

D'var Torah: Parashat Yitro

by Eli Shebson - Wednesday, January 23, 2019

<https://chiefrabbi.org/all-media/dvar-torah-parashat-yitro-4/>

This week, the Chief Rabbi asks whether we are really 'listening'.

Is it possible for anyone to see sound?

There are three different terms used in the Torah for 'listening'.

The first appears at the very beginning of Parashat Yitro, "Vayishma Yitro – Yitro listened." When we use the term 'Shomeya' it means that we take what we hear very seriously – what we hear becomes a call for action. That is why Hashem says to us, "Shema Yisrael" – Listen O' People of Israel to the fact that I am the one God that you must believe in." We, in turn, call out, "Shema Koleinu Hashem Elokeinu – Listen to our voices O' Lord our God." – appealing to Hashem to help us.

The second term is 'Leha'azin' – to hear. Sometimes a word can go into one ear and out through the other and that is what happens with 'Maazin'. That is 'hearing'.

But there is a third, unexpected term, which is the most powerful form of listening. It comes immediately after the Ten Commandments. When in this week's Parsha, the Torah tells us, "V'Chol Ha'am Ro'im Et Hakolot – and the entire nation saw the sounds." Here we have a combination of senses, something quite extraordinary. Perhaps even close to supernatural, in which we were able to internalise the messages that reached us from Hashem with our entire beings.

So powerful was that experience at Mount Sinai, that we believe all of our souls were there. We carry that experience with us even today and it gives us the imperative to carry out the expectations of that covenantal relationship established at Sinai.

So if 'listening' is a call for action, 'Kal Vachomer' – how much more so, when one sees the voices? As a result, all that transpired at Mount Sinai continues to be a very powerful and essential call to us through all ages, to live our lives according to the will of Hashem.

It is good when people are able to say 'I hear what you have said'. It is even better when they're able to say 'I have listened'. But the best of all is when somebody can tell you 'I see what you mean'.

Shabbat Shalom