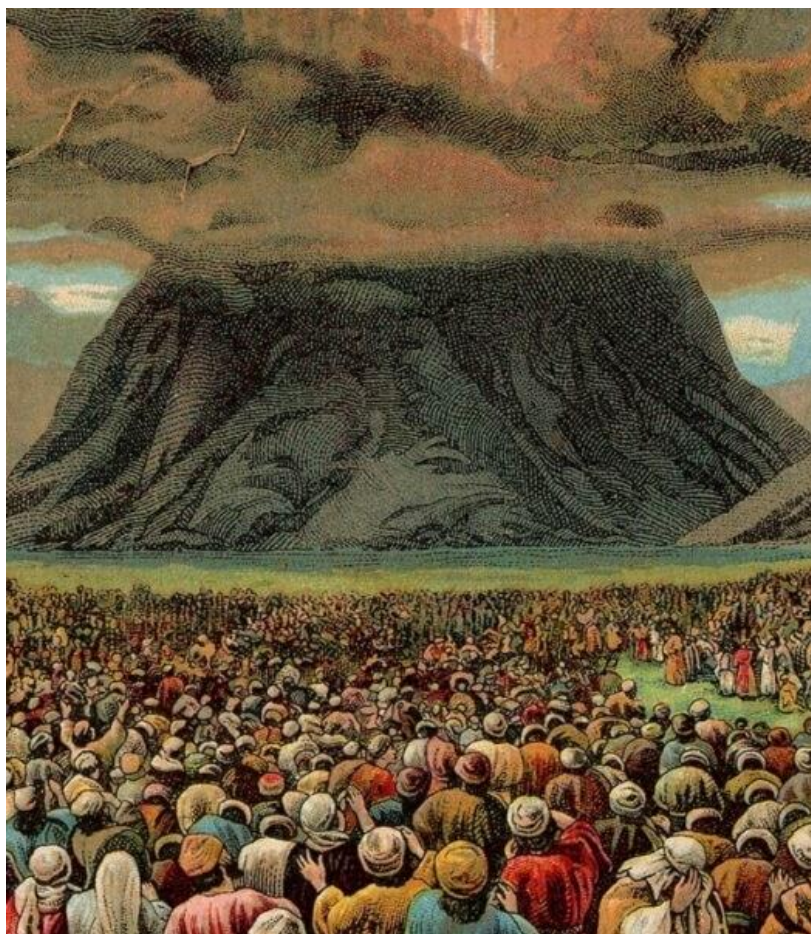


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# CHOICE OR COERCION:

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*Did We Willingly Accept the Torah?*



FEBRUARY 7, 2023  
YU TORAH MITZION KOLLEL  
יתרו, CLIK

## THE QUESTION

### 1. שמות פרק כד פסוק ז

<p>(7) He took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people, and they said, "All that Hashem has spoken, we will do and we will listen."</p>	<p>(ז) ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם ויאמרו כל אשר דבר יקח נעשה ונשמע:</p>
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### 2. תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פט עמוד ב

<p>At Sinai, when they accorded precedence to "We will do" over "We will listen" before You, didn't You call them, "My son, My firstborn son Israel" (Exodus 4:22)?</p>	<p>...בשעה שהקדימו לפניך נעשה לנשמע, קראת להם בני בכורי...</p>
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### 3. שמות פרק יט פסוק יז

<p>(17) Moshe brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stationed themselves at the bottom of the mountain.</p>	<p>ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלהים מרהמחנה ויניצבו בתחתית ההר:</p>
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### 4. רש"י שמות פרק יט פסוק יז

<p>According to its literal meaning this signifies "at the foot of the mountain". But a Midrashic explanation is, that the mountain was plucked up from its place and was arched over them as a cask, so that they were standing בתחתית beneath (under) the mountain itself</p>	<p>בתחתית ההר - לפי פשוטו בגלי ההר. ומדרשו שנתלש ההר ממקומו ונכפה עליהם כגיגית:</p>
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### 5. תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח עמוד א

<p>The Torah says, "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount" (Exodus 19:17). Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain, and the verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Aha bar Ya'akov said: From here there is a substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah. The Jewish people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding. Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: "The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them"</p>	<p>ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר, אמר רב אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא: מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם. אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: מכאן מודעה רבה לאורייתא. אמר רבא: אף על פי כן, הדור קבלוה בימי אחשורוש. דכתיב קימו וקבלו</p>
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(Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews ordained what they had already taken upon themselves through coercion at Sinai.	היהודים, קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר.
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6. תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח עמוד א

