

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

PARSHAS VAESCHANAN

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

LISTEN, YISROEL

CONTENTS

Part I. A Career of Listening - 1

Part II. Created by Listening - 4

Part III. The Day of Listening - 7

Part I. A Career of Listening

The Profound Possuk

Everybody who is even a little bit of a Jew is cognizant of the importance of *Shema Yisroel*. It's the great declaration that we make every morning and evening of our lives and we say it again before we go to sleep. And then every Jew hopes that it will be the last declaration in his life, that he'll be able to say it with his last breaths before he leaves this world.

And so a *possuk* that is so paramount in our lives, it pays for us to study it and not to consider it a simple statement. Of course, we understand that nothing in the Torah is simple but this one is more profound than others. I recall in Slabodka there was a Reb Yitzchok Tukumer — he came from Tukum, in Latvia — an excellent young man, a brilliant *talmid chacham*, and he had written out seven hundred *peirushim* on the first line of *Krias Shema*. Seven hundred *kavanos*! And it's not exaggerated because no matter how much you'll try, you can never go deeper than the *possuk* is.

The Profound Word

But for tonight's subject, we're going to speak only about the first idea we should think of when we say *Shema*, because of all the *peirushim* that this *possuk* contains, the most urgent is the general admonition included in the first two words: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל! It's the most obvious and probably the most neglected *peirush*: "Yisroel," Hashem says, "You have to listen. You have to be a *shomeia*."

Now, to us the word *shema* seems to be just a *hakdamah* to the rest of the *possuk*. Like when you say to a friend, "Listen," so you're not really warning him, urging him that he should listen; what you want is to get your message across, and the word "listen" is merely a way of getting his attention. But here it's not so; here the word *shema* on its own is very important. *Shema* means that's your career: to be a listener.

One-Track Listening

The only question is: who should we be listening to? And so it says right away, *Hashem Echad* — He's the only One that you are allowed to open up your ears to! Ooh, that's already a big demand, because today everybody is telling you things. We have neighbors and friends and wives and husbands who

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are speaking. Not to mention the newspapers, the radio and other media that are telling you *erev va'voker* what they have to say. We are being bombarded with voices בְּשִׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ, in the morning and evening and all day long in between. And very little of it is from Hashem Echad.

Just the opposite! The world today is full of voices of falsehood. There's a great chorus of *sheker* all throughout the world and unfortunately the *yetzer hara* not only makes people deaf to what they ought to hear, but he makes them very receptive to what they should not hear. That's why included in the career of listening is that you have to get into the habit of knowing when to stuff up your ears. You have to make it your business that nothing gets into your brain – the ears are the passageway to the mind – except what Hashem has to tell you.

The New York Times editorial is talking? It's just a cow mooing in the meadow. Ed Koch is talking? It means nothing. It's just a bird chirping in the wind. Our ears are stuffed up to listen to anybody who wants to bring in new ideas that are against the traditions of mankind and *kal v'chomer* against the traditions of the Torah. *Shema Yisroel Hashem Echad* means we have to make up our minds that we'll be stubborn and resist everything else. He's the only One that we listen to.

One Track With Many Singers

So you'll say, "Well, if that's the case, so I'll close my ears to everyone and the only time I'll listen is when I'm in the shul by *krias haTorah* or if one day I'm *zocheh* to have a *nevuah*. But otherwise..." No; just like there are many messengers saying *sheker*, there are also very many messengers speaking the word of Hashem. If Rav Moshe Feinstein on the Lower East Side has something to say or Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky is speaking in Monsey, then שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל! If you're a Yisroel, you have to listen up!

That's included in listening to Hashem. Not like the boy with a little bobby-pin *yarmulke* said to me, "Well, if we're going to listen to the *roshei yeshiva* we'll be brainwashed." So he goes out and he listens

to the radio and the television which washes out his brains entirely. Instead of having his brain washed by Rav Moshe Feinstein or Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky he's washing his brains with the bilge water of the New York City sewer.

And so when an old European rebbe, let's say the Satmarer Rav, is speaking, we're all ears! For years and years while he was still healthy he was speaking very valuable words that deserved to be listened to. But who was listening? Oh, he's against *Medinas Yisroel*? That already sentenced him to being canceled out. Oy, there were so many "wise" people, even rabbis, who ridiculed what he said. And so they're being *oiver* on this principle, *Shema Yisroel*.

