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The Month of Av and The Sense of 'Hearing'

The month of Av, as we know, is the root of all tragedy and suffering in our history.

There are twelve months of the year, and each month contains a special power. The power contained in the month of Av, our Sages explain, is the power of *shemiyah* (hearing).

The Spies' Evil Report Was 'Heard' In The Month of Av

The Vilna Gaon explains that in the month of Av, the *bnei Yisrael* heard the accounting of the Spies about the land of Israel, where the Spies spoke disparage about the land. Instead of listening to Yehoshua and Calev's report, who spoke in praise of the land, the *bnei Yisrael* instead chose to listen to the other eight Spies, who spoke negatively about the land.

There is a power to use our ability of hearing for good, and there is a way how our hearing is used for evil. Our Sages explain that our ears contain an extra piece of skin underneath them, so that we can we block out our ears from hearing something evil^[1].

During the month of Av, the power of hearing was used for evil, when the *bnei Yisrael* listened to the Spies' report about the land, and they came to cry 'tears in vain'. Because they cried 'tears in vain', Hashem declared that day, the ninth day of Av, as "a day of crying throughout the generations".

When we stood at Har Sinai, we used our power of hearing for good, where we heard the voice of Hashem. This was where our power of hearing was used in the most elevated way possible. But in the month of Av, where we cried futile tears, the ears that heard at Har Sinai were damaged. At Har Sinai, we were freed from all forces of impurity and evil, and we returned to the level of perfection. When we heard the Spies' report and we cried, the month of Av became a month of mourning for all generations to come; it was like a form of death that came to mankind.

There is personal mourning in each person's life, and there is mourning on the collective level of the Jewish people, which is when we mourn over the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Let us try to understand, with the help of Hashem, what good listening is, and what evil listening is. Let us see how we can use the power of hearing for holiness - which will merit us to hear the sound of Mashiach's *shofar*.

Hearing and Understanding (Da'as)

Firstly, we need to know what the sense of hearing is about. The Sages state that there are four

senses (contained in the parts of the face): sight, hearing, smell, and speech. What is the essence of the power to 'hear'? We can know what it is by analyzing its opposite. The opposite of a listener is a deaf person (in Hebrew, "*cheiresh*").

The Gemara defines a *cheirish* deaf person as one who is born with the inability to hear and talk. If he can talk, he is not considered to be "deaf" according to the Torah. The Gemara also says that a *cheiresh* has no *da'as* (sensible understanding), just like a minor or mentally ill person has no *da'as*. Elsewhere, the Gemara says that he has 'weak' *da'as*. But either way, there is something missing from his *da'as*.

Thus, one who can hear, one who has "a heart that listens", is one who has *da'as*. There is an expression in the Gemara, "You do not listen to me, you do not understand me." Being a listener doesn't just mean to use your physical ears to listen to the other person. It means to listen with your heart; to have a "*lev shomea*", a heart that listens, or a "*lev meivin*", a heart that understands.

Thus, hearing implies the ability to both hear and talk, and it also includes the ability to have *da'as* (sensible understanding). What is the explanation of this matter?

The Ability To Hear The 'Word of Hashem'

If we want to understand the essence of any matter, we need to examine where it appears the first time in the Torah. The first time the Torah speaks about the idea of hearing is by Adam HaRishon, when he heard the voice of Hashem calling to him in Gan Eden.

From where does a person get his power to talk from? It is because Hashem breathes into a person His word; the "*dvar Hashem*" (word of Hashem). Our entire speech gets its vitality from the "*dvar Hashem*" that empower it. The entire Creation is supported and sustained by the *dvar Hashem*.

This is also why the Sages say that we are commanded to always speak words of Torah, and to avoid speaking words of idle chatter. It is because we have to use our power of speech to emulate the *dvar Hashem*, and such speech contains true vitality that comes from Hashem. By contrast, when someone speaks meaningless words, and surely when he utters forbidden speech such as gossip and other forbidden forms of speech, he is speaking words that are empty from vitality.

Man is called "*nefesh chayah*" (a living soul), and *Targum* says that this means man is a "*ruach memalelah*" (a talking spirit), thus our entire ability to talk is due to the word of Hashem that was breathed into us.