<p>Rabbi Simai taught: When Israel accorded precedence to the declaration "We will do" over the declaration "We will hear," 600,000 ministering angels came and tied two crowns to each and every member of the Jewish people, one corresponding to "We will do" and one corresponding to "We will hear." And when the people sinned with the Golden Calf, 1,200,000 angels of destruction descended and removed them from the people, as it is stated in the wake of the sin of the Golden Calf: "And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward" (Exodus 33:6)...</p> <p>Rabbi Elazar said: When the Jewish people accorded precedence to the declaration "We will do" over "We will hear," a Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Who revealed to my children this secret that the ministering angels use? As it is written: "Bless the Lord, you angels of His, you mighty in strength, that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word" (Psalms 103:20). At first, the angels fulfill His word, and then afterward they hearken...</p>	<p>דרש רבי סימאי : בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע, באו ששים ריבוא של מלאכי השרת, לכל אחד ואחד מישראל קשרו לו שני כתרים, אחד כנגד נעשה ואחד כנגד נשמע. וכיון שחטאו ישראל, ירדו מאה ועשרים ריבוא מלאכי חבלה, ופירקום. שנאמר ויתנצלו בני ישראל את עדים מהר חורב... אמר רבי אלעזר : בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע יצתה בת קול ואמרה להן : מי גילה לבני רז זה שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו? דכתיב ברכו ה' מלאכיו גברי כח עשי דברו לשמע בקול דברו, ברישא עשי, והדר לשמע...</p>
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7. תוספות מסכת שבת דף פח עמוד א

<p>Even though they had already put we will do before we will listen, maybe they would retract when they saw the great flame that caused their souls to leave...</p>	<p>כפה עליהן הר כגיגית - ואף על פי שכבר הקדימו נעשה לנשמע שמא יהיו חוזרים כשיראו האש הגדולה שיצאתה נשמתן...</p>
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8. משך חכמה שמות פרק יט פסוק יז

<p>And they stood at the foot of the mountain. This teaches that He overturned the mountain like a tub. This means that Hashem's Honor was revealed to them in such an extraordinary way until they lost their natural free choice, and their souls left from the attainment of Hashem's honor, and they were forced like angels without choice and they saw that all of the things that are created are dependent on the acceptance of the Torah.</p>	<p>ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר. מלמד שכפה עליהן הר כגיגית (שבת פח, א), פירוש שהראה להם כבוד ה' בהקיץ ובתגלות נפלאה עד כי ממש בטלה בחירתם הטבעי ויצאה נשמתם מהשגת כבוד ה', והיו מוכרחים כמלאכים בלא הבדל, וראו כי כל הנבראים תלוי רק בקבלת התורה [וכמדומה שכבר עמדו על זה]...</p>
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9. גור אריה שמות פרק יט פסוק יז

<p>Tosfos ask that they didn't already say "we will do and we will listen", so why was overturning the mountain necessary? Tosfos answer that maybe they would retract when they saw the great flame that caused their souls to leave. I am not comfortable with this explanation since it completely uproots the good deed of the Jews saying "we will do" before "we will listen" since they retracted from that great merit which lasts for generations. Maybe Tosfos thought that since they retracted out of fear, it isn't considered a retraction that would lessen their merit.</p>	<p>...שנתלש ההר וכו'. בפרק רבי עקיבא (שבת פח.) הקשו התוספות (ד"ה כפה) הרי כבר אמרו "נעשה ונשמע" (להלן כד, ז), ולמה הוצרך לזה, ותרצו התוספות דשמא היו חוזרים בהם כשראו האש הגדולה, שיצאתה נשמתם (שבת פח:). <b>ואין דעתי נוחה בפירוש זה לעשות כל זכות ישראל שהקדימו נעשה לנשמע - לאין, שיחזרו מזכותם הגדול, שהוא לדורי דורות ואולי התוספות סבירא להו דכיון דמחמת יראה חזרו להם, לא נחשב לחזרה למעט זכותם...</b></p>
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APPROACH #1

10. מכילתא דרשב"י פרשת יתרו

<p>And they stood at the foot of the mountain teaches that Hashem overturned the mountain like a tub and said if you accept the Torah then great but if not then here will be your burial. At that time they all burst out crying and their hears poured out like water in repentance, and proclaimed that everything that Hashem says we will do and we will listen.</p>	<p>...ד"א ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר מלמד שכפה עליהם הקב"ה את ההר כגגית ואמר אם מקבלין אתם עליכם את התורה [מוטב] ואם לאו כאן תהא קבורתכם באותה שעה געו כולן בבכייה ושפכו לבם כמים בתשובה ואמרו כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע (שמות כ"ד: ז').</p>
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11. תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה דף ב עמוד ב

