
פרשת יתרו

פרק יט פסוק יז

יז וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לְקִרְאֵת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְנַצְּבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הַהָר:

מושג

מִלְמַד שְׂכַפְּפָה הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עָלֵיהֶם אֶת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוֹטָב, וְאִם לֹא שָׁם תִּהְיֶה קְבוּרַתְכֶם.

Translation:

It teaches us that Hashem held the mountain over their heads like an [inverted] cask and told them: If you accept the Torah it will be well, but if not there will be your burial.

Explanation:

The Maharal explains that the Jews did not need to be forced to accept the Torah as they had already announced *נעשה ונשמע*. Rather, by holding the mountain over their heads Hashem sought to teach the people that acceptance of the Torah is not optional but rather a necessary condition for their existence. While forsaking a Torah life will not lead to an immediate death, it places man under the powerful influence of his *יצר הרע*, trapping him in the grasp of his physical desires. Thus, the comparison to being buried under an inverted cask is completely accurate.

This holds true not only at *הר סיני* but at all times. Thus our Musag reads *שם תהא קבורתכם*, there you will be buried, meaning that the realization that Torah is a necessary part of every Jew's life is a thought that must accompany us always.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Pasuk tells us that the Jewish people stood *בתחתית ההר*, literally meaning that they stood under the mountain. *הז"ל* understand that the people were actually standing under the mountain, as Hashem held it over their heads to illustrate the lesson of our Musag.

NOTES

Our Musag is taken from the גמרא in (פ.ח.) מסכת שבת which teaches:
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.

Our Musag comes to explain a peculiar word found in our Pasuk. When describing בני ישראל standing at the foot of הר סיני the Pasuk does not say ¹ בצד ההר or ² נגד ההר, but rather בתחתית ההר, implying that they stood under the mountain³. While it would not be impossible to explain that the word תחת could be taken to mean adjacent to⁴, חז"ל saw in this wording the lesson of our Musag.

There are a number of difficulties that arise from the passage of the Talmud from which our Musag is taken. To begin with: Why did Hashem see a need to force the people to accept the Torah? Would they have refused otherwise? The previous פסוקים seem to tell us exactly the opposite as we read in ה פסוק:

ויענו כל־העם יחדו ויאמרו כל אשר־דבר יהוה נעשה...

How then can we possibly understand Hashem's need to coerce the acceptance of the Torah?

The wording of the Musag is also peculiar. Why does our Musag teach that Hashem held the mountain over their heads like an inverted cask? Why did it not simply say that Hashem held the mountain over their heads like a mountain? Or simply that He held the mountain over their heads? This is especially difficult to understand when we consider that an inverted cask would actually not kill them, only trap them! If Hashem wanted to scare the people a real, full mountain would certainly do the trick. And finally, why does our Musag say שם תהא קבורתכם - there you will be buried - when it should have said פה תהא קבורתכם - here you will be buried?

address the question of why they required coercion even though they had previously declared תשמע ונעשה by answering that Hashem was concerned that they might change their minds during the frightening experience⁵ of Har Sinai. In order to ensure that they did not cancel their original acceptance, Hashem held the mountain over their heads.

The מהר"ל in his commentary on the Pasuk, rejects the above answer, as it would seriously downgrade the significance we place on the unequivocal acceptance found in the words ונשמע. The מהר"ל⁶ explains that the purpose of the mountain was not to force the people to accept the

¹ As we find in נביא:

כו ויגלו שאול מצד הַהַר מִזֶּדֶם וְאַנְשֵׁיו מִצַּד הַהַר מִזֶּדֶם... (שמואל א פרק כג)

² As we find in the beginning of our Perek:

ב ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני ויחננו במדבר ויחנן־שם וישאל נגד הַהַר:

³ Interestingly, a similar word is used in (פרק ד) when describing תורה:

יא ותקרבו ונתעמדותן תחת הַהַר וְהַהַר בער באש עד־לב השמים חשך עָנָן וְעָרָפָל:

⁴ As we find in ספר שמות פרק כד:

ד ויכתב משה את כל־דברי יהוה וישכם בבקר ויבן מִזְבֵּחַ תַּחַת הַהַר וישמים עֶשְׂרֵה מִצְבֵּה לְשָׁנִים עֶשֶׂר שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

⁵ mention the Midrash that teaches that the great fire engulfing the mountain caused their נשמות to leave their bodies.

