

Purim: A Recommitment to Torah Sheba'al Peh

The Gemara in *Shabbos* 88a, records that until the holiday of Purim, the Jewish people were coerced into accepting the Torah. On the holiday of Purim, we accepted the Torah willingly for the first time. We learn it out from a seemingly disorganized pasuk at the end of the Megilla (9:27), which states “*kimu v’kiblu*” — they established and then accepted. How can one establish that which they have not yet accepted? The Gemara explains that the Jewish people established willingly that which they had earlier accepted unwillingly.

Tosafos ad loc. asks the obvious question: How can the Gemara suggest that the Jews were forced into accepting the Torah when they said “*na’aseh v’nishmah*” — we will do and we will understand — at Har Sinai? The Jewish people at that time were credited and praised with accepting the Torah willingly without fully knowing what the mitzvos were. How can the Gemara here suggest that they were forced into accepting the Torah when they explicitly accepted the Torah enthusiastically? The *Midrash Tanchuma, Noach* no. 3, explains that we accepted the Written Torah — *Torah Shebichsav* — readily but were pressured into accepting the Oral Torah — *Torah Sheba'al Peh*. On the holiday of Purim, we accepted the Oral Torah willingly. What changed? Why did the Jewish people refuse to accept the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* willingly until the miracle of Purim?



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One suggestion is offered by the Netziv, in an essay titled “*Beur Klali Al Nes Purim*” in *Ha’amek Davar* at the end of Sefer Shemos. Until the first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, the Jewish people were exposed to the wondrous miracles of Hashem in an open and revealed manner. Whether it be in the desert, in the conquest of Eretz Yisroel or in the Bais Hamkidash itself, Hashem’s conduct was recognizable. However, when the Bais Hamkidash was destroyed, Hashem concealed himself in a manner that required effort to see His hand in the world. As we all know, the whole premise and theme of Purim is that Hashem saved the Jewish people while remaining hidden. Therefore, when Klal Yisrael saw for the first time Hashem’s hand working behind the scenes, they came to the realization that the more concealed Torah, the *Torah Sheba'al Peh*, needs more focus. It is for this reason that at this moment in time, they accepted the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* willingly.

Rav Chaim Freidlander, *Sifsei Chaim, Moadim* Vol. II (pp. 232-234), offers an alternative explanation. He explains that the reason the Jewish people were almost annihilated was because they refused to heed the warnings of Mordechai about not going to Achashverosh’s party. Instead, they all went and participated. In the end, it was Mordechai, in conjunction with Esther, who helped save the Jews from complete and utter destruction. Mordechai represented *Torah Sheba'al Peh* as a member of the *Anshei Kneses Hagedolah*. Therefore, it became very clear to the Jewish people that not listening to *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (Mordechai) was what led to their precarious situation, and it was listening to *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (Mordechai) that saved them. As a result of the miracle of Purim, the Jewish people willingly reaffirmed their commitment to *Torah Sheba'al Peh*.

As we celebrate the holiday of Purim, let us reflect on re-energizing our learning of *Torah Sheba'al Peh* and reaffirming our observance of *Torah Sheba'al Peh*, as it is truly the safeguard of our continued relationship with Hashem.