

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
*with Reb Yoel Kahn*



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## MAKING TORAH OUR REALITY

Regarding Matan Torah the *possuk* states: “The nation saw the voices and the flames.” Quoting R. Akiva, the Mechilta explains that although voices are usually heard and not seen, at Matan Torah, the Jews “saw what is usually heard and heard what is usually seen.”

A simple question can be asked. The verse doesn’t mention anything about hearing what is usually seen. In fact, the simple reading of the verse implies that the nation saw both the voices *and* the flames. From where does R. Akiva deduce that not only were the voices seen, but the flames were heard? (Indeed, in Rashi’s commentary to this verse, he explains that “they saw what is usually heard,” omitting the concept of hearing what is usually seen.)

Another question: Hashem surely doesn’t do miracles just to show off His abilities. What was the purpose of these supernatural phenomena?

### SEEING VS. HEARING

To understand this, we must first explain the difference between seeing and hearing.

Seeing is generally limited to physical objects. A person can see the various items around him, which are all physical in nature. Hearing, by contrast, applies to spiritual entities. The word *hearing* can refer to understanding, and a logical idea is certainly something spiritual. But even when hearing in the literal sense, the voice being heard is spiritual in comparison to physical, “seeable” objects.

This is the difference between seeing and hearing with regard to the *entity* being perceived. They also differ with regard to the *person* who is perceiving.

When a person hears about something, it doesn’t become internalized within him to such a great extent. By contrast, when he sees something, the idea is real and certain, and it becomes ingrained deeply within him.

Let’s apply this on a broader scale. What type of entities do we “see,” and what do we merely “hear”?

As a rule, the physical world and all that it contains are things that we “see.” We don’t need proofs or *emunah* to validate their existence. Of course they exist. After all, we see them!

On the other hand, G-dly matters—Torah and *mitzvos*—are merely “heard.” Of course, there is no doubt that we believe in Hashem and the Torah, and they can even be proven intellectually. But we cannot say that they are as certain and real to us as physical matters.

### THE WORLD: FACT OR FICTION?

R. Akiva learns that at Matan Torah, the tables were reversed. *Elokus*, Torah and *mitzvos*, which are usually heard, were as clear and evident as an object that is seen. The world, by contrast, was merely heard: they understood it intellectually, and needed proofs to verify that it exists.

Chassidus often discusses the concept of Hashem’s unity, explaining that this does not only mean that there is no other *G-d* other than Hashem, but that *nothing exists* besides Him. How can this be reconciled with the fact that we see a world around us? Many lengthy explanations are given in various *maamorim*, explaining how these two ideas—Hashem’s complete unity and the existence of a world—are both true.

Seemingly, this apparent contradiction could have been solved very simply—by positing that the world is a mere figment of our imagination, and in truth it does not exist!

Chassidus explains that this cannot be the case, and provides proofs that the world indeed exists. One proof is from the *possuk*, “*Bereishis bara Elokim es hashamayim ve’es ha’aretz.*” This clearly demonstrates that Hashem

created a genuine world.

Another proof is from the fact that most *mitzvos* are performed with physical objects. If the world would not be real, then the wool used for *tzitzis* and the parchment used for *tefillin* would similarly not be real, and the *kashrus* of the *tzitzis* and *tefillin* would be questionable! Since *tzitzis* and *tefillin* are surely real,

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After all, we see it!

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it must be that the world does exist.

This is what it means that at Matan Torah, the Jews “saw what is usually heard and heard what is usually seen.” The world, which is usually seen, was heard: evidence was necessary to prove that it is indeed real. Torah and *mitzvos*, on the other hand, were as real as could be, and no proofs were necessary.

## TORAH: NO PROOFS NECESSARY

We say every morning that Hashem is *nosein hatorah*—he gives us the Torah, today and every day.

Accordingly, it is possible for us to achieve the same perspective we had at Matan Torah: *Elokus*, Torah and *mitzvos* can be axiomatic, while physicality can be abstract.

However, as mentioned above, Rashi only states that they “saw what is usually heard,” but not that they “heard what is usually seen.” The simple reason is, as stated above, because that is what is mentioned clearly in the *possuk*. But what is the deeper reason for this omission?

Rashi wrote his commentary for young children who are just beginning to learn Chumash. From a deeper perspective, this means that Rashi was written for someone who is a spiritual “child”—a person who still needs to be educated in the path of Torah. He may be a ninety-year-old, but with regard to Torah and *mitzvos* he is a mere child.

Such a person cannot be expected to “hear what is usually seen”—to only know that the world exists because he has a proof from Torah. Such an attitude can only be demanded

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Why can we not posit that the world is a mere figment of our imagination, and in truth it does not exist?

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from an “adult,” someone who has already “matured” in Torah. When an adult looks at wool or parchment, the only thing he should see are the potential for *tzitzis* and *tefillin*. A child, on the other hand, plays with toys. You cannot tell him that the toys (or the equivalent with an adult) are essentially nothing!

We can, however, demand of him to “see what is usually heard,” namely, that Torah and *mitzvos* should be just as real to him as physicality.

Let’s take a businessman who studies Torah for a half hour every evening when he comes home from work. One day he is exhausted, and he entertains the thought of delaying his daily *shiur* for tomorrow, when he will learn a full hour to make up for today. But if Torah and *mitzvos* are just as real as his physical needs, he will not push it off. True, we cannot demand of him that eating, drinking and sleeping should not be important to him, but we can demand that Torah should be equally important.

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When a person adopts such an approach, eventually he will change, and so will his perspective of the world.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 6, pp. 119ff.

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