<p>Rather, this is what the nations of the world say before Him: Master of the Universe, did You overturn the mountain above us like a basin, and we still did not accept the Torah, as You did for the Jewish people? The Gemara provides the background for this claim: As it is written: "And they stood at the nether part of the mount" (Exodus 19:17), and Rav Dimi bar Hama says: The verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain, i.e., Mount Sinai, above the Jews like a basin, and He said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there, under the mountain, will be your burial. The nations of the world will claim that they too could have been coerced to accept the Torah. Immediately, the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to them: The first mitzvot will let us hear the truth, as it is stated in the continuation of the same verse under discussion: "And announce to us the first things" (Isaiah 43:9). With regard to the seven Noahide mitzvot that preceded the giving</p>	<p>...אלא כך אומרים לפניו: רבש"ע, כלום כפית עלינו הר כגיגית ולא קבלנוה, כמו שעשית לישראל? דכתיב: ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר, ואמר רב דימי בר חמא: מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא הר כגיגית על ישראל, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלין את התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם! מיד אומר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא: הראשונות ישמיעונו, שנא': וראשונות ישמיעונו, שבע</p>
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of the Torah that even you accepted, where is the proof that you fulfilled them?

מצות שקיבלתם היכן קיימתם...

## APPROACH #2

### 12. משנה מסכת אבות פרק א משנה ג

(3) "Antignos of Socho received the transmission from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say, do not be as servants who serve the Master to receive reward. Rather, be as servants who serve the Master not to receive reward. And let the fear of heaven be upon you."

אנטיגנוס איש סוכו קבל משמעון הצדיק הוא היה אומר אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס אלא הווי כעבדים המשמשין את הרב שלא על מנת לקבל פרס ויהי מורא שמים עליכם :

### 13. אמת ליעקב מסכת אבות פרק א משנה ג

The Tanna is teaching us that in order to serve Hashem correctly, a person has to accept Hashem's Kingship in two different ways. The first is not having in mind to get any reward, which is serving out of love. The second is to have fear of Heaven upon you which is serving out of fear. It is insufficient for a person to serve Hashem in only one of these two ways because there are times that love won't be enough and there are times that the fear will be weakened. Therefore, only through the combination of the two of them can a person have everlasting faith.

This explains what it means that Hashem overturned the mountain like a tub over the Jews at the time they received the Torah. Tosfos already asks didn't they previously say "we will do and we will listen". Tosfos answer that maybe they would retract when they saw the great flame that caused their souls to leave. The explanation of the matter is that when they received the Torah and said "we will do and we will listen", that was an acceptance out of love, but they weren't yet tested out of fear. That is what the

ג. אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס אלא הווי כעבדים המשמשין את הרב שלא על מנת לקבל פרס ויהי מורא שמים עליכם.

מלמדנו התנא שבכדי לעבוד את ה' באמת צריך האדם לקבל עליו את מלכות ה' בשני מהלכים, הא' שלא ע"מ לקבל פרס, והיינו עבודה מאהבה, הב' שיהיה מורא שמים עליכם, עבודה מיראה, ואין לאדם להסתפק לעבוד את ה' רק בא' משני המהלכים האלו, כי לפעמים לא תספיק לו האהבה ולפעמים תחלש אצלו היראה, ורק צירוף של שני המהלכים יבטיח אמונה שלמה ונצחית<sup>40</sup>.

וזהו הביאור במה דכפה הקב"ה הר כגיגית על בני ישראל בשעת קבלת התורה, וכבר הקשו התוס' בשבת [דף פ"ח ע"א] הא כבר הקדימו נעשה לנשמע, ותירצו דשמא יהיו חוזרים כשיראו את האש הגדולה שיצתה נשמתן עיי"ש. וביאור הדבר, דכשקבלו את התורה ואמרו נעשה ונשמע קיבלוה מאהבה, אבל מיראה עדיין לא ניסו, וע"ז רמזה האש הגדולה וכמאמר הכתוב בדברים [ד' פל"ו] מן השמים השמיעך את קולו ליסרך ואת אשו הגדולה וגו', הרי שהאש היתה ליראת העונש.

great flame symbolizes like the verse says in Devarim, from the Heaven He makes His voice heard to punish you and His great flame etc. We see that the flame is fear of punishment.

In reality, if Hashem would have overturned the mountain over Esav or Yishmael, they also would have accepted the Torah. Like the Gemara in Avodah Zarah states, did you overturn the mountain over us and we not accept it, which implies that if that was the case, they definitely would have accepted it. But, then their whole service would be out of fear and not love. In contrast, the Jews first accepted the Torah out of love and the overturning of the mountain was to ensure that they also accepted it out of fear. In reality, if the Jews didn't first accept the Torah out of love, they wouldn't have been given the Torah at all.

