

The entire nation saw the thunder and the flames. (20:15)

The level of prophecy and spiritual perception which *Klal Yisrael* achieved during the Giving of the *Torah* was unprecedented. Indeed, as the *pasuk* implies, they were able to "see" the "sounds." Although thunder is an invisible sound, *Klal Yisrael* were able to transcend the barriers of human limitation and rise to a level of superhuman comprehension. They could now see what is heard under normal physical constraints. Seeing and hearing are two functions of the human body, each of which projects its own individual level of perception. One sees with clarity. To see means to perceive with an unambiguous level of recognition. Hearing, on the other hand, does not present an equivalent clarity of perception. Indeed, regarding the testimony of witnesses, the Talmud says, "Hearing shall not be considered greater than seeing." While an individual sees more clearly, he is only able to see short distances - within the limitation of human vision. Hearing is, of course, not restrained to such limits, since one has the ability to hear much farther than he can see.

Horav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, zl, applies the distinction between sight and sound to explain *Chazal's* comment regarding *Klal Yisrael's* level of perception during the Revelation: "They saw what is (normally) heard, and heard what is (normally) seen." The physical dimension of man, or the world in which we live, usually is perceived through the concept of sight. In the spiritual dimension, the Eternal world, perception is defined through the concept of *shmiah*, hearing, since one cannot see the supernatural through the limited vision of the human eye. Hence, we find the enjoinder of "*Shma Yisrael*", Hear O Yisrael, or "*V'haya im shemoa tishmeu el mitzvosai*," "and it shall be if you will surely listen to My *mitzvos*." We listen; we are not able to see beyond the boundary of the physical.

During *Matan Torah*, Giving of the *Torah*, we transcended this boundary, when Hashem "opened" the Heavens. A Revelation heretofore never experienced by mankind occurred. Hashem revealed the hidden secrets of the spiritual dimension to them as never before. They could now "see" what until now had only been "heard." They could "traverse" the distance between the physical and the spiritual by experiencing through imagery - hearing. Furthermore, they could now "hear" what previously had been perceived only through "sight." This physical, mundane world until now had been contained within defined limits. Suddenly, the world became wider, as perception was not confined to the sense of sight. *Klal Yisrael* were so spiritually elevated that they no longer "saw" this world - they related to it through *shmiah*, hearing, because they were lifted beyond its physical periphery.