Tzaddikim Plus

It doesn't mean that we listen only to the *tzaddikim*. If you have capable parents – it means parents who are in the main line of the Torah tradition – you should certainly listen to them! Like it says, שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוֹסֵר אָבִיךָ – *hear, my son, the instruction of your father*, וְאַל תַּטֵּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ – *and don't forsake the teaching of your mother* (Mishlei 1:8).

It means only a father and mother who are *frum* Jews, of course. If not, then you have to be very careful about listening. Be polite. Call them up long distance once in a while. Send your father cufflinks and send your mother a Mother's Day card. But if you see that they are transmitting what they saw in the movies or heard in the college so your ears close up automatically and it's *lo amar klum*; they're not saying a thing. After all, you're listening because you want to listen to Hashem Echad – He is the One Who is speaking to you, only that your parents are transmitting His message.

Now, if you're a little boy you shouldn't listen to this. Because once you hear this, so if your mother says you shouldn't eat too much candy you'll say that it's not from Hashem. And if you're a big boy and you want a sports car but your father says, "Nothing doing," so you'll tell him, "Look, I heard

from Rabbi Miller you have to listen only to Hashem. I don't hear the words of Hashem in your words."

Mother Talk

And so certainly you have to listen to your parents. When your mother scolds you, listen well! The "torah of your mother" means good character. She's teaching you the *derech eretz kadmah laTorah*, good manners, how to behave, to be quiet and bashful.

I once was sitting and listening to a conversation of American children with a European mother, and one son said to the mother, "Ma, you spoiled us. You trained us to be too bashful. We could have succeeded more in the business world if we hadn't been so bashful."

I didn't want to interfere, but I was thinking, "If only you knew how many sins and how much trouble your mother saved you from by training you so." Bashfulness is a very good *middah* and that's what Jewish mothers used to teach their children. That's *toras imecha*.

Father Talk

And your father has what to say, too. If he hauls off on you, pay attention to that smack. He teaches you Torah, he tells you advice. Your father has a lot of things to tell you. Relish that *mussar avicha*. Listen to it!

If you don't, you won't be a *mentch*; you'll never be a decent person. You might be *frum* with a big beard and a nice black hat, even a *kapote*, but you can be a *pere adam*, a wild man. Even if you're a *lamdan*, you're like a lion! They told you that you're the *אָרִי שֶׁבַּחֲבוּרָה*! Heh, heh, heh. An outstanding *talmid chacham*, but there's no way to get along with him because he's wild. He gets married but his wife can't take him. Such a selfish person! It's because he didn't listen. He needed a father to beat the wickedness out of him.

And so you listen to a father and mother because it's included in *Shema Yisroel... Hashem Echad*. And that's what the Gemara says (Brachos 35b), who's really the father that you have to listen to? It's

Hakadosh Baruch Hu. "Hear the instruction of your Father in Heaven." When your father is saying something, don't say it's just a father. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is speaking through his mouth. Your mother, too. When she gives over her *toras imecha*, open your ears wide like Hashem is speaking. You are hearing in your parents' voices the *Toras Hashem*.

Other Transmitters

Now, in the good old days you had to listen to your uncle too. An uncle used to give a *potch* sometimes, and if you came to complain to one of your parents, he'd say, "Your uncle was right! He learned in the yeshiva by so-and-so. You'd better listen to him." So your uncle had something to say too.

I say an uncle. In the good old days, *any* Jew who said anything to the youth, he was speaking the things that had been said to him when *he* was a youth. And so when Jewish boys were cutting capers on the street and acting wild, so an old Jew passed by and he wagged his finger at them, "*Kinder, zeit nit vild*. Children, don't be wild." And the children didn't jeer. They didn't talk back. They quieted down.

It could be after he passed by, a half hour later, they forgot about it and resumed; but for the moment they listened. Not only because he was an old man — it was because they knew the old man was saying what old men had told him when he was a boy, that he was handing over the tradition: Wild is something that's *treif*.

Today, wild has become an attractive word. On the contrary, if you want to make something attractive in advertising, you call it "wild." Even Pepsi, they say it's "wild." In the olden days even among *goyim* it was understood that it's wrong. Little gentile boys would have stoned his soda truck. They would have smashed all the bottles. Wild?! Who wants wild men? But today because the world has broken with the wisdom of mankind's past, everybody's a *chacham* and they listen to whatever

tickles their nerves. That's why life today is so disturbed, because they stopped listening.