**ובאמת** אילו היו כופין את ההר על עשו וישמעאל ג"כ היו מקבלין את התורה וכדאמרין בע"ז [דף ב' ע"ב] כלום כפית עלינו הר כגיגית ולא קיבלנוה, דמשמע דאז ודאי היו מקבלין אותה, אלא שאז היה כל עבודתם מיראה ולא מאהבה, משא"כ ישראל דמעצמם קיבלוה מאהבה, וכפיית ההר לא היתה רק כדי לקבלה גם מיראה. ובאמת אילו לא היו ישראל מקבלים מצדם מאהבה לא היו נותנים להם את התורה לגמרי.

### APPROACH #3

#### 14. הדר זקנים שמות פרק יט פסוק יז

We can explain based on the Medrash. When Hashem wanted to give the Torah the Jews asked how many Torahs there are. Hashem responded that there are two: one written and one oral. The Jews answered that we only want to accept the written one. Hashem immediately overturned the mountain like a tub.

... לכך יש לפרש כדאית' במדרש. כשרצה הקדוש ברוך הוא ליתן את התורה. אמרו לו כמה תורות יש לך. אמר להם ב' תורות. א' בכתב וא' בעל פה. אמרו אין אנחנו מקבלים אלא אותה שבכתב מיד כפה עליהם הר כגיגית:

#### 15. WHY WAS THE FORCED UPON US, RABBI HERSHEL SCHACHTER

...The commentaries on the Talmud all wonder, why it was necessary to force the Torah upon the Jews if they had already enthusiastically expressed their willingness to accept it? The Medrash Tanchuma (to Parshas Noach) elaborates upon this aggada and distinguishes between the different parts of the Torah. The people were prepared to accept both G-d's written Torah, and all the halachos l'Moshe miSinai transmitted directly from G-d. Their response to Moshe was that "kol asher deiber Hashem na'aseh" - that all that G-d had said we are prepared to accept. But the bulk of the Oral Torah is really what the Talmud and the Rambam refer to as "divrei Sofrim", halachos

which were developed over the centuries with much rabbinic input. The rabbis were licensed to employ the various "middos shehaTorah nidrehses bohem" to read (so to speak) "in between the lines" of the Torah in order to present a fuller picture of each of the mitzvos. This the Jews at Har Sinai were not prepared to accept. They felt that this was not Divine! This is a human Torah, and all humans can err. Why should they agree to be subservient to the idea of other human beings? Who says that another is so much more intelligent than I? Each Jew should be entitled to interpret the law according to his own understanding!

And it was this part of the Torah that G-d had to force upon us. Whether we like it or not, G-d expects us to follow the positions set forth by the rabbis in interpreting the Torah. Not until years later, after the story of Purim occurred, did the Jewish people as a whole fully accept this aspect of rabbinic authority. It was at that time that Ezra and the Anshei Kneses Hag'dolah set up the entire system of the Torah sheb'al peh as we know it today. They formulated the text for all blessings and prayers, kiddush and havdalah, the system of thirty-nine categories of melacha, etc., along with many rabbinic enactments. Klal Yisroel at the period of the beginning of the second temple wholeheartedly accepted all of these formulations and innovations of their rabbonim...

## 16. SHAVUOT: CELEBRATING HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE GIVING AND RECEIVING OF THE TORAH, RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG

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The Torah was given with an accompanying mesorah of information and interpretation that ensured and accentuated responsible human participation. In addition, the concepts and principles of Torah law were entrusted to the chachmei ha-mesorah. Their comprehension, analysis and judgment in accordance with the transmitted methodology enabled the halachah to extend its scope across all geographic and temporal boundaries. Thus, the very theme of mattan Torah as the centerpiece of Shavuot is specifically transmitted by means of the oral tradition entrusted to human transmission because it is precisely the human component that singularly characterizes Torah life that is uniquely celebrated on this day...

According to this perspective, the greatest moment of human history, Divine Revelation, is celebrated not merely as a passive albeit awesome experience, but also as the foundational moment for the establishment of a covenant-partnership in which Klal Yisrael would play a crucial function...

However, in light of our analysis, we may posit that Klal Yisrael's role, exhibited and symbolized by the role of gatekeepers of the mesorah and repository and practitioners of Torah she-baal peh, specifically projects the centrality of human input and responsibility. The responsibility to transmit the mesorah faithfully from generation to generation demands exceptional devotion and investment. Moreover, the oral Torah includes not only information but particularly halachic principles and a methodology of their application. This tradition dictates that the Torah can be applied across the ages and in all circumstances by responsible halachists whose contributions constitute a vital part of process and content of Torah...