



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Yitro

HAMELECH

Listen, Please

Today's discussion is a very important one! I want you to listen closely. It is all about listening.

Our *parashah* opens, "And Yitro listened." That is all it took. In last week's *parashah*, all nations of the world heard about *Kriat Yam Suf*. Most of them took that to heart just to be scared and wary of the Jews. Yitro took it a step further. A big step further. Yitro's listening led to the change of a lifetime.

Yitro was already the father-in-law of Moshe, perhaps the most amazing person to walk the face of this world. Yitro himself had a position of prestige in his hometown. Yet he left it all to go and become annexed to this nation of "running slaves," because he knew that they were really a "kingdom of nobles". He recognized them as Hashem's Chosen Nation, and he recognized Hashem as the One and Only Divine Power.

Other nations heard about Egypt's great defeat and stopped long enough to say, "Wow! It's good it wasn't me," and then continued on with their idolatry and immorality.

Yitro said, "Wait a minute. There is something going on over here. History in the making. The Creator and Supervisor of the world is showing His Power and is about to communicate His wishes to His Chosen People. I don't want to miss this. I want to be a part of it. From within."

Did You Hear That?

Now, listening is an important thing. Some people think that they're listening, but they're really not. They're just waiting for the other person to finish so they can say what they want to say.

Communication between people is not what it used to be. People talk and their audience has their mind elsewhere. People discuss an issue and are not really interested in hearing what the other one has to say. People go to a shiur and are not concentrating on what the speaker is saying.

Can You Hear Me?

A person has five senses. Each is important. But perhaps the sense of hearing is most important of all. A blind man can do certain mitzvot. One who cannot hear nor speak is exempt from all mitzvot. In Bava Kamma 85b, we are taught that someone who harms another must pay for the damage. If he makes him deaf, he must pay the market value of an entire person. This shows that "shmiah" – listening is the *gantze mentsch* – the whole person. A person is a person because he can hear. Without it, he's *ois mentsch* – subhuman.

Maharal says: A man is meant to be a *kli kibul* – a vessel capable of receiving and maintaining. One who cannot hear, cannot receive. In many instances, "shmiah" is translated by Targum Onkelos as *kabbalah* – receiving.



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Listening is amazing. Speech is amazing. One person moves around his mouth – tongue, lips, etc. and lets out air in a way that is sensible and communicates his thoughts. A person within hearing range receives these sound waves and an impact is made upon his brain. He understands the message.

Speak Up

The Torah demands of us *shmia*. In Parashat Beshalach (16:26), Hashem says: If you will listen to the Voice of Hashem, your Almighty etc. In this week's *parashah*, as an introduction to *Kabbalat HaTorah*, Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* (19:5), "And now, if you will listen to My Voice and guard My Covenant, you will be for me most special of all nations, for I own the whole world."

Daily we proclaim (from Devarim 6:4): Hear O Israel, Hashem our Almighty – this very same Hashem is totally One. The second paragraph of our Shema recitation also opens with words which demand of us to listen and follow in the ways of Hashem.

In Parashat Va'etchanan (5:1), Moshe calls out to *Bnei Yisrael*: Listen, *Yisrael*, to the statutes and to the rules which I am saying into your ears today.

There is discussion amongst our Sages if one has fulfilled the mitzva of Shema by merely saying it inaudibly, or does he actually have to hear each word as it exits his lips. (Berachot 15)

Also when learning Torah, our Sages stress the importance of enunciating the words clearly, not

just thinking them or mumbling them. (Eirubin 54a) When one speaks out words of Torah, the ears are enjoined to take part in the learning experience, and the person's whole being becomes immersed in the holy words. Thus, a person remembers much better what he learned out loud.

Listen Well

Yeshaya HaNavi tells us (55:3): Incline your ears and come to Me; listen and revive your souls! The Medrash explains: If a man is injured in any limb or body part, the doctor will bandage the affected area. But when a person has suffered a spiritual malady, apply medication to the ear and all will be well! What is that medication? Words of mussar, inspiration to repent. A good ear is a heal-all. Listen well, and follow up with improved attitudes and deeds.

Ohr HaChayim (to Shemot 19:5) says that the most important mitzva is to listen to the Torah. Do that, and everything else will follow.

Listen to Torah and your *tefillot* will be accepted. (Devarim Raba 10:1)

Says R' Zeira (or perhaps it was R' Chanina bar Papa): People cannot compete with Hashem. People can only fill empty vessels, not full ones. Hashem can fill full vessels [i.e. Hashem gives more Torah teachings to a person who made it his business to fill himself with Torah to start with.] This lesson is derived from the double



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wording in the verse, "*Im shamoa tishma*" – if you heard [in the past] you will [continue to] hear.

A Lesson in Listen

There is a difference of opinion if Yitro came to join Klal Yisrael in the desert before or after *Matan Torah*? If he came afterwards, why is the story put before *Matan Torah*? Because the Torah wants to give us a lesson in listening. We are to learn from Yitro to listen and be moved by that listening; be inspired. This is the introduction to *Matan Torah*.

If You Heard It...

Rav Zusha of Anipoli was once sitting in a Beit Medrash. A woman entered and asked if anyone saw her husband. She described him briefly.

This woman had been abandoned by her husband some time ago and after a while, the woman decided to go town to town, looking for him.

Rav Zusha answered, "He is in the "*Beit Hachnosat Orchim*" on the other side of town.

The woman went there and found him there.

The townspeople were amazed at how Rav Zusha knew this piece of information. He himself had never stepped foot in that place.

Reb Zusha explained, "This morning, I overheard two people chatting. One told over that a new man had come to town and was staying in the *Beit Hachnosat Orchim*. I had no reason to hear

such stories. I understood that if such information came to my ears, then it must be of value to somebody. So when the woman came around and asked about her husband, I understood that he was the newcomer, so I sent her in that direction. Pretty simple, no?"

Reb Zusha knew that *shmia* is important. He tried not to *stam* overhear gossip. If it came to his ears, it had a purpose.

Let's Listen

So let us use the power of *shmia* for good things. Let us attend *shiurei Torah*. Let us listen to our *chavrutot* and to our family members and friends. Let us listen and understand. Read between the lines.

Let us listen patiently. It is one of the first methods of Torah acquisition (Avot Chap. 6). When someone tells us something, before responding, let us recap what they said. Let us ask them, "Is this what you meant? Did I understand you correctly?"

Let us give them a chance to correct themselves, or to reword their question or comment so that it is more understandable to us. Such an approach will breed peace and avoid unnecessary difficulties.

True listening will bring us true happiness. Try it. You'll see what I mean.

**Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka**