



## TEXT STUDY 4

# The Place of Torah in Our Lives

This text study, created by Roy Young of Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills, provides an opportunity to think more deeply about our relationship to the Torah.

- **Among the many *midrashim* about the giving of the Torah are the following two:**

Rabbi [Yehudah Hanasi] said: When [the people] Israel stood at Mount Sinai, they were unanimous in accepting joyfully the rule of heaven, as it is written: "All the people answered as one, saying, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do!'" (Exodus 19:8). What is more, they vouched for one another's [commitment to fulfill the commandments].

*Midrash Tanchuma, Yitro*

Another interpretation of "Moses led the people toward God, out of the camp, and they took their places beneath the mountain" (Exodus 19:17):

This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, held the mountain over their heads like a barrel, saying, "If you take the Torah upon yourselves, it will go well [with you], but if not, this shall be your burial place" (Shabbat 88a). Thereupon they all burst out crying and poured out their hearts in penitence, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do and we will hear!"

*Mekhilta deRabi Shimon Bar Yohai*<sup>27</sup>

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The existence of these two legends about the giving of the Torah suggests that we need to receive Torah both voluntarily and involuntarily.

- In what ways do we accept the Torah involuntarily?
- In what ways do we accept it voluntarily?
- What are the implications of this idea for the planning of future learning initiatives in our congregation?

## ***Glossary***

*Midrash* is the general term for a genre of rabbinic literature that interprets biblical texts. *Midrash Tanchuma* is an eighth century *midrash* on the Torah. *Mekhilta deRabi Shim'on Bar Yohai*, a legal *midrash* on the book of Exodus, was written during the first two centuries of the common era, but redacted after the fourth century.

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