

מעניני תורה

שבועות

The Free Embrace of Torah

Mrs. Tovit Krakowski

Math

My parents, who live in Israel, have an aide from Sri Lanka named Randima. Randima once shared with me an exchange she had with my father, Rav Nachum Rabinovitch, author of the *Yad Peshutah* on the *Mishneh Torah*. She asked him, "In Sri Lanka, the Buddhists have priests, the Muslims have imams, and the Catholics have fathers. What do the Jews have?"

My father gave her a surprising answer. He said, "The Jews don't have anyone like that!"

Randima was amazed by this answer. In her hometown in Sri Lanka, she witnessed a great deal of violence and criminal behavior. She was struck by the peace and harmony of life in my parents' neighborhood of Mizpeh Nevo. But beyond the contrast between the behavior of people in her country and what she saw in Israel, Randima was impressed by the fact that people were kind to one another without any apparent *external compulsion*. People were nice simply because they were nice!

On *Shavuot* we recall the moment that we, as a nation accepted G-d's sovereignty and the obligations of *Torah*. Interestingly, the Midrash (*Shabbat* 88a)

tells us that there was an element of coercion in this acceptance:

"*Va-yityatzvu be-tachtit ha-har* - And they stood at the foot of [literally: under] the mountain" (*Shemot* 19:17). R. Abdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them, "If you accept the *Torah*, good; if not, this shall be your grave."



The Midrash is telling us that the experiences the Jews had just been through during the Exodus, witnessing unparalleled miracles and the uprooting of the laws of nature themselves, not to mention the absolute power of the actual moment of revelation, had in a sense deprived the Jews of any choice in the matter-- it was impossible for them not to agree.

For the young nation, this was the necessary first step. But in order to truly acquire the *Torah* in a mature fashion, the nation would eventually need a higher level of acceptance.

Fast forward now to Ruth. In her path to the acceptance of the *Torah* there were no miracles, no awe-inspiring revelations, no lightning or thunder. There was only a very deep love for the woman who had been her mother-in-law for ten years, an attachment so strong that Ruth could not abandon her, despite all the hardships that she knew she would face in a new land.

Ruth's acceptance of the *Torah* came totally from within, and therefore she was able not only to become a Jew herself, but also to infuse into her adopted people the ingredient that had been lacking, the ingredient of internally motivated acceptance. She thus became the progenitor of David *HaMelech*, and thereby of the *Mashiach*.

Ruth is the example of what my father meant by his statement to Randima: the *Torah* is there for everyone, but it must be acquired internally. No one has a monopoly on the *Torah*; the poor widow from *Mo'av* is equal to the greatest scholars of the day in being able to acquire the *Torah* through a life lived in accordance with its principles. The true gift of *Torah* is not something that can be compelled; it must be embraced.

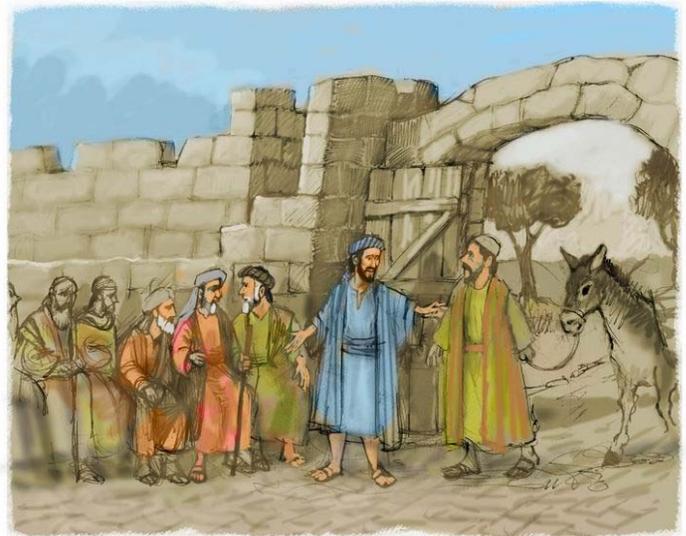
As the school year closes, it is time for me to say good-bye to Ma'ayanot. I will miss my colleagues and students greatly. I am glad to have worked at a school where it is understood that *Torah* must be acquired from within, and expect and look forward to hearing many achievements in the years to come.

