

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



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## SEEING THE "YES" IN EVERYTHING

The Aseres Hadibros are preceded by the *possuk*, "Hashem spoke all of these things *leimor* – to say."

Usually, the word *leimor* indicates that Moshe was to repeat a given command to the Bnei Yisroel. But that cannot be the meaning in this case. Every Jew alive was present at Har Sinai; what's more, even those who were yet to be born, until the end of time, were there too. There was no one to whom Moshe would need to repeat the Aseres Hadibros. If so, what does *leimor* mean?

### YES OR NO?

The Mechilta explains that here, *leimor* means "to answer": after each *dibbur*, the Bnei Yisroel gave a verbal reply, acknowledging the command and accepting it.

What exactly did they say? The Mechilta records a *machlokes*. Everyone agrees that they responded to positive commands by saying, "Yes, we will do so." However, with regard to negative commands, R' Yishmael and R' Akiva are of differing opinions: According to R' Yishmael, they said, "No, we will not do so." R' Akiva, however, maintains that they said, "Yes, we will listen."

What's the difference between these two replies? Saying "No, I will not steal" and saying "Yes, I will listen to Your command to refrain from stealing" seem to be one and the same. Is this merely a play of words?!

### SEEING VS. HEARING

This argument is connected to another dispute between R' Yishmael and R' Akiva relating to Mattan Torah: R' Yishmael says that the Jews saw what is usually seen (the flames) and heard what is usually heard (the sounds), while R' Akiva holds that they saw what is usually heard and heard what is usually seen.

What is the difference between hearing and seeing? When you hear about something, it remains somewhat distant from your

reality. However, when you see something, it penetrates your consciousness in a much deeper way.

Usually, the world is "seen" and Elokus is "heard." The world is something we experience and feel; there is no doubt in our minds that it exists. On the other hand, although we know about Elokus and believe that it exists, it remains abstract.

But by Mattan Torah, says R' Akiva, it was different. The Jews saw what is usually heard and heard what is usually seen. They were elevated to a level where the existence of Elokus was one-hundred-percent certain, and no proofs were necessary. Physicality, on the other hand, was something they had to be convinced truly exists: since the Torah commands us to put on *tefillin* crafted from the hide of an animal, and to wear *tzitzis* woven from wool, it must be that the world is not an illusion but a real existence.

### A NEW DEFINITION

The difference between seeing and hearing is not only whether you need proofs to be sure of its existence or not. Even after you have evidence that it is real, an entity that is "heard" is viewed in a very different light than an entity that is "seen."

When a person is sure about the world's existence, animal hide and wool are exactly that: animal hide and wool. The fact that they can be used for mitzvos is a secondary function and does not define their essence. But suppose a person views Elokus as certain, while physicality may be an illusion. What is the proof that it is indeed real? Since it is needed for a mitzvah. If so, this is its very definition: a medium with which a mitzvah can be fulfilled. Animal hide isn't animal hide and wool isn't wool; they simply are opportunities for *tefillin* and *tzitzis*.

According to R' Akiva, this is the way Bnei Yisroel viewed physicality at the time of Mattan Torah. They didn't see physical objects; all they saw were opportunities for mitzvos.

The same was true for negative commandments as well. When analyzing the concept of thievery, they did not see a wicked act.

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Since the Torah commands us to put on *tefillin* crafted from the hide of an animal, it must be that the world is real.

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All they saw was another chance to fulfill a mitzvah—the mitzvah of *lo signov*, to refrain from stealing.

This is the meaning of R' Akiva's statement that they answered "Yes" to both positive and negative commands. Even when they were told about negative ideas (such as stealing), all they saw was something positive—that Hashem had created additional opportunities to perform mitzvos.

## R' AKIVA'S FINAL MOMENTS

The Gemara relates that when the Romans brutally tortured R' Akiva by combing his flesh with iron combs, his students observed him saying Shema.

"To such an extent?!" they exclaimed.

"All my life," replied R' Akiva, "I yearned to fulfill the *possuk* 'You should love Hashem... with all your soul,' which means that one should be ready to sacrifice his very life for His name. Now, I finally have the ability to do so!"

What surprised the students of R' Akiva? What exactly were they asking?

On a simple level, they were astounded at how R' Akiva was able to focus on Krias Shema while undergoing such tremendous suffering. But the Rebbe explains that this was not their question. In their eyes, for R' Akiva to be able to put his pain aside and say Shema was not particularly extraordinary. What they were asking was something else entirely.

Krias Shema emphasizes the concept of "Hashem Echad," how everything in the world is one with Hashem. Through saying Shema at such a time, R' Akiva was demonstrating that even this terrible occurrence was a reflection of Hashem's unity.

This was something R' Akiva's students could not understand. They were able to grasp how physical entities could be used for a holy purpose. But when observing such a sight—the evil

Romans were torturing their teacher, and why? Because he had studied Torah—they were at a loss how to explain it. There was no greater opposition to Torah and *kedushah* than this. How could R' Akiva see in this as well the idea of Hashem Echad?

R' Akiva replied that yes, this, too, was an expression of Hashem Echad. When being put in such a situation, he didn't see the negative aspect; all he saw was that he had been given an opportunity to fulfill the *possuk* of *bechol nafshecha*, to sacrifice his life for Hashem's name.

## A FRESH LOOK AT NISYONOS

Although this was the level of Bnei Yisroel at the time of Mattan Torah, it is something we must attempt to reach as well. In

the *berachos* said before studying Torah, we say *Boruch atah Hashem nosein hatorah* in the present tense, signifying that Hashem is giving us the Torah each and every day. We must therefore strive to reach this level of awareness, in which physicality is seen as a mere medium for Torah and mitzvos.

And just like the Bnei Yisroel saw the positive even in the negative commands, we must also do the same. When encountering a *nisayon* or a struggle, we must look at the positive aspect:

since Hashem creates the world every second anew, including this obstacle, and the purpose of Creation is so that Bnei Yisroel can fulfill Torah, it must be that this difficulty, too, is there for this reason. Keeping this in mind will make it easier to overcome the *nisayon*, knowing that it was placed there just to provide another opportunity to serve Hashem.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 6, Yisro 2 and fn. 35.

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Why did Hashem create thievery? To give us another chance to fulfill a mitzvah—the mitzvah of *lo signov*.

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