

HEARING VOICES FROM HEAVEN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 232, Marror: A Bitter Problem? Good Shabbos!

Hearing Voices from Heaven

Vayikra begins with the words "And He called to Moshe and HaShem [G-d] spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying" [Vayikra 1:1].

Rash"i comments that [the wording "spoke to him (Moshe), from the Tent of Meeting"] teaches us that the Voice stopped and did not go out beyond the confines of the Ohel Moed [Tent of Meeting]. [This is because if the only purpose of the pasuk [verse] was to tell us the location from where HaShem's Voice emanated, the pasuk should have said, "And He called to Moshe from the Ohel Moed, and HaShem spoke..."]

Rash"i continues by explaining that one might have thought that the reason why HaShem's Voice was not heard beyond the Ohel Moed was because it was a soft voice. In order to teach us otherwise, the Torah in Bamidbar uses the words 'ES hakol' - 'THE Voice' [7:8g]. This refers to the Voice described explicitly in Tehillim 'The Voice of Hashem is powerful; the Voice of Hashem is majestic; the Voice of Hashem breaks cedars.' [29:4-5]. So if the Voice was so powerful, why could it not be heard beyond the Ohel Moed (as indicated by "from the Ohel Moed")? The answer is that the Voice stopped and did not go any further.

If someone wanted to eavesdrop behind the curtains of the Ohel Moed on the conversation Hashem was having with Moshe Rabbeinu, he would not hear anything. Now, if in fact it was a loud voice, why did it not go beyond the confines of the Ohel Moed? There are two possible explanations.

One possibility is that it was a miracle. (Which would lead us to the question -- what would be the purpose of Hashem making such a miracle?)

The other possibility (which the sefer Darchei Mussar suggests) is that there was no miracle. In reality the Voice was loud enough to be heard. However the people were not "tuned in" to hear that Voice.

The frequency of a dog whistle is set to a range that is audible for a dog, but not for humans. The Voice of Hashem, l'Havdil, was a sound that could only be "picked up" if one were on the spiritual level of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Voice was there. Conceivably, anyone could have heard it, provided they were properly "tuned in". There are sometimes voices that are present which we just do not hear.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches: "Every day a Heavenly Voice (Bas Kol) goes forth from Mt. Horeb and proclaims 'Woe to the creatures because of the shame caused to the Torah'" [Avos 6:2]. Have we ever heard this Bas Kol? No. Does that mean Rav Yehoshua ben Levi is wrong? The answer is that he heard a Voice that we do not hear -- because he is "tuned in" to that Voice. There are many sounds from Heaven that are present, but unfortunately we are often not receptive to them.

Rabbi Frand's Iraqi War Diary

We can conceptualize a sound that has such a high pitched frequency that we can not hear it. However we are often unable to conceptualize something that is right there to be seen. It can be right in front of us and we will sometimes not see it.

Such a phenomenon occurred during the Gulf War. We, over the last few months (this class was delivered in March 1991) have seen miracles. This is not hyperbole but understatement. We have seen miracles, but we have not "seen" them. They have not made an impression.

Let me review my personal diary. I remember where I was on August 2, 1990. I was driving on Mt. Wilson Lane and I heard the news that Iraq had invaded Kuwait. I said to myself "Nu, another war." I was surprised, but I was not startled.

Then, a couple of weeks later, I heard something that did not make any sense: Iraq declared, "We will pull out of Kuwait, if the Israelis pull out of the 'occupied' territories". I remember thinking to myself, "What a stupid comparison. This is so ludicrous!" But as the months went by, this became more and more 'sane' in the eyes of the world. We saw how this event was becoming a 'Jewish event'. I saw that we were going to wind up right in the middle of this thing and I was convinced that we would be 'sold out'. I was convinced that 'peace' would be made on the backs of the Israelis.

I remember the day in mid January that a meeting was held in Geneva between U.S. Secretary of State Baker and Iraqi Foreign Minister Aziz. I was driving on the Beltway and remember hearing the news reports: "They are still talking... they are still talking..." Two hours went by, four hours went by and I thought "Oh no. Here comes the moment when they are going to sell us down the river." Finally, I heard that the negotiations broke down! I could not believe it. Then I heard the press conference. Aziz, for forty-five minutes, would only speak about the Israelis. That comparison, which I considered the strangest comparison in the world, now, four months later, became the main issue to be negotiated! But it fell through!