Why Megillat Rut? Esther Simchi ('13)

Each year on *Shavuot*, between bites of cheesecake, we read *Megillat Rut*. This *megillah* tells the story of a young Moabite woman named Ruth and her conversion to Judaism. From a young age we are given several different reasons why we read this story and how it connects to *Shavuot*. In addition to the classical reasons, there is also a deep connection between the events of *Megillat Rut* and the nature of *Torah* itself.

One possible reason we read *Rut* is to commemorate the day that we received the *Torah*. Before this, the Jewish nation was just like Ruth before she converted to Judaism; we were not Jewish. Therefore, on *Shavuot*, we celebrate our national conversion. We are also taught that Ruth was the great-grandmother of David *HaMelech*. It is appropriate to read this story on this *chag* not only because David *HaMelech* passed away on *Shavuot*, but also to signify how a convert to Judaism can have the potential to have

great descendants. Another possible reason for those who are interested in *gematria* is that the numerical value of the word "Rut" in Hebrew is 606. This equals the 606 *mitzvot* we received at *Har Sinai* plus the 7 *mitzvot* that were given during the time of Noach. In addition, another name given to the holiday of *Shavuot* is *Chag HaKatzir*. The *megillah* of *Rut* takes place during harvest season, the same time of year as the holiday of *Shavuot*.



Another idea brought by Rabbi Yehudah Prero as to why we read *Megillat Rut* on *Shavuot* is as follows. According to *halachah*, *Mo'avim* converts to Judaism are prohibited from marrying into the Jewish nation, as it says, "Lo yavo Amoni u-Mo'avi be-kahal Hashem" (*Devarim* 23:4). In that case, why was Ruth allowed to marry Boaz? A close reading of the text reveals that the *Torah* uses the word "Moavi" which technically is translated as male Moabites. Therefore, Boaz, the prestigious and wise man of his generation, understood this *pasuk* to mean that Moabite female converts are permitted to marry Jews. Boaz exemplifies a Jew who is learned in both the Written and Oral *Torah*. Although there is a law in the Written *Torah* that prohibits a *Mo'avi* convert from marrying a Jew, the Oral *Torah* presents the actual halachic understanding the *pasuk*, which is more limited in scope.

We thank *HaShem* for our *Torah* by reading *Megillat Rut* on *Shavuot*. Reading *Megillat Rut* on *Shavuot* marks the re-acceptance of both the Written and Oral

Torah. Rut was allowed to marry Boaz because Boaz took into account the significance of the Oral *Torah* and its implications. Many years later, we still treat the Written and Oral *Torah* equally as was taught to us in *Megillat Rut* by Boaz.

Did We Actually Marry GOD?

Liad Arussy ('14) and Sarah Hiller ('15)

Since many believe that *Matan Torah* was the marriage of *HaShem* and *Bnei Yisrael*, *Shavuot* can be thought of as our anniversary with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, a time we reminisce about our wedding. However, when we look at the *pesukim* closely, it may not seem to be so romantic. In *Shemot* 19:17, the *pasuk* says “*Va-yotzei Moshe et ha-am likrat HaElokim min ha-machaneh, va-yityatzvu be-tachtit*



ha-har- And Moshe brought forth the people out of the camp to meet *HaShem*; and they stood at the foot of the mountain.”

Rashi explains *HaShem* approached *Bnei Yisrael* as a *chatan* goes to meet his *kallah*, which seems like a

beautiful idea. However, Rashi goes on to explain the second half of the *pasuk*, “*va-yityatzvu be-tachtit ha-har,*” as not necessarily meaning that *Bnei Yisrael* were standing at the foot of the mountain, but rather he suggests that *HaShem* actually held the mountain over them as a threat. In that case, is it a true wedding? *Bnei Yisrael* were literally forced into it! Furthermore, since we did not willingly accept the *Torah*, does this mean we do not actually have to keep the *mitzvot*?

The *Gemara* in *Masechet Shabbat* 88a expands this question further. R. Avdimi Bar Chama Bar Chasa says that *HaShem* held the mountain over their heads and said, “If you accept the *Torah*, good. But if you do not accept the *Torah*, this will be your grave.” That is simply a threat and therefore not a proper marriage! Raba disagrees and believes that even if the generation of the desert did not accept the *Torah*, the Jews in Esther’s generation did, as it says “*Kiyemu vekiblu ha-Yehudim* - They accepted and re-affirmed what they previously accepted” (*Esther* 9:27). The Jews in Persia willingly accepted the *Torah* previously given to them. Therefore, even if our acceptance did not actually take place at *Matan Torah*, we can say we willingly accepted the *Torah* given to us at *Har Sinai*.