But the traditional Jewish nation, the younger generation knew that by listening to the ones who were authentic old-time Jews, so you were hearing in those words all the ideas that were coming down from the earliest days.

Back to the First Peirush

And therefore, we have to return to that first ideal of *Shema Yisroel*. Listen to what you're saying every day. It's a *halacha*, **צִרְיָךְ לְהִשְׁמִיעַ לְאָזְנוֹ** – you have to say it loud enough so you can hear it, so it should go into your head (Orach Chaim 62:3). It means to return to the principle of listening to *Hashem Echad*, and that's how we'll gain all the ideals and attitudes of a *Yisroel*.

You have to open your ears when *Hashem* speaks. "I'm speaking to you from the *siddur* every day," *Hashem* says. "I'm speaking to you from the Chumash and from *Mishlei* and from all the *seforim*. I'm speaking to you at *krias haTorah*, I'm speaking to you through your *rebbeim*, the *chachomim*, your parents."

And so *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* speaks to us through many ways, but whoever it is, we must keep in mind we're interested in only one message: *Hashem Echad*. We want to know what *Hashem* is telling us; we don't care at all what anybody else says unless it's bringing us the message of *Hashem*. You should take the words to heart. **אֲשֶׁרִי אִישׁ שִׁשְׁמַע לְמִצְוֹתַי וְתוֹרָתִי וְדִבְרִי יָשִׁים עַל לְבוֹ** – *How fortunate is the man who puts the Torah on his heart!* (Birchos Krias Shema). **אֲשֶׁרִי אָרָם שִׁמַּע לִי** – *Fortunate is the one who listens only to Me!* (*Mishlei* 8:34).

Part II. Created by Listening

Avraham's Creations

Now, I want to explain to you how fortunate you really are when you listen to what *Hashem* has to say. What happens to a person when he becomes a listener? Does he become merely a repository of

more information? Is it just that if he's listening to the right messengers he'll have good messages in his head? He'll be a **חֲמוֹר נוֹשֵׂא סִפָּרִים**, *a donkey carrying tomes?*

No, that's nothing yet. To have information, that's not the entire story. The point of hearing is to become a new person. What you hear, that's what you become! You actually become a new creation – for good or for bad – because of your ears.

You remember when *Avraham Avinu* and his wife *Sarah* left *Charan* to go to *Eretz Canaan*, so it states in the *Torah* that they took along with them **אֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן** – *the people that they made in Charan* (*Bereishis* 12:5). So the *Medrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:14) is bothered by that *lashon* – who can make a person? Even just the wing of a flea, if all the wise men of the world come together, all the people who know about medicine and biology, all the professors, all the curators of museums, all the surgeons, a world congress of the best brains, and the task was to create one wing of a flea, it would be an impossible task. So what does it mean "the people that *Avraham* and *Sarah* made in *Charan*?" How do you make people?

Converting the Mind

So here's what the *Medrash* answers: It says that *Avraham* and *Sarah* converted them. **אֲבָרָהָם מְגִיר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים וְשָׂרָה מְגִירָת אֶת הַנָּשִׁים**. They made *baalei teshuvah*.

But it's still a question. Why does it say "he made them?" He taught them, he converted them, but he didn't create them!

So pay attention now to the explanation. Every person, you have to know, has two parts to him; one part is his body and one part is his mind. And both can be made. Suppose you're a plastic surgeon and a man comes to you with a squashed nose, so you can mold on his face a beautiful nose, a beautiful Jewish nose. Let's say if, *chas v'shalom*, he lost an arm. So, if you're an expert, you can give him a workable imitation arm. Even some artificial internal organs can be supplied.

Mind Over Matter

But after all is said and done, it's the same man. We don't say this surgeon “made” me. He made a *part* of me. He made my nose, he made my arm, but he didn't make *me*. But when somebody changes your *mind*, that's a different story. If someone gives you new ideas, new ideals, new ways of looking at the world, then he has changed what's most important and you're a *new person*. He made you! It doesn't matter that you're the same 180 pounds of protoplasm. That's nothing. You have a new mind and therefore you're a new person.

