

Listening



Aims:

1. To explore the role of listening in the Torah
2. To see Judaism as a religion of listening
3. To think about the importance of being able to listen in life and how we can improve the world by listening

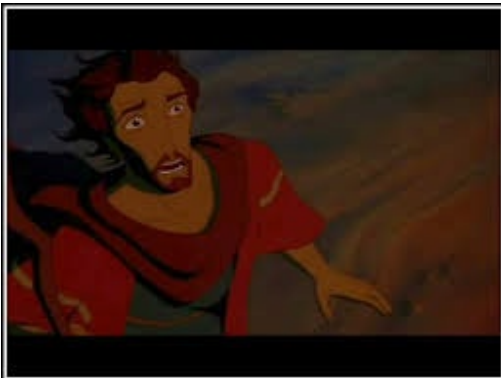
Shalom Roshim, Sganim v'Madrachim,

Hope you are all well and having a good week!

The choveret often focuses on “big issues” such as making peace or famous mitzvot. Or, it looks at “big people” such as Rabbi Akiva and Rav Kook. But in amongst all this great stuff, it’s important to take an opportunity to think about US, how WE behave on the day-to-day, and then realise that what we do impacts ourselves, those around us, our people and the world!

In that vein, this week we’ll look at the massively underrated attribute of listening. Not as easy as it sounds! (haha what a pun)

Aim 1: To explore the role of listening in the Torah



Parshat Va’era opens with a recap of G-d’s relationship with the Jewish people through Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’acov and then G-d says (Shemot 6:5):

וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי, אֶת-נַאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם,
מֵעֲבָדִים אַתֶּם; וְאֶזְכֹּר, אֶת-בְּרִיתִי.

“And I too **have listened** to the cry of Bnei Yisrael who are enslaved by Egypt, and I have remembered My covenant”

G-d goes on to promise how he will redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt, and Moshe goes to relay the good news to the Jewish slaves. However (Shemot

6:9):

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, מִקְצֹר רוּחַ, וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה.

“And Moshe spoke these things to Bnei Yisrael, **but they did not listen** to Moshe because of shortness of breath and hard work.”

Listening to the cry of Bnei Yisrael was the **first step to Him rescuing them** from slavery in Egypt.

This idea of listening is a key one in Judaism, and it appears more than you may ever have noticed. All the stories in the Torah which relate to issues of

communication rely on good listening skills. Take a look at this episode with Ya'acov and Rachel (Bereishit 30:1-2).

"And when Rachel saw that she bore Ya'acov no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Ya'acov, "Give me children, or else I die." And Ya'acov's anger burned against Rachel; and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?""

The Midrash expounds this dialogue (Bereshit Rabba 71):

"And Ya'acov's anger burned against Rachel; and he said..." The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Is this the way to respond to those in distress? By your life, in the future your children will stand before her son."

If we consider only the words that were actually stated, Ya'acov was right. God, however, objected to Ya'acov's response: Is this the way to respond to those in distress? Ya'acov should have been sensitive to the distress that did not find full expression in Rachel's words, to the grief she felt because of her continued barrenness, as opposed to her sister's fertility. He therefore should have responded to her with patience, rather than with anger. He may have done so had he been *truly* listening to her.

"The word Shema is untranslatable in English. It means 1. Listen, 2. Hear, 3. Reflect on, 4. Understand, 5. Internalise, 6. Respond in action, and hence 7. Obey. [...] I have translated it as "Listen" rather than the traditional "Hear" because listening is active, hearing passive. [...] most civilisations have been cultures of the eye. Judaism, with its belief in the invisible G-d who transcends the universe, and its prohibition against visual representations of G-d is supremely a civilisation of the ear. The patriarchs and prophets did not see G-d; they heard Him. Hence the key verb in Judaism is Shema, "listen". To give dramatic force to the idea that G-d is heard, not seen, we cover our eyes with our hand as we say these words."

(Rabbi Lord Sacks zt'l, Green Siddur p382)



Western philosophy has always been driven by that which is visible. Someone who has promise is called a **visionary**, we talk about **imagination** (from image)

when we modify an idea we talk about **re**vision. They say seeing is believing. In Judaism, we seem to have a different idea...

Aim 1: To explore the role of listening in the Torah



Regarding Hashem listening to the cries of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt:

- Why does the Torah tell us that G-d heard the cry of Bnei Yisrael? Surely He was always aware of it!
- Why did Bnei Yisrael not listen to Moshe?

Regarding Rabbi Sacks' quote:

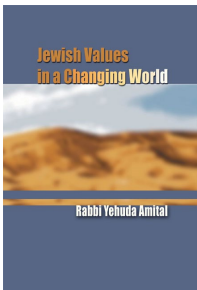
- Which do you trust more - seeing or hearing?
- Is there a difference between someone saying "I'm listening" or "I hear you"?