I remember the Wednesday night when the war started. I remember hearing that the missile sites in

Western Iraq were being attacked. I thought "Baruch Hashem, we will be spared." I was caught up in the euphoria. I remember preparing the shiur that Wednesday night. It was so difficult to concentrate on my preparation because I was listening to the radio at the same time. It took me 10 hours to prepare the shiur!

I remember how great I felt that Thursday. Then I remember that Thursday night -- the Thursday night that none of us will ever forget. It was about 6:45 PM when the reports came in that Scud missiles were falling on Tel Aviv. We all remember how we felt.

There were people who called up and asked, "Will there be a shiur tonight?" I responded that I understood that perhaps no one was in the mood to listen to or say a shiur, but we have to say the shiur.

I remember driving down Park Heights Avenue at 8:45 PM when the reports were claiming that it was Chemical and Nerve Gas missiles that were falling on Tel Aviv. I walked into this Beis Medrash and witnessed Jews crying. I remember seeing Jews sitting here, reciting Tehillim. It was an unbelievable sight. As difficult as it was to say that shiur, I know that it was much harder to listen to the shiur.

I remember walking out of the shiur and asking someone for the latest news reports and being told "seven casualties; no deaths". I could not believe my ears.

I returned home and heard the reports that the Israelis were prepared to attack and they scrambled jets. I thought "here it comes -- the next Arab- Israeli war; the jets are already flying!" Jordan announced that if Israel crossed their airspace, they would attack Israel; Syria threatened to attack Israel. I thought "Oy vay! Another war against Israel!"

Then, unbelievably, the Israelis did not attack. I remember flying that Friday morning to Los Angeles and wondering how I would manage 5 hours on the plane without news. I stayed in the Baltimore terminal until the last minute, watching the News on the TV monitor. When I boarded the plane, the steward asked me "How are you?" I responded, "I've been a lot better!"

The first question I asked when I landed in Los Angeles was "What happened in the last 5 hours?" The response: "They did not attack." I remember the hours ticking off until Shabbos began in Los Angeles and being grateful that I had 3 extra hours before Shabbos to listen to the news since I was on the West Coast. It was almost morning in Eretz Yisroel. Thank G-d, the Israelis did not attack and Thank G-d, there were no more missiles. I was sure that if there were to be more missiles, the Israelis would certainly respond.

I turned off the radio right before Shabbos. I was in a strange house in Los Angeles, so I was unfamiliar with the radio controls. I promise you I did not do this on purpose, but for some reason at 6:15 AM the next morning, the radio went on. I was never happier to be woken up early on a Shabbos morning. I was lying there in bed listening to KABC in Los Angeles and all of a sudden, I heard that

there was a second attack on Tel Aviv.

I felt "This is it. One attack they might tolerate; but not two!" But Israel did not respond to the missiles. The Scuds kept on falling and almost nobody was killed! Hurt yes, but after 39 MISSILE ATTACKS there were NO MORE THAN 3 PEOPLE KILLED!

That was an open miracle. True, HaShem 'hides' even the most open of miracles. For example, the Torah commands us to place fire on the altar even though fire comes down from the sky. So too, this was a miracle.

Just to make sure that we did not think that Scud missiles were merely oversized Roman Candles, on the last day of war, HaShem showed us, unfortunately, what a Scud missile could do. A Scud missile killed hundreds of American servicemen in their Saudi Arabia barracks. If the secular media says that what happened in Israel is nothing less than miraculous -- in so many words -- then we in our lifetime have seen miracles. The question is, however, have we SEEN it? Did we SEE it? Are we any different today than we were before the war? That is the question we must ask ourselves.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian once said that Emunah [Belief] is not demonstrated by the intensity of the Tehillim (prayers) recited during a crisis but by the intensity of the Hallel (praises) recited after the crisis. Everyone says Tehillim with his or her heart during a crisis. (There are no atheists in a foxhole.) But Emunah is demonstrated after it is all over. After the miracles we have witnessed -- the crushing defeat of a mortal enemy of the Jewish people without one Israeli soldier firing a shot -- have we SEEN the miracle?

How is the intensity of our Hallel? That is what indicates the intensity of our Belief. This is our challenge of Divine Service -- to contemplate what we saw with our eyes and to tell our children and our grandchildren "We saw miracles. We saw the Hand of HaShem." We have to be different as a result of that. We have to offer a Hallel with the intensity of an "Az Yashir" [Shemos Chapter 15]. The Jews who saw the splitting of the Red Sea recited a Song of Praise (Shirah). We saw a miracle and we must recite a 'Song of Praise' as well.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#232). The corresponding halachic portion for this week's portion is: Marror: A Bitter Problem?. The other halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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