And so when Avraham gave them new ideas — Sarah too; Sarah was a *talmidah* of Avraham, like it says *וְסָרָה שָׁמַעַת פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל*, Sarah would stand behind the curtain of the tent listening to everything Avraham was saying (Bereishis 18:10). And so Avraham taught the men new ideas and Sarah taught the women new ideas, and that's how they “made” new people. They didn't give them plastic arms instead of their regular arms. They didn't give them new noses or false teeth. Everything remained the same but the most important part, what's inside here, in the mind — that was changed. It's the biggest operation possible, to take out the brain from your skull and put in a new one.

Mind — Your Own Business

And that's the operation we're here for; to create a mind, to change our minds into something bigger and better, that's the most important business we could do in our lives.

And don't think your mind doesn't have to be changed. It's a tragedy that most people suffer from that attitude. Most people think they have a good mind, and that's the best proof that their mind is entirely vacant. We must realize we don't know anything. A man is a blind creature. There's so much to know. We're fooling ourselves. We're deceiving ourselves all our lives. We think we know and later in life we'll regret that our lives went by and we wasted opportunities to create ourselves by learning Torah and gaining *chochmah* and *yiras Hashem* and Torah ideals.

You won't have a mind unless you labor on it for years. It's not just to think *halachos* and *dinim*. You have to learn *how to think* entirely in a new way, according to the style and direction of the Torah. It's work but it's the greatest of all creations you could produce — you're producing in yourself a new mind, a Torah mind; we will call it *Torah'dike sevara*, to think Torah. And you become a new person entirely. It's not the same you.

You Are What You Hear

And so you understand now why we recommend having a strainer over your ears. Because if listening can make a new person out of you, if this creation of a person is effected primarily by means of the ears, we have to be very careful with what we hear; otherwise, all the garbage you hear makes you that. You are what you hear and it remains forever.

Everybody knows that Rabi Yehuda Halevi in the Kuzari is a very careful writer. He doesn't say any *meshalim* or any *guzmaos*. Every word is measured. In fact, he says too few words — in just a few words he puts a great deal of thought. And here is what he tells us: “The things that you heard in your youth, the songs” — he's talking about romantic songs — “*lo titachein aleihem teshuvah*, it's not possible to repent for it” (3:5). Even though you'll repent, you'll fast, you'll shed tears, you'll never be able to take it out of your mind.

Mindful Forever

Now, it doesn't mean you'll think about it all the time, that it'll be in your *conscious* mind; it might go down into the *subconscious*. But it will remain forever! As long as you live, it'll be there. And I heard from my *rebbe*, *zichrono levracha*, that you'll take it with you into the Next World too. That's a different subject to discuss sometime here. My *rebbe* said that even if you're a *tzaddik*, you're going to take it along with you into the Next World, too.

It doesn't mean you can't repent for the sin. Let's say *chas v'shalom* you went into a movie. Nobody should ever dream of such a thing, especially nowadays. If you walk into a movie nowadays then

you have a very small chance of ever coming to the Next World. I can guarantee that, no question about it. But suppose a person made a mistake, he didn't hear this before and he went to the movies; so he has to know he'll never get that out of his head again.

Now, for the sin he can do *teshuvah*; he can repent, yes. How much he has to repent, he has to go to a rabbi who will teach him how to repent. But *the repentance is not going to remove the thing from his mind*. Because it's a creation; his mind was remade. It's like a man who, in his anger, once cut off his hand. And now he can't put on tefillin anymore. He can repent from now until the end of his life, but the repentance will only remove the sin. He still won't be able to put on tefillin because the hand won't grow back again. And the mind is the same; once it's corrupted it will never regain its complete purity. Once it registers, these words you heard, they're there.

Now, that doesn't mean you should give up. No! You should keep on adding good thoughts. Keep on thinking thoughts of *emunah*, of Torah, all the wonderful Torah ideals; keep adding layers and layers and do your best to cover it up! Bury it deeper and deeper! But it's still there, however.

Keep Out! Mind at Work

And therefore the best thing is never to let it in. That's why you young fellows who are not married yet have to know that when you think you found the right one, make up with her, "*In our home, no television!*" I would say radio too – if you can have no radio too, *tavo aleichem bracha* – but maybe some people, sometimes you need to hear the weather and then you shut it off right away. But a television? There shouldn't be any question in your mind! And if she is hemming and hawing, then you look elsewhere.

