based on our acceptance.

## SECTION TWO



### A Test of our Commitment

#### OVERVIEW

*The Gemara in Shabbos 88a says that Hashem lifted Har Sinai over our heads to guarantee that we would accept the Torah. How had the Jews previously shown our commitment to accepting the Torah, so that it would be obvious that we would agree to Hashem's demands?*

*The Gemara in Avodah Zarah describes the events of Shavuot from a different perspective and sheds light on this issue.*

#### מראה מקומות

- גמרא עבודה זרה ב: מ- "דרש רבי חנינא" עד "איתגורי איתגור"
- הרי"ף על העין יעקב – עבודה זרה ב: (ד"ה אמר להן ראשונות)

**QUESTION:** The Gemara says that if the Jews had refused to accept the Torah when they were standing under the mountain, they would have died there and the entire world would revert to a situation of emptiness (as the Gemara will say)

**The fate of the entire world hung on a single act of the Jews. How had the Jews previously shown their ability to pass this test?**

The Gemara at the beginning of Mesechtas Avodah Zarah describes the events of Matan Torah from a different perspective, including the eagerness of the Jews to accept the Torah and observe its rules.

#### Summary of the Gemara in Avodah Zarah

*The Gemara in Avodah Zarah daf 2a-3a says that in the future (in the time of Moshiach), Hashem will announce that He will reward anyone who was involved in the Torah. The Gemara relates that each of the non-Jewish nations will line up to claim that they deserve the reward.*

*Each will describe various ways that they enabled the Jews to learn. However, Hashem will reject all of their claims.*

**אומרים לפניו** – *The Gemara towards the bottom of 2b says that the nations will then try another attempt to convince Hashem to give them the reward. They will say to Hashem, **רשב"ע כלום נתת לנו ולא קיבלנוה** – “Ribbono Shel Olam, did You offer it to us and we did not accept it?”*

*Hashem will respond to them, based on a verse in Habbakuk, that He offered the Torah to the nations, but they each rejected it.*

**אלא הכי אמרי כלום קיבלוה ולא קיימנוה** – *The nations will then ask whether they had accepted the Torah and were punished for not observing it. Hashem will reject this claim as well.*

**אלא כך אומרים לפניו רשב"ע כלום כפית עליהו הר כגיגית ולא קבלנוה כמו שיעשית לישראל** – *Rather they will claim, “Ribono Shel Olam, did You lift up the mountain over our heads, as You did to the Jews, and we did not accept it?” It quotes the verse, "ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר", and describes the event as it does in Mesechtos Shabbos.*

**מיד אומר הקב"ה...** – *The Gemara says that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will respond that the non-Jews themselves did not fulfill the **שבע מצוות בני נח** – the seven universal laws – which He had given them previously. Therefore, there was no reason to offer additional laws to them under coercion.*

The **Rif** on the (ד"ה אמר להן ראשונות) עין יעקב - עבודה זרה ב: (ד"ה אמר להן ראשונות) says that Hashem lifted the mountain above the heads of the Jews because we previously showed Him our commitment when we said "נעשה ונשמע". Additionally, we were already fulfilling the small number of Mitzvos which we received in Marah prior to traveling to Har Sinai (specifically those of Shabbos and certain laws governing business transactions).

Since we had already willingly fulfilled these mitzvos, this demonstrated that we had submitted (**משעבד**) ourselves to Hashem.

The Rif cites the verse "תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב" – “the Torah which Moshe commanded us is the inheritance for the congregation of Yaacov” (Devarim 33:4). He says that the word **מורשה** (inheritance) alludes to the word **מארסה** (engaged). Just as a **נערה המארסה** – an engaged woman – is considered married even before the Nisuin at the Chupah and cannot back out (without receiving a Get), we were already “married” to Hashem through our eager fulfillment of the Mitzvos we had received. We showed through this that we would accept the rest of the Torah when Hashem lifted the mountain over our heads (based on Pesachim 49b).

In contrast, in the future when the nations of the world will claim that they would have accepted the Torah if Hashem had lifted the mountain over their heads as the Jews did, Hashem will reply, since you did not accept what I already gave you, there was no reason to give you additional laws.



