

On the third day...there was thunder and lightning...and the entire people that was in the camp shuddered. (19:16)

Klal Yisrael was not the only one to shudder from the noise. That awesome sound, the "mysterium tremendum" that accompanied the Revelation and Giving of the *Torah*, echoed far beyond the periphery of that mountain. It reached an entire world. They all gathered together, the kings and princes, the common man and scholar, to offer praise to the Almighty. The *Midrash* says that they were scared; they feared for their lives. They thought the world was coming to an end. Perhaps Hashem was deluging the world with another *mabul*, flood. They went to their "wise man," seeking guidance and encouragement. "Was the end near?" they asked Bilaam, the wicked archenemy of our People. "Is Hashem returning the world to a state of disaster?" they asked. "No," Bilaam responded, "there will no longer be a flood. The noise emanates from an entirely different experience. The Almighty has had a precious treasure hidden away since 974 years before the creation of the world. It is called the *Torah*. He has waited all this time to give it to His children, the Jewish People." When they heard this, they all began to sing *shirah*, a song of praise to the Almighty.

What is the *Midrash* teaching us? While the nations of the world were far from virtuous, what led them to believe that their behavior had deteriorated to the extent that they deserved to be obliterated like the generation of the flood? *Horav Elchonon Sorotzkin, zl*, feels that they were justified in their fears. The world population had fallen to a nadir of depravity on a level with the generation of the flood. After all, how do we explain a world that stands idly by while a treacherous Pharaoh enslaves an entire nation, drowns their male offspring, bathes in the blood of their slaughtered children, all directed at the persecution of the Jews? Is there a more revolting form of indifference than this? The world is deaf to the screams of the dying children, to the bitter cries of their grief-stricken parents, to the moaning sounds of the broken-hearted Jews falling under the Egyptian whip. And we wonder why Hashem would want to destroy them. Only Hashem heard the cries, empathized with the sorrow and felt the pain of the hapless Jews.

He liberated them from bondage, freed them from persecution and destroyed their cruel oppressors. The world heard a loud cacophony of sound, the sounds of Revelation. They were afraid, however, that the sound was for them, that it heralded their well-deserved punishment. Bilaam told them not to worry. Those were not the sounds that accompanied disaster; rather, they were the clarion call of hope, the harbinger of the Giving of the *Torah*. If the Jewish People would accept the *Torah*, guard it, and observe its precepts, then the entire world would be saved. *Chazal* analogize this to a king who entrusted his beautiful garden to the hands of a sharecropper. After awhile the king returned to see the fruits of the sharecropper's labor. He entered the garden and noticed thorns - large, ugly thorns all over. He quickly obtained a large shears and began cutting away at the thorns. Suddenly, a beautiful, perfectly shaped, sweet-smelling rose appeared. "For this rose, I will spare the entire garden!" exclaimed the king. So, too, does Hashem spare the world because of His rose - the *Torah* for which He created the world. He waited twenty-six

generations after Creation and "looked down" at His garden; He took His shears and cut away the thorns of evil, the wicked generations that sinned unrepentently against Him. He kept on searching and cutting until He "discovered" a rose, the Jewish People who would accept His *Torah*. He took this rose and smelled it at the very moment that *Klal Yisrael* accepted the *Aseres Ha'dibros*, Ten Commandments, and He was revived/pleased. When *Klal Yisrael* rang out with the words "*naase v'nishma*", "we will do and we will listen, " Hashem responded, "Because of this rose/*Klal Yisrael* I will spare the world."

What a beautiful interpretation of *Chazal*! What profound meaning *Chazal*'s timeless words have for us today. Is the world that different today? Modern technology has blessed us with tools for destruction as never before. The world is filled with cruel demagogues bent on taking advantage and destroying those weaker than they. Our own people experienced a subhuman cruelty that would be impossible to believe if it were not true. All of this occurred while almost an entire world, including our own "host" country, turned away - deaf, mute, not seeing a thing. Yet, the world exists and is sustained by Hashem. Why? Why do they deserve to go on? It is because of the precious rose - *Klal Yisrael* and their commitment to the *Torah*!