

“Seeing is believing”- is a well know phrase, but from our parasha we learn that “**hearing is believing**”. Two weeks ago in Beshalach, after the splitting of the Red Sea, the Torah records how Israel saw the great power unleashed against the Egyptians, “*Vayar Yisrael et Hayad HaGedola asher asa HaShem B’mitzrayim*” [14:31]. They saw with their own eyes, but that was not enough. In last week’s parasha, G-d says, “*Atem Re’item Asher Asiti Lemitzrayim*” “*You saw what I did to the Egyptians... [19:4]*. This would have been the perfect moment for a ceremony of ratification to follow. But alas, they saw but did not hear, they viewed but did not internalize.

It is only when we get to this week’s parasha that we show readiness for the covenant; they finally understood that seeing may be believing, and doing may be instructive, but only when they hear, when the Torah enters into their internal organs, and into their Neshama that they are prepared for the covenant. Only then are they ready to declare “**Na’aseh V’nishma!** [24:7] “We will do and we will hear [listen]”

The story is told that on one of his journeys, the founder of the Mussar movement, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, was invited to a Friday-night meal. As soon as the host walked through the front door with his illustrious guest, he noticed that his wife had forgotten to cover the two challot. He immediately called out: Sarahle, how many times have I told you that the Shabbat Challot must be covered?” She turned red, and immediately covered the challot and disappeared into the kitchen.

The host then turned to Reb Yisrael with a self-satisfied smile: “Now you can honor us by making Kiddush on our behalf” he declared.

The great Tzaddik quietly asked his host: “Tell me, why must we cover the challot?”

“Why, every child knows that! Usually a meal begins with a Beracha over the bread, but since tonight the Kiddush over wine trumps the HaMotzi Beracha and we recite the Borei Pri Hagafen first, we cover the challot so as not to shame it while it waits for its Beracha”, answered the host.

Rabbi Yisrael nodded quietly and sadly, “You are absolutely correct, but why can’t you hear what your mouth is saying? If the halacha teaches us not to embarrass a piece of dough, how can you have shamed a human being, and your wife at that?”

Halachik note: According to the above reason one could technically uncover the challot immediately after the Beracha over wine was recited. However another reason for the covering is because when the Mohn fell from the sky a layer of dew covered the ground as a “bed” for the Mohn (Bamidbar 11:9), and then a layer of dew covered the top of the Mohn (Shemot 16:14). Following this reason, one should not uncover the challot until he is about to recite the Hamotzi. According to the first reason there is no need for a covering under the challot. We follow “both reasons”

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