

FROM THE EDITOR

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Our Sages speak¹ of the giving of the Torah, which took place on Shavuot, as being akin to a *chasana* (wedding), with Hashem as the *chason* (groom), the Jewish People as the *kallah* (bride), and Har Sinai, the mountain, being overturned like a dome, serving as the *chuppah* (marriage canopy).

It all sounds so romantic – the long-dreamed of union between G-d and His beloved, chosen people, at a scenic and secret wilderness location, safe from the paparazzi and other uninvited guests.

But any ideas of romance quickly evaporate when we consider that our Sages teach² that, after Hashem overturned Har Sinai like a dome, with the Jewish People standing under it, He said to them, rather threateningly I might add, "If you accept the Torah, good, and if not, there will be your graves". Not exactly a dream wedding. Wasn't the fact that we had famously said³ the words, "*Na'aseh v'nishmah*" ("we will do and we will understand"), when Hashem had offered us His Torah enough of a commitment for Him? If the concern was, for example, that we might later back out of the union, then overturn the mountain on us then and stop us from going, but certainly not now.

In fact, one of our Sages immediately comments in the gemara on Hashem's overturning the mountain that if the Jewish People would later be summoned to judgment regarding why they did not keep the Torah, they would now be able to make a great argument in their favour: we were forced to accept it, so how can we be held accountable for violating it! Nevertheless, another Sage quickly counters this claim, answering that such an argument won't help because, years later, in the days of Achashveirosh, we again accepted the Torah⁴, this time willingly.

There's another gemara⁵ that describes how the nations of the world will come at the end of days and claim, "Did we [the nations of the world] accept the Torah and not fulfil it [ie like the Jewish People]?" And when challenged why they didn't accept the Torah in the first place, the nations of the world will simply answer, "Did you overturn a mountain over us like you did to the Jewish people?" In other words, the Jewish People aren't so special, they were forced to accept the Torah, you could have forced us to do so as well!

So, why did Hashem overturn the mountain and threaten our destruction? Why was it necessary for us to receive the Torah in such a violent fashion, against our will?

The existence of the entire world depended on the giving of the Torah. In fact, Rashi comments⁶ on the words found in Bereishis "the sixth day" (the only day of creation to include a definite article) – that it actually refers to the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, when, according to one opinion⁷, the Torah was given, and he explains that everything was created on condition that the Jewish People accept the Torah. If there would not be Torah, the world would revert to *tohu vavohu* (formlessness).

How could it be that the entirety of all existence should depend upon the Jewish People's choosing to accept the Torah... or not – something that could have gone either way, akin to leaving the fate of the world to the flip of a coin! With so much at stake, it wasn't fitting that the acceptance of the Torah should simply be left to the discretion of the Jewish People.

Therefore, Hashem overturned the mountain so that the Jewish People were forced to accept the Torah against their will, through compulsion, with no chance that they would be able to remove or somehow cancel the arrangement, at that time or later.

But there was another reason that Hashem gave us the Torah in this unusual way. By compelling us to accept the Torah, by doing it against our will, Hashem "forced" Himself, so to speak, upon the Jewish People and the Torah⁸ clearly spells out what happens to a man who does such a thing to a woman: he can never divorce her.

So, Hashem overturned the mountain in order that this union between us would be the result of compulsion, thus making it a union that He could never sever, thereby binding Himself to the Jewish People for all eternity, come what may.

On behalf of everyone at *Jewish Life*, we wish you a chag sameach and good yom tov.

Based on the Maharal (Gur Aryeh Shemos 19:17, Tiferes Yisrael 32)

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

¹See eg, Aruch HaShulchan Even HaEzer 34:4

²Shabbos 88a

³Shemos 24:7

⁴Esther 9:26

⁵Avodah Zorah 2b

⁶Rashi to Bereishis 1:31

⁷See Shabbos 87a

⁸Devarim 22:29

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ON THE

On the cover: One of the many names of Shavuot is Chag HaKatzir - the Harvest Festival, which refers to the wheat that was harvested at that time of year and the bikkurim (first fruits) which began being harvested and brought to the Beis HaMikdash (Temple) at that time of year. Pictured is a bundle of wheat.

