

*There is a well-known Midrash describing what transpired before the Jews agreed to accept the Torah. The Midrash tells us that in fact the Jews were not G-D's first choice to receive his precious Torah, in fact according to the Midrash he first offered it to several different people. G-D first offered it to the children of Esa, but they would not accept it until they were apprised of what laws were stated in it. G-D explained that it contained the injunction against murder. The children of Esav immediately rejected the Torah claiming that murder was an integral component of their daily lives. G-d then approached the children of Yishmael and offered them the Torah. They too first wanted to know what laws were written in it. When they were told that thievery was not allowed they rejected the Torah as well. Finally, G-D approached the Jews and they accepted it unequivocally without questioning its contents.*

*The Gerrer Rebbe finds this Midrash to be quite puzzling. We have always taken great pride in the fact that we chose to accept the Torah while other nations rejected the principles and values laid out in the Torah, but if this Midrash is to be believed, then what are we so proud of? We only accepted the Torah because we never heard any of its difficult commandments. Perhaps if we had been notified of a challenging commandment, we too would have rejected the Torah as being too demanding or impossible to follow.*

*The simple answer is that we can celebrate the fact that we never even questioned G-D as to what He wanted us to keep. Our greatness lay not in our acceptance, but in the manner of our acceptance. To voice our agreement to G-D, we uttered the famous words, "Na'aseh V'nishma – We will do and we will hear." We agreed to live by the Torah's commandments without even being fully aware of what those commandments actually were.*

*The Gerrer Rebbe suggests an alternative explanation. He believes that the Jewish people were in fact apprised of a very specific and challenging commandment that was just as difficult to observe as to not murder or steal. What was that one commandment? Prior to the Torah being given on Mt. Sinai, the Torah tells us, "And you shall set bounds for the people around the mountain, saying: Take heed to yourselves, that you do not go up on the mount, or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be surely put to death."*

*The Gerrer Rebbe explains that this verse is not simply a prohibition from climbing the mountain that the Torah was soon to descend upon. The Torah would not bother to record for posterity such a provincial, temporary, and isolated measure that bears no influence on contemporary Judaism, rather the prohibition of climbing the mountain must be as relevant today as it was then. The Rebbe explains that the prohibition of climbing the mountain is a metaphoric reference to the mountain of knowledge and understanding that every Jew seeks to attain about G-D and His mysterious ways. Every Jew has an instinctual burning desire to truly understand the essence of G-D. Although the study of Kabbalah seeks to aid in this venture, even the most learned of all Kabbalists can never claim to have a complete mastery of G-D. The most they can claim is a peripheral knowledge of G-D's name and his interactions with us, but a deep, personal, intimate knowledge of G-d is an unattainable, if not impossible task.*

*Impossibility notwithstanding, our temptation to have an intimate knowledge of Him burns deep within every Jew. Although we were ordered not to climb the mountain, not to engage in this fruitless task because it is a perilous journey fraught with many dangerous pitfalls, it is a temptation every bit as alluring as the temptation to steal and murder. Yet, we still agreed to accept His Torah even though we could never climb this proverbial mountain and we are always forced to remain firmly entrenched within the boundaries of our corporeal humanity.*

*Our acceptance of His word even in the face of such a restrictive law confirms that our faith and commitment to G-D is undiminished by the fact that we can never truly know and never truly understand His essence.*

*To that we can say "Mi K'Amcha Yisrael – Who is like Your nation, the Jewish people."*

**Shabbat Shalom**  
**Rabbi Tannenbaum**