## SECTION THREE



### A Coercion and a Willing Reacceptance

#### OVERVIEW

*The Gemara teaches that because Hashem coerced us to accept the Torah, this gave us an excuse in the future to claim that we should not be punished for failing to observe it. However, this claim was removed when we reaccepted the Torah after the Purim miracle.*

*Issues which need to be clarified include:*

- *Why would Hashem put us in a situation that we could defend our improper actions through a claim of coercion?*
- *How did we lose this ability when we reaccepted the Torah?*
- *In light of our claim that we were coerced into accepting the Torah, how could Hashem have punished us prior to our willful reacceptance?*

#### מראה מקומות

- גמרא שבת פה. מ- "א"ר אחא" עד "קימו וקבלו היהודים"
- חידושי הר"ן (ד"ה מכאן מודעא רבה תאורייתא)
- תוס' (ד"ה מודעא רבה לאורייתא)

#### Summary of the Gemara

*The Gemara in Shabbos teaches that Hashem threatened to wipe out the entire Jewish nation if we did not accept the Torah, and then it describes one outcome of that act:*

**א"ר אחא בר יעקב מכאן מודעא רבה לאורייתא** – *It quotes Rav Acha bar Yaacov who says, "from here is a **Moda'ah** – a compelling claim of coercion on the Torah."*

*אמר רבה – The Gemara quotes Rabba<sup>2</sup> who responds and says, אף על פי כן הדור קבלוה בימי אחשורוש דכתיב "קימו וקבלו" – This is as the verse in Megillah 9:27 teaches, "the Jews fulfilled and accepted upon themselves."*

*The Gemara explains: קיימו – they (the entire Jewish nation) agreed to fulfill – מה שקיבלו כבר – what they had already accepted upon themselves (referring to the Torah).*

Rabba is explaining that once the Jews willingly reaccepted the Torah after the Purim miracle, this negated the Moda'ah which they previously had. Therefore, they were entirely bound to follow the Torah, and could be punished if they did not do so.

## **Understanding the Jews' forced acceptance of the Torah and its ramifications**

**Numerous issues need to be resolved to understand the statement of the Gemara here, including:**

**QUESTION ONE: What is the meaning of the phrase מודעה רבה לאורייתא?**

**QUESTION TWO: Since we had a מודעה for our behavior from the time of the giving of the Torah until we reaccepted the Torah after the Purim miracle, how could the Jews have been punished for any sins they committed in the interim?**

The term מודעה refers to statement of coercion, which a person can use in court to annul a transaction by showing that he was forced to agree to it.

**Rashi** (ד"ה מודעה רבה) explains: שאם יזמינם לדין למה לא קיימתם מה שקבלתם עליכם – for if the Jews were taken to court and asked, "why did you not fulfill what you accepted on yourselves," יש להם תשובה שקבלוה באונס – they would be able to respond that they were forced to accept it.

The **Chiddushei HaRan** (ד"ה מכאן מודעה רבה תאורייתא) suggests an explanation of the Moda'ah and why it was eliminated when the Jews reaccepted the Torah at the end of the Purim events.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on an emendation by the Hagehos HaBach.

He says that the Jews' acceptance of the Torah was a prerequisite to our receiving the land of Eretz Yisrael. (Had we refused to accept the Torah, we would not have been entitled to receive the Land, but would have died in the desert.)

Since accepting and fulfilling the Torah is the basis of our life in Eretz Yisrael, once the Jews failed to properly observe its rules, we needed to be exiled from it.

When Rav Acha in the Gemara says that the Jews had a Moda'ah, he meant, "לדידן" "שאינו לנו חלק בארץ" – for us who do not have a portion in the land (since we do not live in it) – we have a valid Moda'ah. Since we accepted the Torah to receive Eretz Yisrael, once we were exiled from the land, we could argue that we are no longer bound to follow the Torah.

