

WE WILL DO AND WE WILL HEAR*

וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית
וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ
כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר יְהוָה
נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע:

And he [Moses] took the book of the Covenant,
and read in the ears of the people; and they said:
All that Adonai has spoken
we will do and we will hear.

And he [Moses] took the book of the Covenant—“From Genesis until the giving of the Torah and the commandments that were given at Marah” (Rashi). *And [Moses] read in the ears of the people*—He took pains, through his own efforts and those of the leaders, to ensure that the book was read within the hearing of each and every one of the people—so that the words would not only be “heard” in the plain sense but be internalized, each person assuming the covenant with conscious intention. *And they said*—They answered not as individuals but as a community, for they had been enslaved and then liberated together, now inheriting the law together, and they had become one people through sharing a covenant with God. *All that Adonai has spoken*—They acknowledged that the words are holy, a gift from God, to enlighten us about the workings of God’s creation and how we shall guide our lives in accord with God’s will. *We will do*—We will, they affirmed, repeatedly apply ourselves to live this law, never relinquishing the covenant that defines us as a people, no matter the difficulties we encounter or our failures in meeting them. *And we will hear*—And we shall continue to listen to the decisions of judges and the lessons of our teachers who interpret the Torah in every time and place, dedicating ourselves to learn “all its details and meaning” (S.R. Hirsch).

* Exodus 24:7 (in Mishpatim)