Now, you old fellows who are already married, buy her a diamond ring. Tell her, "Please, my dear, a diamond ring instead of the television." Buy her anything! There's no price too big to pay because

you don't know what a mistake you made when you let that television come into your house.

Now, if she doesn't agree then you might need a different plan of action. Don't say you heard it from me but when your wife is away shopping, if you can tiptoe into the dining room with a hammer and demolish the television set, you don't know what a big accomplishment you're doing for your family!

Otherwise, your beautiful home is just a sewer. Imagine someone built a new home and then into his dining room he opened the sewer main and anytime the people in the block defecate or urinate it goes right into his dining room on his expensive rug. That's preferable! Because these low characters are spewing out day and night the worst kind of filth and it's coming into your home, and your poor, innocent little children are growing up with corrupted minds. And that's what they'll be forever. On your back!

And you have to shut your ears to many other things too. *Halevai* it was only the gentile world. Unfortunately, today even in *batei knessios* and *batei medrashos* you hear *leitzanus* and things that are absolutely unnecessary to hear. And whatever people say registers. It's filed away in your *neshamah* and you'll never get rid of it in this life and the World to Come. Nothing is forgotten.

Listen to Me

That's why *Shema Yisroel Hashem Echad* is so important. We are what we hear and we want to be created, built up, only on the ideals of *Hashem Echad*. And therefore, the Torah says, **אֲשֶׁרִי אָרָם שָׁמַע לִי** – *how fortunate is a man who learned how to listen to Me*. And you can never listen enough because that's our life's career, listening. Don't say, "I heard it once and now I'm bored." Like a rabbi once told me. When he told a certain story, a parable about a lion and a man, so the next time even though it was an entirely different story, he can't mention a lion anymore. He had to change it to a bear. Because if he'll say the word "lion," people tune out.

Some people come to these lectures and after a few months or a few years they stop coming. Why? So a man tells me, “I got the *shnitt* already.” He “gets it”. It means he didn’t get *anything*! Listening means more and more, again and again, until it recreates your mind. In the Slabodka yeshiva, we heard a *mussar* lecture three times a week, an hour-and-a-half each time, and very many times the ideas were repeated. And some *talmidim* were there twenty years in the yeshiva and they said they didn’t hear enough. Because each additional time it goes more and more deeply into your awareness.

Even to the same teaching over and over and over, *Shema Yisroel!* Listen, Yisroel! Let it saturate your mind and you become changed gradually. Little by little as the years pass by, you become a different person. It’s amazing how much a man changes by listening to the Torah. You become transformed so thoroughly that Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, “Oh! Now this man is someone entirely different. He recreated himself with a Torah mind. That’s the man I want! He’s the one living most successfully.”

Part III. The Day of Listening

Weekday Withdrawal

And now we come to Shabbos. Shabbos, you have to know, is intended as a day of listening. It’s the day that we go away from the world, from all the talkers of the outside world, and we withdraw into our own world of Shabbos. And this function of non-involvement, of withdrawing into yourself — whether you withdraw into the *beis hamedrash* or into your own home — it’s for the purpose of listening.

Listening to what? So pay attention now. There are two great sources to which a man’s ear should be attuned on Shabbos. Number one, he must listen to what the Torah has to say. The Gemara tells us that *בְּשַׁבָּת נִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל* – *the giving of the Torah was done on the day of Shabbos* (Shabbos 86b). And it wasn’t an accident, a quirk of the calendar. The

purpose was to let us know that Shabbos especially must be utilized to continue listening to the Voice that we first heard on that day.

Tune Out and Tune In

Oh, what a Voice that was! We swooned, we fainted when we heard Hashem speak. But it wasn’t only for then; it was a *קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְלֹא יָסָף* – *a tremendous Voice that never ceased* (Devarim 5:19). Rashi in our *parsha* says that *בִּי קוֹלוֹ וְחֶזֶק וְקִיָּם לְעוֹלָם* – *this Voice is powerful and exists forever*; every day it echoes and re-echoes. And Shabbos more than other days is an opportunity to hone our listening skills.

And so the first on the list for Shabbos is to listen to the Torah, to hear the voice of Hashem speaking to us from the Torah. After all, there’s so much noise in the outside world, so many wrong ideas. It’s remarkable that even among the *frum* Jews there’s such a fullness of error in the minds, that it’s actually a battle to get the truth to enter our minds. And therefore, if we’re able on Shabbos to tune out the world and allow ourselves to listen to one thing — to tune into the Torah — that’s a successful Shabbos.

