



RABBI SHALOM ROSNER

RAV KEHILLA, OHEL EPHRAIM IN NOFEI HASHEMESH
MAGGID SHIUR, DAF YOMI, OU.ORG
ROSH BAIS MEDRASH ENGLISH SPEAKING PROGRAM JCT MACHON LEV

Was the Torah Accepted Willingly or Forced Upon Us?

A BARREL OVER OUR HEAD

The Gemara in *Shabbat* (88a) tells us, based on the verse in *Shemot*:

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּתִחְתִּית הַהָר אָרֶב אֲדִימִי בֶּן חָמָא בֶּר
חָסָא מַלְמָד שְׁכָפָה הַקָּבָ"ה עַלְיהֶם אֶת הַהָר כְּגִיאַת
וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם אַתְּ מַקְבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מָוֶט וְאִם לֹא
שֶׁמֶת הָרָה קְבּוֹרְתֶּכָם

And they stood at the bottom of the mountain. Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa teaches

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that God, blessed be He, forced the mountain upon them like a barrel. And he said to them, "If you accept the Torah, wonderful; if not, there will be your burial."

The Gemara describes Hashem holding a barrel over Am Yisrael and forcing them to accept the Torah. The Gemara continues, explaining that initially, the Jewish people could have said, "We were forced to accept the Torah," but later, at a more mature stage of history, they accepted it willingly.

NA'ASEH V'NISHMA

On the same daf, the Gemara analyzes the two most famous words B'nei Yisrael said together: *Na'aseh v'Nishma*—"We will do and we will listen." This depicts Am Yisrael's unequivocal willingness to accept the Torah. Tosafot asks: how do we reconcile the idea that they were forced to accept the Torah (*Kafa Aleihem Har K'gigit*) with the fact that


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they willingly said *Na'aseh v'Nishma*? Was it willingly accepted or forced upon them?

COMMITMENT TO TORAH

The Midrash (Tanhuma Noah) and the Hizkuni (Shemot 19:17) explain that HaKadosh Barukh Hu gave us both the written Torah (*Torah Sheb'ihtav*) and the Oral Torah (*Torah Sheb'al Peh*). Just accepting the written Torah is insufficient. Naase V'Nishma was on the Torah Sheb'ihtav, while *kafa aleihem har k'gigit* was on the Torah Sheb'al Peh.

The Ben Yehoyada (Shabbat 88a) asks why we have a description of God holding a barrel over the nation like a mountain. Why not just hold a mountain over them? What is the symbolism of a barrel? The mountain-as-barrel metaphor illustrates that the written Torah is just a vessel (barrel), but the Oral Torah is the depth, the countless droplets of knowledge that are necessary in order to properly fulfill the written Torah. A Torah lifestyle requires full commitment to both Torah Sheb'ihtav and Torah Sheb'al Peh. They are inseparable.

Our lives must be structured around Torah—not the other way around. As the Gemara in Shabbat(31a) states קבעת עיתים לתורה (*kavata itim laTorah*). We ought to fit the times to Torah (itim L'Torah), and not try to adapt the Torah to meet the times (Torah L'itim). We have to strengthen both facets of Torah. ■



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