



D'VAR TORAH

Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

Is it possible to see sounds?

From Parshat Yitro we learn that the answer is, yes.

Immediately after the Torah tells us about the extraordinary encounter that the nation had with Hashem at Mount Sinai, when the Ten Commandments were given:

'Vechol-ha'am ro'im et-hakkolot' – 'the entire nation saw the sounds'.

What can this mean?

I believe we can gain some insight into this, from a Bracha which we recite every single morning.

Upon waking up, we thank Hashem, 'Poke'ach Ivrim', for opening the eyes of the blind.

That is because while we are asleep, we cannot physically see as we usually would and therefore, we appreciate the opportunity to see what is in front of us, from the moment that we open our eyes.

But there is a sad question that is asked in Halacha:

If a person unfortunately is blind, should they recite this Bracha - 'thank you God for opening the eyes of the blind'?

The Mishnah Berurah tells us that the answer is yes and there are two possible reasons.

The first is that the blind person is thanking Hashem, for the sight that other people have, because they can assist the blind person.

Or there is a second reason – that it is because the term 'Poke'ach Ivrim' does not literally mean, 'who opens the eyes of the blind', but rather, 'who enlightens the blind'.

The word 'Poke'ach' comes from the term 'Pe-keach', which means to be bright, to be perceptive, to understand what is happening – and that is what this Bracha is for.

'Poke'ach Ivrim' means, we thank Hashem for enabling us to appreciate the depth of what is in front of us, in the way that we say in English, 'I see what you mean.' And this doesn't necessarily mean that you physically have vision.

That is the reason why a blind person should say this Bracha and that explains what happened at Mount Sinai.

The nation saw the sound, such was the depth of their spiritual experience, that they could perceive everything that was in front of them. The truth of Hashem. The truth of the Torah He was giving to us.

Our prayer therefore is, that throughout the future, may Hashem bless us and our future generations, so that we likewise, will always be able to see the sounds – to perceive, to understand and to internalise the greatness of the truth of Hashem and the commandments that He gives us.

Shabbat Shalom.