Activities

- **Trigger:** Instruct your chanichim to get into age order without speaking. More of a communication activity
- **Jackanory:** Read a story using props, after another activity ask them a number of questions about the story, what colour was the book? How many hats were there? See if they know more about the bits with props or where they were simply listening. How much effort does it take to actively listen to the story? (Make sure to throw in some complicated facts and figures)
- **Sausages, bangers and mash:** read the Rabbi Sacks quote. The reader has to pay attention to the words so not to miss any "S" "B" or "M" words. And everyone has to listen to catch the reader out ;)

Aim 2: To see Judaism as a religion of listening

Bein Adam I'Makom

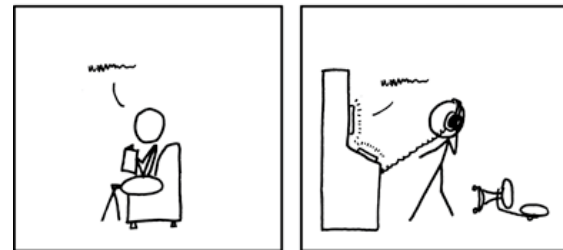


“In order to be able to grasp the message behind the words, two things are necessary. First of all, a person must be endowed with moral sensitivity, an ability to feel the distress of others and not be immersed only in himself. Second, simplistic thinking must be avoided... he must know that not everything in the world is black or white - most of it is gray. It is not easy to understand the gray, but the ability to understand human complexity requires that attention be paid to such cases as well. The development of such sensitivity is important not only for understanding other people. It also helps a person to acquire a more profound perspective upon reality...”

Rav Yehuda Amital: Jewish Values in a Changing World

Judaism is a religion of the ear. It is not enough to hear what is going; we don't live a passive existence - we have to listen. When you learn Talmud you will notice that all the phrases relate to listening, they say **תא שמע** 'come and listen' when there is a proof of something. By listening we show that we care and we are ready to act. If you actually listen to someone's story then it is difficult not to care. If we listen to each other and truly hear what people are saying to us and what we are saying back then we will go far.

NOW AND THEN, I ANNOUNCE "I KNOW YOU'RE LISTENING" TO EMPTY ROOMS.



IF I'M WRONG, NO ONE KNOWS.
AND IF I'M RIGHT, MAYBE I JUST FREAKED THE HELL OUT OF SOME SECRET ORGANIZATION.

Bein Adam I'Chavero

There are some mitzvot which involve listening. The most common of these is kriyat hatorah (reading the Torah) every Shabbat morning and at three other times during the week.

The question arises regarding these mitzvot; 'what happens if you hear them by accident?' What happens if one has no intention of fulfilling the mitzvah, say for instance you are walking past the Shul on Rosh Hashana as they are blowing the shofar and happen to hear the sounds? The answer is that if you intend to fulfil the mitzvah and actively listen to the shofar, you have fulfilled

the mitzvah. But if you happen to hear as you walk past, then you have not fulfilled the mitzvah (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 589:9).

Aim 2: To see Judaism as a religion of listening



➤ Have you ever noticed that teachers demand that you listen to them when they speak? As well as being a prerequisite for communicating information it is also considered a sign of respect.



➤ Isn't it funny therefore that in shul we are generally silent during the Amida - the time which **Man is speaking to G-d**.

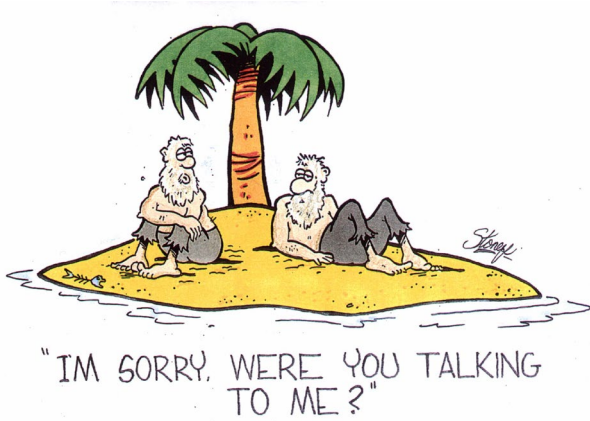
➤ **BUT, as soon as leynening begins- as G-d talks to Man - the shul erupts with discussion?**

Activities

- **Scramble my Message:** Two groups compete against each other to relay a message across the room. Only some people can see the original written message, they cannot move it or speak. The second group within the team have to decipher the message from their teammates and spell it out using (homemade) scrabble letters. You can complicate this by allowing one team to speak or to put an obstacle course in the way. or not (i.e. should we say Hallel, mourn or neither) and what we choose to educate future generations about.

Aim 3: To think about the importance of being able to listen in life and how we can improve the world by listening

Have you ever noticed that when people pass beggars in the street they often mumble something as they go past, 'no thank you' or 'I'm all out of change'. **Why do you think this is?** Maybe by speaking we block out the sound of that person, we are scared of hearing their request for help because we might not want to help. If we hear them it is much harder not to act.



We have already discussed how listening to others requires and enables us to be truly considerate of others. Not only that, but this true compassion drives us to act. This is how we are meant to better the world for everyone. If I think about this when my mum is asking me to do something, or my friend is telling me about their day... imagine what a

difference it can make!

We also thought about the idea of listening to Hashem; Hashem addresses man through the words of the Torah and the Nevi'im (prophets). Do we spend enough time trying to really understand what he's saying? If we truly listen to the message Hashem gives us about how we should be living our lives, as individuals and as a nation, we will come closer to fulfilling the task He sets us in the world.

Aim 3: To think about the importance of being able to listen in life and how we can improve the world by listening

Activities

- **Treasure/scavenger hunt:** Instead of leaving written clues around or sending them out, madrichim give spoken clues only. They only say them once, and they aren't going to wait for everyone's attention! Chanichim have to listen to make sure they get the clue.