Rabba replies to him that the Jews' reacceptance of the Torah during the time of Purim negated any Moda'ah we could claim. The Jews reaccepted the Torah then when they were also living in exile, as they were all living in Shushan and other parts of the Persian Empire. They reaccepted the Torah willingly without connecting it to living in the land. We who similarly do not live in the land are bound by their renewed commitment to follow the Torah.

The **Chiddushei HaRamban** (ד"ה והא דאמר'י בענין אגדה) gives a similar approach. He adds that when the Jews willingly reaccepted the Torah in Shushan, and then returned to Eretz Yisrael shortly after, they carried with them the tremendous inspiration they had gained from the salvation they had just experienced. They accepted the Torah completely, so that they would no longer have any complaint on it.

The **Rashba** brought by the **Eitz Yosef** on the (ד"ה מודעה רבא) עין יעקב gives a comparable answer.

### **Understanding the impact of our reacceptance of the Torah during Purim**

**QUESTION: How can the Gemara say that the Jews only reaccepted the Torah years later after the Purim events? Did they not do so at other times in between, such as on Har Gerizim and Har Eival upon entering Eretz Yisrael?**

**Was there a unique element of the Jews' reacceptance during Purim which is the reason that the Gemara here mentions it?**

**Tosefos** (ד"ה מודעה רבה לאורייתא) notes that the Jews reaccepted the Torah on other occasions between Shavuos and Purim, and appeared to do so willingly each time.

He cites the Gemara in Nedarim daf 25a which teaches that when the Jews were encamped in Arvos Moav before Moshe Rabbeinu died, שכרת משה ברית – that he made a new agreement between them and Hashem. The entire nation promised to

fulfill the Torah and Mitzvos, **והשביעם על כך** – and he made them take an oath that they would do this.

Second, he cites the Gemara in Sotah 37b which describes that the Jews reaccepted the entire Torah at the time of Yehoshua at Har Gerizim and Har Eival.

Tosefos is asking: how can the Gemara here say that the Jews only reaccepted the Torah years later at the time of Purim, since it appears from the Gemara in these other two places that they did so willingly twice in between?

**ת"א** – He quotes **Rabbeinu Tam** who answers: when the Jews accepted the Torah on these two occasions, they did so **על פי הדיבור** – upon the command of Hashem – **והרי כבעל כרחם** – and it was as if they were forced to do so.

**אבל** – In contrast when the Jews later reaccepted the Torah after Purim, **קבלו מדעתם**, **מאהבת הנס** – they accepted it willingly due to their love for the miracle.

**ומה שכרת עמהן ברית לעבוד את ה'** – Later, Yehoshua sealed a new covenant among the Jews for them to serve Hashem, which they accepted on their own. However, this was limited in scope, since **לא קבלו אלא שלא לעבוד ע"ז** – they only accepted upon themselves not to serve idolatry.

In contrast, the Jews' reacceptance after the Purim miracle was unique and complete. It was an acceptance of the entire Torah and was taken willingly. Therefore, the Gemara mentions it here as the final commitment which bound the people to fulfill it.

### **Explaining the culpability of the Jews for their sins following Matan Torah**

**QUESTION: Many years passed between Matan Torah and the Jews' reacceptance of the Torah. How could they have been punished during this time, since they had a מודעה?**

The **Maharsha** on the (ד"ה מכאן מודעה רבה כו') asks why the Jews were punished during the time of the first Beis HaMikdash, since this was prior to their reacceptance of the Torah at the time of Purim. At this time, they still had a Moda'ah which should have protected them if they fell short in their observance of the Torah.

He cites the words of **Tosefos** (ד"ה מודעה רבה לאורייתא) that at the time of Yehoshua (prior to the Purim events), the Jews willingly accepted upon themselves not to worship Avodah Zarah. Since this was one of the primary sins they committed while the first Beis HaMikdash stood, they were duly punished for it.

In addition, the **Eitz Yosef** on the (ד"ה מודעה רבה) cites the Midrash Tanchuma which says that the Jews willingly accepted the תורה שבכתב on themselves when they said "נעשה ונשמע". Since they did so voluntarily, they did not have a מודעה on this. They were punished for violating the prohibitions in it, in addition to the שבע מצוות בני נח which they were bound to fulfill even before Matan Torah.