Shabbos Houses in Syria

That always was one of the great blessings of Shabbos. Shabbos, we know, is the *mekor ha’bracha*, it’s a day of many blessings, but among the most overlooked ones in our times is that it is a day of Torah. Ancient Jews knew that. Even though they worked all week, they spent the Shabbos learning.

Not *part* of Shabbos — in the very ancient times, Jews spent all day long in the *beis hamedrash*. Shabbos in the ancient times, up to the *churban Bayis Sheini*, was a day when the Jewish nation assembled in the “Shabbos houses.” I’ll describe what Josephus relates. He’s telling us what the gentiles reported. They said “somewhere in Syria” — Eretz Yisroel was a small country and so the gentiles far away thought it was part of Syria — “there’s a nation of the Jews, and every seventh day they gather in their Sabbath houses all day long and

they spend the day in meditation on their Deity.” They called it the “Shabbos houses.”

Now, the gentiles, of course, didn't know the details of what was taking place. But this much we know from people who saw it with their own eyes, that the Am Yisroel spent their Shabbos in the *batei knessios* all day long.

There were no schools. But on Shabbos the whole nation all went to school. “*Shul*” means school. They went to shul on Shabbos and they sat and learned. They had speakers too; the *Tanaim* used to speak. That's where a lot of our *medrashim* came from, by the way, because there were beautiful speakers who entranced the people with tales of the days of old and with moral lessons. And it's remarkable how many people came to listen! Men, women, and children came for *oneg ruchni*; they really enjoyed it.

Shabbos Houses in Old Russia

Now, I'm going to skip over some thousands of years and quote to you from the Zichron Yaakov, a Jew who wrote his memoirs from way back in old Russia, about 150 years ago, so you'll see that it always was so. He says that on Friday nights the men who worked all week snatched a little sleep and then they got up early — it was still dark; 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the morning; the stragglers, the late risers came in at 5 — and they came together in the *beis medrash* to study Torah until the morning.

They sat in various groups, according to their professions. The shoemakers had their own group and with their poor pennies they hired a *rebbe* of the shoemakers' group, the *shusters' chevrah*. Then the tailors had their own group. There were more scholarly groups, but whatever it was, everyone was utilizing the Shabbos for the study of Torah. That's how it was in the small towns in Eastern Europe only a few hundred years ago.

Shabbos Houses in Williamsburg

The truth is that even today, if you go to the Satmar Beis Hamedrash in Williamsburg at 3 o'clock in the morning, people are already sitting and

learning. Because that's what Shabbos is for. The authentic Jewish nation utilized Shabbos for listening to what the Torah is saying.

Even when I was a boy, the old idealism of the Shabbos burned with a bright flame. Of course, we cannot compare them to the glorious days when the Am Yisroel was still young but I remember, I used to go as a bar mitzvah boy and listen to *rabbonim* Shabbos afternoon. In America in those days, every synagogue had a Shabbos afternoon lecture. But not just for one hour — people sat and listened and listened for *hours*. All over Brownsville, all over the East Side, *rabbonim* were speaking on Shabbos afternoon at length. That was the old tradition; the last embers of that great fire were still burning — the fire of Torah that burned like a conflagration all over the Jewish nation.

Traditional Sabbath Observance

And therefore, if we want to keep Shabbos — I mean the traditional Shabbos, not the Americanized Shabbos — it shouldn't be wasted. The day should be used for eating and drinking, and some *kosher* sleep, absolutely, but get up eventually and utilize part of the day for the function that Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended, for listening to His Voice.

Even if it's Chumash alone! But don't merely say the Chumash; *listen* to the words. Listen to the Mishnah. Listen to the Tehillim. Listen to the Gemara. Listen to the *pessukim* in Mishlei. Listen to Pirkei Avos. *Perek* is not merely something to say on long Shabbos afternoons. Hashem says, “I'm talking to you.”

You'll be amazed at what He's saying. Many times things that you *heard* all your life, but you never had an opportunity to *listen* to what it's saying. There's a great message that is inspiring, that's urgent and necessary for you to hear. Try to gain the attitude of listening to the Voice. “What is the *possuk* saying to me? What is the *maamar Chazal* telling me?”

That's one of the glories of Shabbos and that's why the Torah was given on Shabbos — to let us know it's a day of Torah. Our nation grew great

because they utilized the Day of Listening for what Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended.