If the Jews of the time of Esther, hundreds of years after *Bnei Yisrael* saw the great *nissim* of *HaShem* and were given the *Torah*, were able to willingly accept the *Torah*, then the same applies today. Yes, at times it may feel like a burden that was thrust upon us to wake up and go to davening every single day, for example. However, as a people, we chose to accept these *mitzvot* and it is our job to do as they did in Persia, and we must embrace them. Even if the marriage did not begin as a conventional one, our marriage to God is one that makes us unique as a nation and for that we should be proud.

Location, Location, Location

Temima Kanarfogel ('14)

The holiest place on earth that is even remotely comparable to the upper realm in which *HaShem* exists is, without question, *Eretz Yisrael*. Rashi (in *Devarim* 11:18) says that it is the most effective place to fulfill the *mitzvot*. Ramban states that, in some way, every *mitzvah* relates to *Eretz Yisrael*. In agreement with these opinions, it would be logical to assume that the giving of the *Torah* should have taken place in *Eretz Yisrael*. Yet we find the scene of *Matan Torah* to be at *Har Sinai*, a mountain in the desert, outside of the Land. If *mitzvot* were destined to ideally be observed in this land, then why weren't they originally given in

it? And furthermore, if they were not given in this seemingly ideal location, then why was a place of desolation chosen as the location of *Matan Torah*?

The *Mechilta Shemot* 20:1 suggests two reasons as to why *Matan Torah* did not take place in *Eretz Yisrael*. The desert is a land of neutral territory, one that cannot be claimed as belonging to any people in particular. If the *Torah* had been given in *Eretz Yisrael*, the other nations of the world would point out that the *Torah* was given specifically in a Jewish land, and they would use it as an excuse for not accepting the *Torah*. In addition, the *Torah* could not have been given in *Eretz Yisrael* because if a certain *shevet's nachalah* hosted *Matan Torah*, that *shevet* would say that the *Torah* was given solely to them.

Furthermore, the *Torah* was given specifically outside of *Eretz Yisrael* to dismiss any future assumptions that the *Torah* could not be, or was not, accepted by all, at any time and any place. The scene of the wilderness only confirms and fortifies this idea. The *Gemara* in *Eruvin* 54a states that to successfully learn and attain wisdom from the *Torah*, one must be humble like a desert. Just as a desert is open to all passersby and permits them to enter, a person too must be willing to open himself to the *Torah* and accept *HaShem's* commandments.

While it is understandable that the *Torah* was given in a place that reflects the suitable attitude that is required to accept the *mitzvot*, the choice to present the *Torah* specifically on *Har Sinai* is questionable. After all, *Matan Torah* was an event that completely shifted the course of Jewish history. How could it have taken place on a lowly mountain such as *Har Sinai*, one that suggests that the *Torah* was, *chas ve-shalom*, unworthy of being properly respected?

Rabbi Shlomo Goldman offers a comparison that can be made between *Har Sinai* and *Matan Torah*. When someone gives a gift, the quality of its wrapping paper depends on the value of the gift. The more valuable the gift is, the less elaborate the wrapping paper must be, because it does not need to supplement the gift's insufficiencies. Likewise, the *Torah* did not need to be given in a noteworthy location

because it was important enough to be given even on an insignificant mountain. *HaShem* contrasted the humility of *Har Sinai* with the *Torah* in order to highlight the *Torah's kedushah*.

The combination of *Har Sinai* and the desert transformed *Matan Torah* into an occurrence that emphasized the *Torah's* significance and its openness to all who wanted to receive and internalize it. It was not intended to be an experience for an exclusive group of people. In actuality, its location was meant to invite anyone and everyone in the world to witness the giving of *HaShem's* direct instructions for the people to follow.

Shavuot's Promise

Hennie Silverman ('13)

What is it we think of when we hear *Shavuot*? Some think of staying up all night, and others of cheesecake, but the main idea surrounding *Shavuot* is the receiving of the *Torah*. The *Sefer Ta'amei HaMinhagim* says that even the name "*Shavuot*" comes from the Hebrew word meaning "promise." It is on this day that we, as Jews, commemorate the promise we made with *Hashem* to accept Him as our God, and to accept His *Torah* and as our way of life. Why, then, is this massive commitment not associated with the holiday of *Shavuot* in the *Torah* itself when the holidays are described in *parshiyot Emor* and *Re'eh*?