⁶ אבל העיקר הפירוש אשר נראה פשוט, כי כפה עליהם ההר כגיגית לומר 'אם לא תקבלו התורה, שם תהא קבורתכם' לומר כי התורה היא הכרחית לקבלה, ואם לא יקבלו התורה שמה תהא קבורתם. וידוע, כי דברים המוכרחים להיות הם חשובים במעלה יותר, שאי אפשר מבלעדם, ואין קיום לנמצא בזולתם. לכך כפה עליהם ההר כגיגית להודיע מעלת התורה, שאי אפשר מבלעדה כלל. ואם לא היה עושה זה, היו אומרים כי התורה אין הכרחית לעולם, רק ברצון קבלו עליהם, ואם לא קבלו לא היו צריכין. לכך היה השם יתברך מפתה ומרצה אותם קודם, וכאשר ראו שעיקר נתינתה על ידי כפיית ההר, היו מוכרחים לומר כי נתינתה מוכרחת, שאין להם קיום זולתה. ולכך הביא שם על המאמר זה "ויהי ערב ויהי בוקר יום

Torah, as they had already done so willingly, but rather to teach them an important lesson about the Torah. Hashem was concerned that the people would feel that the Torah is a beautiful book and certainly worthy of their acceptance. However, it is not necessary. One could certainly enjoy a life infused with spiritual significance once he or she accepts a close relationship with Hashem, however, one could theoretically live without the Torah as well. In order to debunk this philosophy, Hashem demonstrates to them that there *is* no life without the Torah. And, this lesson is not only relevant now at **הר סיני**, but for all time. Any time throughout history that the Jewish people will choose to reject the teachings of the Torah, they are choosing death over life; **שם תהא קבורתכם**.

For this very reason, continues the **מהר"ל**, the **גמרא** which taught our Musag continued with another important lesson:

דאמר ריש לקיש: מאי דכתיב ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי, ה"א יתירה למה לי? מלמד שהתנה הקדוש ברוך הוא עם מעשה בראשית, ואמר להם: אם ישראל מקבלים התורה אתם מתקיימין, ואם לאו אני מחזיר אתכם לתוהו ובוהו (מלמד שהתנה כו': הששי משמע הששי המיוחד במקום אחר... ויהי ערב ויהי בקר של גמר כראשית תלוי ביום הששי, והוא ששי בסיון, שנחנה בו תורה – רש"י)

Here too the Torah is informing us that Torah is not merely an important aspect of the creation of the world, but rather it is the only reason for the world to exist. Without the acceptance of the Torah **ביום הששי**, on the sixth of Sivan, there would be no point to creation, no **בראשית ברא**.

However, this lesson is not immediately apparent. One might think that they could live perfectly well without the Torah. One could challenge the assertion that rejection of the Torah leads to certain death. After all, many materialistic Jews, who are not religious in the least, seem to lead long, happy, fulfilling lives. But, in truth, our Musag teaches, this is an illusion. They do not realize that without the Torah as our guide we are trapped by our **יצר הרע**, almost compelled to follow the powerful pull of our physical passions.

I once heard a beautiful parable, which compared those who follow the dictates of their physical appetites to a fly who finds himself outside of a bottle filled with a sweet liquid that was placed there to trap flies. From the outside he sees all the flies inside enjoying themselves and tries as hard as he can to find a way inside. Only once he is already inside does he belatedly realize that they are all trapped and doomed to die!

This is the lesson of the **הר כגיגית**, the mountain held over their heads like an inverted cask, which would not kill them immediately, only trap all those underneath it. Hashem was illustrating that those who do not accept the Torah, those who reject the spiritual and follow the material, will remain forever trapped under the mountainous 'thumb' of materialism, robbing their lives of any real significance and negating the very reason for their existence.

Questions for Further Thought:

- A. Can you think of situations in which you have felt 'trapped' by your **יצר הרע**? Were you able to escape? What could you have done in your situation to ensure you did not get trapped?
- B. The **גמרא** that teaches our Musag concludes by telling us that during the story of Purim, the Jews accepted the Torah without any need for coercion. Why do you think the Jews at **הר סיני** required this lesson while the Jews at the time of **מרדכי ואסתר** did not.