When Hashem created the universe, He created it with ten expressions, but there was no man yet to hear it. Man was created last, and he didn't hear the *dvar Hashem* that said "Let there be light" and "Let there be a firmament." Until we received the Torah at Har Sinai, no one ever heard the actual *dvar Hashem*. For twenty-six generations, no one heard Hashem's voice. Although our *Avos* kept the entire Torah, and there was Torah learning in the yeshivah of Shem and Ever and in the yeshivah in Goshen, there was not yet a revelation of the *dvar Hashem* which a person could hear. Only at Har Sinai did we hear the voice of Hashem.

This is also the depth of the declaration of "*Naaseh V'Nishma*" (We will do, and we will hear), when we stood at Har Sinai. It was because we received a new kind of hearing, a new set of ears: the ability to hear Hashem's voice. The ears we had before we stood at Har Sinai were not the same ears we had after Sinai. The ears we received at Har Sinai enables us to hear the *dvar Hashem*, to hear the Ten Commandments of the Torah, which commands us to speak the words of Torah. Ever since then, a person is able to remember Har Sinai – he is able to connect to the word of Hashem, which he heard at Har Sinai.

The Gemara defines a deaf person as one who is born as both deaf and mute; he cannot talk because there are no words which he has ever heard, to talk about. This is true about the physically deaf person - but there is also spiritual deafness (as we will soon explain).

When a person hears a spiritual message, he is connecting to the "*dvar Hashem*" that was heard at Sinai. Every single Jew received that ability.

The giving of the Torah was essentially a conversion process to Judaism, and it is also called a birth. The Sages said that a deaf person is one who is born deaf and mute, but if he can hear from birth, he is not called a deaf person according to *Halacha*. The birth of the Jewish people, which was at Har Sinai, meant that we were all on the level of hearing from birth. So we were all 'born' with the ability to hear the *dvar Hashem*, and ever since then, we have the ability to speak words of truth: the words of Torah, which is the word of Hashem.

The giving of the Torah at Sinai enabled us to receive a new kind of listening and speaking, in contrast to the person who is born deaf and mute, who cannot hear nor speak. This ability was only given to the Jewish people, for only the Jewish people stood at Sinai. It is forbidden to teach Torah to a gentile, nor may a gentile learn it; he is liable to capital punishment if he does so. This is because a gentile doesn't view Torah as the *dvar Hashem*; he only learns it for the sake of knowing its information. But the Jewish people's view towards the Torah is to learn it with the understanding that it is the *dvar Hashem*.

This is what it means to truly "hear". A *lev shomeia*, a "heart that listens", is a power exclusive to the Jew's soul, who stood at Har Sinai. It is spiritual hearing; to hear the voice of Hashem - to hear the *dvar Hashem* in each thing.

Now we can understand what evil hearing is. When a person doesn't hear the *dvar Hashem* in something, he has misused the power of hearing.

Hearing Hashem

Our *Gedolim* would often view the people who told them news as messengers of Hashem to let them hear what they needed to hear. They would hear Hashem talking to them within the information. But even a person who is not a *Gadol* can hear the messages of Hashem through the things he hears, for it is said that every Jew can hear the Heavenly "*bas kol*".[\[2\]](#)

The Destruction of The Beis HaMikdash: What We Lost

Yirmiyahu HaNavi warned *Klal Yisrael* that if they don't repent, Hashem will come and collect His debt. He said, "*Hear, O heavens, and listen, earth.*" When *Klal Yisrael* didn't listen to the Navi, it was not only because they didn't repent, but because they lost the ability to listen with their hearts. By refusing to listen to the Navi, they lost their listening heart.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was because *Klal Yisrael* wasn't listening to what they needed to hear. Hashem speaks to a person all the time, but if someone doesn't hear His voice, he does as he pleases and thus he never repents.

Yerushalayim, and specifically the *Beis HaMikdash*, was the place where the voice of Hashem would go out from to the rest of the world. "*For from Zion goes out Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.*" The voice of Hashem was heard at the giving of the Torah, and then it was no longer openly heard. But it continues to be heard in the Torah, in the "word of Hashem" - and it was heard in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The *Beis HaMikdash* was a place where a person could always hear the word of Hashem. Whereas the giving of the Torah was only a temporary time to hear the word of Hashem, the

Beis HaMikdash was a place where it was heard constantly.