Pesach, the holiday of the Exodus from Egypt, is directly linked to our freedom of slavery. Additionally, the holiday of *Sukkot* is matched with its commemorative ideas. *Shavuot* seems to be the one holiday in



which we are not commanded by the *pesukim* to celebrate what occurred on that day.

The *Shulchan Aruch* answers this question. He states that the reason the celebration of these three holidays is different is that the holidays themselves are inherently different. On *Pesach* we celebrate an event that happened to our ancestors long ago, and on *Sukkot* we do the same. Although we are supposed to celebrate these days as though we were in the time that it occurred, we are still commemorating an event from the past.

However, *Shavuot* is not the same. On *Shavuot* we are not celebrating a once-in-a-lifetime event that happened to our people long ago. On the holy day of *Shavuot* we celebrate the giving of the *Torah* for eternity. The *pesukim* cannot deem the holiday of *Shavuot* as a day of getting the *Torah* because such a gift cannot be bound to one earthly day. In every generation on *Shavuot* we receive the *Torah* and we will continue to receive it for generations to come. It is important to remember that this holiday does not acknowledge an event that happened long ago, but it reminds us of an event that forever replays in our lives.

Kiss or Embrace?

Gali Sadek ('13)

On *Shavuot*, we read the story of Rut and Naomi, two incredible women from our history. Naomi was a widow living in the land of Moab with her two royal Moabite daughters-in-law, Rut and Orpah. After a few years, Naomi felt it was necessary to return to Israel. She felt it was not fair to her daughters-in-law to coerce them to come with her and therefore told them to stay in their comfortable homes in Moab. Orpah decided to stay in Moab, but Rut did not allow Naomi to leave alone, and accompanied her along the journey to Israel. Upon reaching Israel, the two women suffered many hardships and faced horrible poverty. In the end of the story, the two women are rewarded with a happy ending and promised an amazing lineage in their future.

When did Naomi become aware that Rut would not abandon her? We are all familiar with Rut's famous

speech of dissent when she said to Naomi, "Do not press me to abandon you, to turn back and leave you behind. Wherever you go, I shall go. Wherever you sleep I shall sleep. Your people are my people, your Lord is my Lord" (*Rut* 1:16). However, if we look into *Sefer Rut*, we see Naomi was aware that Rut would return with her before this point. Initially when Naomi notifies her daughters-in-law of her return to Israel we read, "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, and Ruth embraced her. And [Naomi]



said, 'Behold, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and her gods. Follow your sister-in-law.' And Rut said, 'Do not press me to abandon you . . .'" (*Rut* 1:14-15). We clearly see in these *pesukim* that Naomi knew Rut would stay because she asked her to follow in Orpah's ways, clearly indicating that Rut did not want to leave.

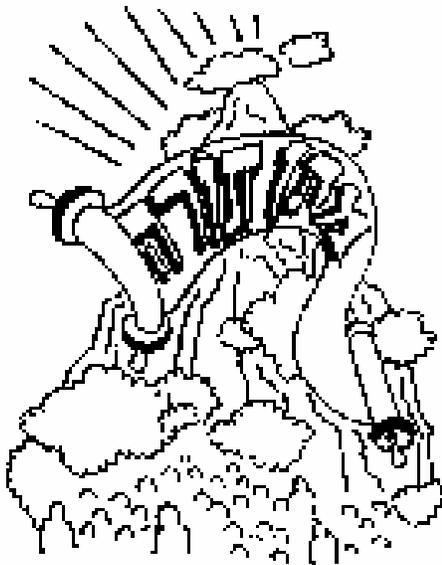
How did Naomi know from this encounter that Orpah was not returning with her and Rut was? The difference was in their reactions to what Naomi said. Orpah kissed Naomi, as opposed to Rut who embraced her in a full hug. What is so significant about a hug and a kiss that Naomi was able to tell who was coming with her and who was staying? Throughout *Tanach*, we see a distinction between kisses and embraces. According to *Sotah* 42b, when David set out to kill Goliath, *HaShem* remarked, "Let the child of the one who kissed be vanquished by the one who embraced," showing that the distinction between a hug and a kiss came to impact the descendants of Rut and Orpah as well.

