

## Parasha Yitro

1-19-2021

Chaverai v'Rabotai

### Introduction

As a former Philadelphian, it would be negligent of me to not point out that this week's parasha – Yitro – has a special place in the hearts of all our local sports fans. In this parsha we learn that HaShem not only follows the NFL but clearly roots for Philadelphia. We learn this from chapter 19, verse 4 where “וַאֲשָׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל-” כְּנָפֵי נְשָׁרִים”, “I have borne you on the wings of Eagles”.

### Holding the mountain over our heads

Although the Jewish people certainly didn't literally fly to Har Sinai, it is what happened there that I'd like to focus on today. We read, “Moses led the people out of the camp toward G-d, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.” The Hebrew used here is “וַיִּתְּצוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר”, b'tachtit is from the same shorash (root) as tachat or under. These words form the basis of the famous Talmudic interpretation from Rabbi Avdimi bar Chama (in tractate Shabbat 88a) “the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain, and the verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a

tub, and said to them: 'If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial.'"

Are we to then understand that the Jewish people were forced by HaShem to accept the Torah and its obligations? Of course not!

Rav Acha bar Ya'akov said: "... there is a substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah. The Jewish people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding." To this, Rava said: "Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written in Megilat Esther 9:27: 'The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them'. From this we learn that the Jews chose to take upon themselves that which was previously accepted through coercion at Sinai.

## Adoption & Converts

As the father of an adopted daughter, this two-part acceptance by the Jewish people of the Torah, reminds me of the similar acceptance of Judaism by an adopted child. At the time of the adoption, my daughter was converted through immersion in a mikvah and was then considered as Jewish as any other gair (convert). However, since she did not directly accept the laws (being a baby after all), the act of becoming a bat mitzvah represented her personal, explicit, acceptance into B'nai Yisrael.

How is it though that my daughter, or any convert to Judaism, is equal in the eyes of HaShem and that they are considered as having accepted the Torah in the same way as those of us born Jewish? We learn from Deut. 29:13-14 (parashat Nitzavim) about the revelation at Sinai that "...not only with you that I make this

covenant and this oath, but with those who are standing here with us this day before the LORD our G-d and those who are not with us here this day”. Tractate Shevuot 39a explains that ‘those who are not with us here this day’ applies to all subsequent generations of those born Jewish and all converts in the future. In Shabbat 146a, Rav Ashi expounds on the presents of converts at Sinai, by saying that “Even though they themselves were not at Mount Sinai, their guardian angels were present.”

## Colleyville

As we look back on the events of last Shabbat at Congregation Beth Israel of Colleyville, Tx, we must give thanks to HaShem that everyone was unharmed.

But I would like to focus on what happened outside the walls of Beth Israel...the outpouring of support from Jewish communities around the globe – of **ALL** denominations. This should be a reminder to us, as we learned from this parasha, that all of K’lal Yisrael was standing there, together at Sinai. A reminder that we should carry with us each day as we go out into the world and interact with Jews of all levels of observance or belief. We are all one people – Am Yisrael Chai.

Shabbat Shalom