Thus, when we lost the *Beis HaMikdash*, we lost that ability to always hear Hashem's word.

The Loss of the Shirah (Song)

Let us try to understand more what the deep power of "hearing" is.

The Gemara says that two voices cannot be heard at once. However, the *Raavad* writes that we can hear two tunes at once. This is because *nigun* (tune) is a higher kind of sound than hearing words. A person can also hear the *taamim* (sounds) and *nigun* (tune) contained in the Torah, the *shirah* (song) of the Torah, as he hears the words of Torah. In the *Beis HaMikdash*, the Kohanim would do the *Avodah*, and the Leviim sang the *shirah*; this was together with the "*dvar Hashem*" that went out from there.

We still have the Torah, even after the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. What is missing now from the Torah, then? What Torah did we lose with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*? We lost its inner song, its *niggun*, its *shirah*.

This is the depth of why the Sages wanted to forbid *shirah* after the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred); the *shirah* is the opposite of the concept of *sinas chinam*. Whereas *sinas chinam* causes disparity, *shirah* comes to unify. It unified sound with word and enables us to hear two sounds at once.

In addition to the reason of *sinas chinam*, the *Beis HaMikdash* was also destroyed because of *lashon hora* (evil gossip). *Lashon hora* is also a kind of speech that causes disparity. *Lashon hora* is at its name implies – it is '*lashon ra*', evil speech, because it is not true speech. It is far removed from the concept of *shirah*. One who speaks *lashon hora* about his friend is not unified with him and separates himself from him. He is missing the *shirah* of the Torah.

It is forbidden to hear *shirah* during the Nine Days, and the depth of this is because we lost the *shirah* of the Torah. We are missing the true *shirah*, and thus it is forbidden for us to take our minds off this loss; that is why we cannot listen to music during these days.

A *cheirish* (one who is born both deaf and mute) has no *da'as*, and the depth of this is because he cannot connect to others. He doesn't hear and he doesn't talk to others, so he cannot connect with others. Thus he has no *da'as*. If he can hear others or if he can talk to others, he is not considered by Chazal to be "deaf" according to *Halacha*, because he can at least connect to others.

Our Avodah: Hearing The Word of Hashem In Everything We Hear

Now we can better understand what our *avodah* is during these days.

The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was rooted in the fact that *Klal Yisrael* heard the Spies' evil report. In addition, *Klal Yisrael* didn't listen to the prophets who warned them of the impending destruction. The *avodah* of these days is thus to access and regain the power of *shemiyah*, inner listening.

Our ears heard the word of Hashem when we stood at Har Sinai, and this ingrained in us the power to hear the word of Hashem in each thing. One can hear the *dvar Hashem* in each thing he hears. In this way, everything that a person hears can bring him to the state of oneness with Hashem.

When one doesn't hear the word of Hashem in each thing, and instead he simply hears the events of

the world without connecting it to the *dvar Hashem*, he is listening to this “world of disparity” (as it is called by our Sages), instead of listening to the *dvar Hashem*. He hears the sounds of This World, not Hashem. This will also cause his own words that he speaks to be disconnected from the *dvar Hashem*.

But if one hears the *dvar Hashem* in each thing that he hears, he hears His one voice in everything. He only hears “one” voice alone. When he hears that “one” voice, he will find that his speech only can speak of only “one” thing....

In Conclusion

May we merit from Hashem that the impurity and blockages be removed from our ears, that instead of hearing the nonsense of this world, we should instead hear the word of Hashem. When we are hearing the word of Hashem, we can then speak of one thing alone, a kind of speech will unify all of *Klal Yisrael* together and turn us into one unit again. And through this we will merit, with the help of Hashem – may it come speedily in our days - the rebuilding of the complete *Beis HaMikdash* and the coming of *Moshiach*. Amen.

[1] Kesubos 5b

[2] A statement of the Baal Shem Tov. See ***Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus #010 - Inner Listening***, and ***Reaching Your Essence #003***

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/essence-month-006-av-hearing-hashem>