What is this difference between a kiss and an embrace? To answer this question, we must look at *Har Sinai*. When *Bnei Yisrael* were at *Har Sinai*, prepared to accept the *Torah* and the laws commanded within it, *HaShem* raised the mountain and said, "If you accept the *Torah*, all is well, but if you don't, this will be your burial place." Why did *HaShem* feel the need to place this threat upon *Bnei Yisrael*? Had they not already said *na'aseh ve-nishma*? They said "we accept upon ourselves all the laws of the *Torah*!" Is that not enough?!?! To this question *HaShem* answers, no, it is not enough. When giving *Bnei Yisrael* this threat, He was giving them a lesson to pass on for generations.

HaShem said that when *Bnei Yisrael* said *na'aseh ve-nishma* it was only because of an emotional impulse. Their heart told them that it would benefit them to take on the role of *HaShem*'s people and therefore, they immediately agreed. However, *HaShem* believed

if they only took on the responsibilities of the Jewish People due to an emotional impulse, the connection would soon dissipate. Therefore, He wanted to make sure *Bnei Yisrael* would have a stronger bond and connection to the *Torah* and its values. In order to strengthen the bond, He had to stress the fact that *Torah* is the breath of life, that it holds the utmost importance in our lives. This bond that *HaShem* created by stressing the importance of *Torah* caused a perpetual bond between the nation and *Torah*, setting down the strong fundamental relationship based on emotion AND need.

This story comes to show the difference between a kiss and an embrace. A kiss represents *Bnei Yisrael*'s "*na'aseh ve-nishma*" speech. It is an incom-



plete physical contact which represents strong inner emotions but not a merging of two souls. An embrace, on the other hand, represents an everlasting bond, two hearts that beat as one. Therefore, when Orpah kissed Naomi, it was clear to Naomi that Orpah loved her, but not enough to need to leave with her. However, when Rut hugged Naomi, Naomi realized that Rut was attached to her and would never allow Naomi to leave on her own.

Many times, in our everyday lives, we sometimes feel our connection to God is lacking the same emotion and sense of need that *Bnei Yisrael* had in the past. However, if we can think about the everlasting bond we created with *HaShem* at *Har Sinai*, we can reassert our extreme love and devotion to *HaShem*.

Have an amazing *Shavuot*!

Given or Received?

Shavuot as Zeman Matan Toratenu

Shira Sohn ('14)

Shavuot, like many other *chagim*, is a holiday with many names. One of *Shavuot*'s names is *Zeman Matan Toratenu* – the time of the giving of our *Torah*. But would it not be more logical for *Shavuot* to be called *Zeman Kabbalat Toratenu* – the time of the acceptance of our *Torah*? After all, in *Shemot* 24:7 *Bnei Yisrael* famously accept the *Torah* with the words "*na'aseh ve-nishmah* – we will do, and we will listen."

Rashi on *Shemot* 19:17 quotes the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* 88a which explains that at *Matan Torah*, *HaShem* held *Har Sinai* upside down over *Bnei Yisrael*'s heads and threatened to drop it on them, making that spot their graves, if they did not accept the *Torah*. According to this *Gemara*, it seems that *Bnei Yisrael* did not actually accept the *Torah* of their own volition at all at *Har Sinai*, but rather were forced to accept it by *HaShem*. Rava explains that *Bnei Yisrael* accepted the *Torah* without force when they re-accepted the *Torah* in the times of *Achashverosh*, as it says "*Kiyemu ve-kiblu* – they upheld, and took upon themselves." This means that they upheld, or reaffirmed, what they had already accepted. Therefore, even though *Bnei Yisrael* were originally forced into the *Torah*, they later accepted it wholeheartedly.

Still, a question remains, why did *HaShem* need to force *Bnei Yisrael* to accept the *Torah* if they had willingly accepted it with the words “*na’aseh ve-nishmah*”? The *Sefat Emet* explains that the word “*asiyah*” can mean doing, but it can also mean force. Thus when *Bnei Yisrael* said “*na’aseh ve-nishmah*,” they were actually asking *HaShem* to force them to accept the *Torah*. *Bnei Yisrael* knew that they wanted to accept the *Torah*, but they also knew that their *yetzer hara* would drive them not to do so. Therefore, when *HaShem* held *Har Sinai* over their heads, He was merely doing what they had asked and allowing them to overcome their *yetzer hara* in order to accept the *Torah*. For this reason, we call *Shavuot Zeman Matan Toratenu*, because it is a holiday in which we commemorate that *HaShem* allowed us to overcome our *yetzer hara* and gave us the *Torah*.

