

## “What You See and What You Hear”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

At Sinai the Bible relates that the Israelites “saw the voices.” (ex. 20:18)  
Why would it be important to emphasize that revelation was seen as well as heard?

The Kotzker Rebbe gives an astonishing answer. The Hebrew word *lo* can be written with an *alef* or a *vav*. When written with a *vav*, it means “to him”; when written with an *alef* it means “no” or “don’t.” Thus in Job the famous verse, “Though He slay me, still will I believe,” (Job 13:15) could, reading an *alef* rather than a *vav*, mean, “If He slays me I will no longer believe.” Reading with an *alef* or a *vav* makes a big difference.

So, the Kotzker teaches, someone who heard *lo tignov* — “Do not steal” as “lo” with a *vav*, would think the commandment is “steal for Him” — that is, that one is permitted to steal for God’s sake, for a holy purpose. Israel had to “see” the *alef* so they would not merely hear “lo tignov” and think that theft for a sacred purpose, such as to teach Torah, was ever permissible. The command is “do not steal.” Seeing the verses, Israel learned that theft was wrong, no matter its intent. The Torah knows that the criminal always claims nobility, but the crime is always base.