

**Parshat Yitro contains the seminal event of the Exodus from Egypt- namely, the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Jewish people prepare for three days, as Moshe ascends and descends the mountain several times with instructions from Hashem. At daybreak on the third day, the nation begins to feel the presence of Hashem. There is lightning, thunder, and the strong sound of a shofar being blown. Right before we are told of the revelation, the Torah tells us where the Jewish people were during all of this. We were 'b'tachtit ha'har'. The simple understanding of this is that the Jews were gathered at the bottom of the mountain. The midrash, however, picks up on the fact that 'tachtit' actually means under. According to the Midrash, Hashem picked up the mountain, suspended it over our heads and said 'if you accept the Torah you will live, but if not- here will be your graves'. This Midrash is very problematic as it makes it seem like the Torah was accepted under duress. Especially in light of the fact that only a few chapters later the Torah informs us of our 'Torah receiving mantra'. We called out 'Naaseh vNishma'- 'we will do and we will hear'. We declare that we will heed the words of the Torah before it is actually given and through this show tremendous dedication and trust in Hashem. The Midrash takes it a step further and says that Hashem was so pleased with this declaration that He sent two angels to adorn the heads of each Jew. These two Midrashim seem to contradict each other! If we willingly accepted the Torah before we were even shown its contents, why was it necessary to suspend the mountain over our heads?**

**The Maharal (16<sup>th</sup> century Prague) gives us a beautiful insight into this topic. He explains that the Jews did in fact accept the Torah willingly. We had absolute free will in this matter, and Hashem would not have it any other way. The Torah is meant to be something we choose and cherish. For our relationship with Torah to be pure, we needed to accept it voluntarily. Why then did Hashem need all the threatening theatrics? Hashem needed to give us the Torah in a frightening way to teach us an invaluable lesson about Torah. Hashem needed us to realize that the entire existence of the world was dependent on our accepting the Torah. This was the moment the world had been created for, and without the Torah, existence is meaningless. If we would have only accepted the Torah out of the eagerness of the moment, we could easily have deduced that Torah is only for when we 'feel it'. If we accepted it under free will, we can also walk away from it freely. When Hashem lifted the mountain over our heads and gave us the ultimatum, Hashem was saying 'you willingly accepted my Torah, but you also need to know that you can't exist without it'. This dual acceptance of the Torah- both willingly and under duress- illustrated the dichotomous relationship we have with Torah. We should always view ourselves as carrying on the legacy of 'we will do and we will hear'. Our fulfillment of the Torah should be through eagerness and excitement to carry out God's will. However, even when we are not eager or excited, we must remember that Hashem didn't really give us a choice. We cannot live without the Torah, nor should we want to.**

**It is always our hope as parents and teachers that students will want to make the right choice. We also want them to gain independence and feel ownership over their decisions. However, we should take a cue from Hashem. For the values and issues which are most important to us, we need to make our children realize what is at stake. They need to see us put our foot down and maintain that certain things are sacred. When Hashem did this, it strengthened our bond to the Torah and ensured that the Jewish nation will never be separated from the performance of Hashem's will.**

**Shabbat Shalom,**

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