## SECTION FOUR



### The World Trembles in Fear

#### OVERVIEW

*The Gemara in Shabbos says that the world was fearful that it would be destroyed if the Jews refused to accept the Torah. What was the reason for this fear, and how was it addressed?*

#### מראה מקומות

- גמרא שבת פח. מ- "אמר חזקיה" עד "לתוהו ובוהו"
- גמרא עבודה זרה ג. מ- "[אלא כך] אומרים" עד "יתנו עידיהם ויצדקו"
- מהרש"א - עבודה זרה ב: (ד"ה מלמד שכפה עליהם כו')
- חתם סופר - שבת (ד"ה מחזיר אתכם)

#### Summary of the Gemara

*The Gemara in the middle of 88a analyzes two verses regarding the creation of the world, which it connects to the events of Matan Torah.*

*"אמר חזקיה מאי דכתיב "משמים השמעת דין ארץ יראה ושקטה" – It quotes Chizakayah who asks the meaning of the verse, "From heaven you made judgment heard, the earth feared and then grew quiet" (Tehillim 76:9).*

*He asks: אם יראה למה שקטה – if the world was afraid, why was it silent?  
ואם שקטה למה יראה – And if it was silent, why was it afraid?*

*אלא בתחילה יראה ולבסוף שקטה – Rather, the verse indicates that the world was initially scared and then became silent.*

**Rashi** (ד"ה בתחילה) ו-(ד"ה יראה) says that the world was afraid that the Jews would not accept the Torah, and it would be destroyed.

Rashi says that once the Jews said "נעשה ונשמע", the world immediately calmed down.

*כדריש לקיש דאמר ריש לקיש מאי דכתיב "ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי" – The Gemara says that this is like the statement of **Reish Lakish** who asked, "why does the verse say, "there was night and day, it was **the sixth day**" (Bereishis 1:31)?*

*לי תירדה למה לי "ה" – The letter "ה" is extra. Why is it needed?*

*מלמד שהתנה הקב"ה עם מעשה בראשית – The Gemara says that the extra letter "ה" teaches that Hakodesh Baruch Hu made a condition with creation. "ואמר להם "אם ישראל מקבלים התורה אתם מתקיימין" "ואם לאו אני "ואם לאו אני" – "if the Jews accept the Torah, you will survive," "but if not, I will return you to your (original) state of emptiness."*

**Rashi** (ד"ה מלמד שהתנה וכו') explains that the extra letter "ה" in the word הששי causes it to be read "the sixth day." It alludes to another sixth day, that of the sixth of Sivan, the day on which Hashem would give us the Torah.

(The letter "ה" does not appear regarding the other days of creation, meaning that Hashem was alluding to a specific later event only in the verse regarding יום הששי.)

Rashi says that the גמר בראשית תלוי ביום הששי – the final stage in the creation of the world was based on (the giving of the Torah on) the sixth of Sivan.

The **Maharsha** (עבודה זרה ב: ד"ה מלמד שכפה עליהם כו') says that in the beginning of creation, the entire earth was covered with water. Hashem gathered the water into defined areas so that the land would emerge and man could live on it. If the Jews did not accept the Torah at Shavuot, Hashem said that He would reverse the process and return the world to its original state of תוהו ובהו.

### **Understanding the fear of the world that it would be destroyed**

The **Chasam Sofer** (ד"ה מחזיר אתכם) cites the **Ramban** in his **Derashos** (דרשת תורת ה') who says that if the Jews had not accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, ממילא תוהו ובהו – the world would automatically revert to its earlier state of emptiness.

The Ramban explains that the world was created only for the Jews to accept and fulfill the Torah. Had we not done so, there would be no purpose for the world to exist and it would immediately be destroyed.

**QUESTION: How was the Jews' acceptance of the Torah sufficient to calm the world? How did it know that the Jews would continue to observe the mitzvos and learn the Torah?**

The **Rif** on the (ד"ה אמר חזקיה) **עין יעקב** says that after the Jews accepted the Torah, the world immediately became calm, as the verse says "תורת ה' תמימה משיבת נפש" – "the Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul" (Tehillim 19:8). He says that the Torah brings life to the Jews and **ונתבסס** – it creates a base – for the world to exist.

