



DIVREI TORAH BULLETIN

CYIR: COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL RABBIS IN ISRAEL

דברי תורה

A project of the NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL

GUEST RABBI:

RABBI YAAKOV HOMNICK

MEMBER, COUNCIL OF YI RABBIS IN ISRAEL

Also available at: www.youngisraelrabbis.org.il

SHAVUOT

6 SIVAN 5768 / JUNE 9, 2008

DAF YOMI: SOTAH 16

698 Days of Captivity for Israeli MIA's Ehud Goldwasser, Eldad Regev and Gilad Shalit

In the Torah's description of Hashem's giving us the Torah we read (Shemot 20, 14):

"וכל העם רואים את הקולות..."

"And all the people saw the sounds and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking . . ."

There is an apparent problem in these words: A person cannot see sounds; one *can* see flames and the mountain smoking, but cannot see the sound of Hashem proclaiming the Ten Commandments, nor can one see the sound of the shofar!

Rashi, in commenting on these words, deals with this problem and, based on the words of the Mechilta says:

"רואין את הנשמע"

At Mount Sinai the miraculous took place, "רואין", B'nai Yisrael were able to actually see **את**, "נשמע" what is usually heard, "שאי אפשר לראות במקום אחר", "that which is impossible to see in any other situation."

Strangely enough, what Rashi is saying is that they actually *did* see the sounds emerging from the Al-Mighty, with their very

eyes. What Rashi means is that in this case what they heard was not a matter of belief but something they actually saw with their own eyes.

Of the five senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, just sight and hearing have the greatest connection to religion. In law, we disqualify hearsay evidence. A witness has to see with his own eyes and not hear from others.

Was it Mark Twain who said: "I believe nothing of what I hear and only half of what I see." Seeing is believing!

But in the case of religion, hearing plays an important role:

"שמע ישראל"

"Hear O' Israel," which actually means comprehend, or accept, but we hear from our teachers and we hear from our parents.

The pasuk at the beginning of K'doshim reads:

"איש אמו ואביו תיראו ואת שבתותי תשמורו"

"Every person must respect his mother and father and keep My Sabbaths."

Asks Rashi: Why is keeping Shabbat mentioned in such close proximity to respecting one's parents? To tell you that even though you must respect your parents, if they tell you to be m'chalel (desecrate the) Shabbat, you should not listen.

Asks R' Meir Simcha of D'vinsk in his Meshech Chochmah: How could we possibly think that what your parent tells you should supercede what the Al-Mighty Himself tells you? If Hashem says keep Shabbat and your parent says don't keep it, do you have to be told in a special way not to listen to your parent?

Answers the Meshech Chochmah, "You know why we have to be told not to obey our parent when they tell us to violate Shabbat?" Because who told us about Shabbat in the first place? Were it not for tradition – our parents and their parents before them - how would we know anything about Shabbat, or any other Mitzvah of the Torah? And they are telling us to violate it! Says the pasuk, you may have heard it from your parent, but it is Hashem who is commanding you – you must listen to Hashem, just as your parents are obligated to listen to Hashem.

So in religion we hear; we hear from parents, teachers – even from books. But only once did we see with our own eyes!

There is an essential difference between hearing and seeing – not only as to reliability, but in the actual processes of hearing and seeing themselves: The ear can only hear one thing at a time.

Rashi points out in the Gemara several times:

"תרי קלי לא משתמעי"

"Two sounds cannot be heard at the same time." Of course, an orchestra makes a complex sound – but even a symphony is heard as one sound following the other; at no given moment do we hear the entire symphony as a complete, total unit.

In vision, on the other hand, we have an entire field of vision. First we see the entire picture. Only afterwards, if we concentrate, can we limit what we see to a single item or point.

Why do people have difficulty accepting the mitzvot of the Torah? Because they hear a mitzvele here, a mitzvele there – they never have the entire magnificent tapestry before them. That is what

"רואים את הנשמע"

"seeing what is usually heard," means. At Sinai they did not hear bit by bit, but the entire picture was flashed before them. They saw the broader magnificent picture that the entire Torah presents.

Not only that, but there is a Midrash that states:

"רואים את הקולות"

"They saw the sounds" means, they saw how each Jew received the Torah tailor-made for them!

"לפי כוחו של כל אחד ואחד"

"According to each one's abilities." Not only did each Jew see the larger picture, but they

were also able to see how they and their neighbors were being shown that which suited their own individual needs.

It was a REAL revelation; their eyes were opened for good. This is why R' Yehuda Halevi in his Kuzari places the revelation at Sinai at the center of his belief system. It is not something we were told about. It is something we ourselves experienced together unforgettably, as a complete nation.

We live in an era of history - denial - even of recent history. But no one can deny that unbroken tradition among us, stretching from Sinai and handed down from father to son and from teacher to pupil.

That great moment of revelation is what we strive for again, as we go towards the fulfillment of all the Nevi'im's prophecies

**"בביאת משיח צדקנו במהרה בימינו
אמן."**

Chag Sameach!