Another explanation of *Shavuot*’s alternate name is that *Matan Torah* was a one-time event. *Bnei Yisrael* were given the *Torah* at one time, in one place. After *Bnei Yisrael* were given the *Torah* on *Har Sinai*, it became their mission to acquire the *Torah* and make it their own. Each day, through studying *Torah*, liv-



ing according to the *Torah*, performing *mitzvot*, and teaching *Torah* to others, we accept the *Torah* for ourselves. Thus, *Shavuot* is *Zeman Matan Toratenu*, the day on which we were given the *Torah*, but

every day of our lives is *Zeman Kabbalat Toratenu*, the day we accepted the *Torah*.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev uses the idea that at *Matan Torah*, *Bnei Yisrael* were passive, merely being given the *Torah* but not doing any actions, to explain why *Shavuot* is not attributed any holiday-specific *mitzvot*. Doing an active *mitzvah* on a day when we commemorate the giving of the *Torah* would oppose the day’s theme of receptivity. This is why on *Shavuot*, instead of doing active *mitzvot*, we try to re-accept the *Torah* for ourselves by learning *Torah* all night. We celebrate *Shavuot* as *Zeman Matan Toratenu* by not doing specific *mitzvot*, but also as *Zeman Kabbalat Toratenu*, by accepting the *Torah* anew on *Shavuot* night.

Do or Die: The Jews’ Acceptance of the *Torah*

Yonina Silverman (’14)

The holiday of *Shavuot* is celebrated in commemoration of *HaShem* giving the Jewish people the *Torah*. When taking a closer look at the *pesukim* in *perek* 19 of *Parshat Yitro*, it might seem as though *Bnei Yisrael* did not actually accept the *Torah* willingly. *Pasuk* 17 says, “*Va-yityatzvu be-tachtit ha-har.*” According to Rashi’s *peshat* interpretation, this phrase means that *Bnei Yisrael* stood at the foot of the mountain. According to the *Midrash*, however, this phrase means that *HaShem* took the mountain from its place and then suspended it above *Bnei Yisrael*. He then said that if they accept the *Torah* then there will be good, and if not then He will destroy the world. According to this opinion, it sounds as if *HaShem* is threatening His people.

Matan Torah is often compared to a wedding. *HaShem* is considered the groom and *Bnei Yisrael* his bride. In Judaism, if a woman is forced to marry someone, then the couple is not considered married. Does this mean that *Bnei Yisrael* should not be considered as having accepted the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*?

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan says that at the time when *Bnei Yisrael* were on a level that merited the witnessing of open miracles, they lacked the ability to have free

choice, and were essentially forced by the miracles they witnessed to accept the *Torah*. From the time of *Matan Torah* until the destruction of the first *Beit HaMikdash*; there were many open miracles, which therefore prevented *Bnei Yisrael* from having free choice.

It would therefore be accurate to say that *Bnei Yisrael* did not really accept the *Torah* at *Matan Torah* because they had no free choice. The question can be raised: how was the *Beit HaMikdash* destroyed? If *Bnei Yisrael* never accepted the *Torah*, then they should have been exempt from following all of the *halachot*. The *Meshech Chochmah* provides an answer to this: although the nation did not properly accept the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*, they still had to keep the three most important *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*, which are the prohibitions of murder, adultery and idolatry. Their status was like that of a *ger toshav*, who has to keep certain *mitzvot*. The destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, according to *Chazal*, came because *Bnei Yisrael* violated those *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*.

After the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, free choice re-entered the lives of the Jews. The *Gemara* in *Shabbat* 88a says that in the times of Achashveirosh, after the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the *Megillah* writes, "Kiyimu ve-kiblu" (*Esther* 9:27). *Bnei Yisrael* re-accepted the *Torah* of their own volition.

Shavuot is a time when we take the beautiful *Torah* that *HaShem* has given us and spend many hours learning it. We learn from *Matan Torah* that there are times when something has to be forced upon a person in order for him to appreciate it. If *HaShem* had not forced the Jewish people to accept the *Torah* at *Matan Torah*, there is a chance that they would have declined. If they had declined, the Jewish nation would not exist today. We are lucky to have the *Torah* and be able to learn it whenever and wherever we want. This was not always the case throughout Jewish history. We should take advantage of the night especially designated for *Torah* study to truly celebrate *Matan Torah*.

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Thank you to Mrs. Orly Nadler, Mrs. Fran Rochwarger, Mrs. Madeline Schmuckler and Mrs. Andrea Winkler for their technical assistance.

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