He cites the Gemara in Avodah Zarah which relates the attempt in the future by the nations of the world to try to claim reward for observing the Torah. The Gemara says that Hashem will rebuff their claims, and say that only the Jews lived up to this task. The Gemara on 3a there says that the nations will demand proof that the Jews faithfully observed the Torah. Hashem suggests several answers, each of which will be rejected by the nations. It finally answers that the nations of the world themselves will testify that the Jews upheld the Torah.

The Rif says that the verse from Tehillim describing the "feelings" of the world refers to two events. The first statement of **יראה** – that the world will be scared – means that it was frightened that the Jews would not accept the Torah. Once we accepted it on the sixth of Sivan at Har Sinai, it achieved a level of calmness, knowing that it had a reason to continue to exist.

However, an element of fear remained in the world even after Shavuos. It was concerned that the Jews would not continue to observe the Torah, and even if they did, there would be no one available to testify to this fact. Without clear proof that the Jews had faithfully observed the Torah, the world could still be destroyed.

The Rif says that the second statement that the world will become **שקטה** – calm – refers to the future. The world will take solace in the future in the knowledge that the Jews not only accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, but will continue to observe it during the time of the Moshiach.

# SUMMARY: WHY DID HASHEM LIFT THE MOUNTAIN OVER OUR HEADS? (SHABBOS 88A)

## *Section One - Lifting Up the Mountain Like a Barrel*

I. During Matan Torah, Hashem lifted the mountain over our heads like a גגית – barrel. The Gemara learns this because the verse says the Jews were בתחתית ההר – within the mountain (**Maharsha**). The word גגית has the gematria 426, the same as תכו – within (**Parparos L'chochma**).

II. The **Midrash Tanchuma** (פרשת נח פרק ג') says that we previously accepted the תורה שבכתב when we said, "נעשה ונשמע", but needed to be coerced to accept the תורה שבעל פה due to the extra effort needed to learn it.

The **Ben Yehoyada** says the message of Har Sinai being lifted like a barrel teaches us that every word of the Torah is like an empty vessel with endless depth.

III. **Tosefos** says Hashem lifted Har Sinai over us because He feared that we would withdraw our commitment. The **Maharal** says He did this to teach us that the entire world exists due to our fulfillment of the Torah.

## *Section Two – A Test of our Commitment*

I. The **Rif** says that we showed our eagerness to accept the bulk of the Torah by observing the small number of Mitzvos which we received in Marah prior to arriving at Har Sinai and the שבע מצוות בני נח. The Gemara says we were like a מארסה – an engaged woman – who is eager to arrive at the Chupah and complete the marriage.

## *Section Three – A Coercion and a Willing Reacceptance*

I. The Gemara says that we had a מודעה – a claim of coercion – that we should not be punished for violating the Torah since Hashem forced us to accept it. However, we lost this claim when the Jews in Shushan reaccepted the Torah on themselves and their descendants following the Purim miracle.

The **Ran** and the **Ramban** says that the Jews could have claimed that we accepted the Torah to fulfill it in Eretz Yisrael and were not bound to follow it in exile. We lost this claim once we reaccepted it, since we were in exile at that point, and did so immediately before returning to Eretz Yisrael.

II. Even though we had a מודעה, we were still liable to be punished for violating the Torah since we had agreed to observe its rules (**Maharsha, Eitz Yosef**).

## *Section Four – The World Trembles in Fear*

I. The world was afraid that it would be destroyed if the Jews refused to accept the Torah, since it was created only for the Jews to fulfill the Torah (**Chasam Sofer** from the **Ramban**).

## ABOUT US

*Derech B'Yam HaTalmud presents a guided approach to aid in the learning and teaching of Gemara B'Iyun. It offers a live daily iyun shiur in Ramat Beit Shemesh, and written and electronic materials for learning and teaching.*

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