The Voice of Creation

Now, there's another Voice that we have to listen to on Shabbos that's just as important as the first one. All of Creation, all of nature, that's also the Voice of Hashem. In the beginning Hashem said, "Yehi!" and He caused everything to come into being. בְּדִבְרֵךְ ה' שָׁמַיִם נִעְשׂוּ – With Your Word, Hashem, everything was created (Tehillim 33:6). And it didn't stop; that Word still stands in the heavens. כּוֹנֵנֶת אֶרֶץ – You established the world and it remained standing from Your Word (ibid. 119:90). לְעוֹלָם ה' דִּבְרֶךְ – Hashem, Your Word stands in the heavens forever (ibid. 119:89).

The Voice of Hashem, when He said, "Yehi!" and He created the world, is still speaking. הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים יוֹדוּךָ ה' – The heavens are talking! (ibid. 19:2). כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ כְּבוֹד – All Your deeds, Hashem, praise You. מַלְכוּתְךָ יִאֲמְרוּ וּגְבוּרַתְךָ יִדְבִּירוּ – They speak of the glory of Your Kingdom (ibid. 145:10-11).

Of course, some people laugh to themselves when they hear this. They take these *pessukim* merely as poetry. They were never trained properly; they didn't have the right *rebbeim* and therefore they don't hear anything. It's like talking to a deaf man; you tell him with sign language, "There's a philharmonic orchestra that is playing music," but he doesn't hear anything. The world is deaf; they're not accustomed to the concept of listening. And therefore, we say, הַחֲרָשִׁים שָׁמְעוּ – you deaf people, begin to listen! (Yeshaya 42:18). Open your ears!

The First Shabbos Zemer

And what's the day set aside especially for this function of listening? Shabbos! Like Dovid Hamelech said in his מְזֻמּוֹר שִׁיר לְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת; that was his Shabbos song. And what did he say there? כִּי שָׂמַחְתָּנִי ה' בְּפַעֲלֶךָ – "Hashem, You made me happy with Your work, – I sing at the deeds of Your Hands." A remarkable thing! The one Shabbos song we have in all of Tanach and there's not a single word about the election of the Am Yisroel and their connection to

Shabbos. Not a single word about the *melachos* of Shabbos or the *seudos*. He says, "I'm going to tell you what Shabbos is for! It's for saying מָה גָּדְלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ – How great are Your creations, Hashem, how deep are Your plans in nature!" (ibid. 92:1-6).

On Shabbos, Dovid looked at the grass. "Ayayay, grass! How did it happen? Where did it come from? A seed should be able to take a little carbon dioxide and a little this and a little that and make meadows of grass! How can it be?!" So Dovid was jumping with excitement, בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יְדֶיךָ אֲרִנֶּה – I sing at the work of Your Hands!"

And so if you pass a rosebush on the way to shul on Shabbos, the rosebush is talking. The thorns, the petals, are speaking. When you eat a peach or a plum – for *oneg Shabbos* you take a peach, very good – but take a look at the pit too. Listen to what it's saying about its Creator. It's a marvel of ingenuity.

Not only roses and grass. It's the leaves and the trees. It's the sun and the clouds and the wind. It's the *niflaos haBorei* in our own bodies. It's the whole Shaar HaBechinah! The whole *briah* is speaking and Shabbos is the best day to open our ears and listen.

Summing Up Shema Yisroel

So we'll sum up what we heard in order that we shouldn't go away with a lot of words and forget what we said. The *possuk* שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל is the clarion call of our people, but we shouldn't overlook the first two words, "Listen, Yisroel." That's the point. People are in a hurry to get to the end of the *possuk*, ה' אֶחָד. Take your time; the first piece is important, too. You want to be a Yisroel? You have to be a *shomeia*, a listener.

How do you listen? It's a very big subject, how to listen, what to listen to and what not to listen to, but it's all encapsulated in *Hashem Echad*. We listen to nothing except *Hashem Echad*! If we're going to succeed in this job of recreating ourselves into what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants, we have to know that our business in life is to listen to only one kind of instruction.

And because it's such a big part of our career, that's why we were given the gift of Shabbos: one day a week set aside for this great function of listening to the right things. Of course, all week long, too, but Shabbos especially. That's the day when we close our ears to everything else and we listen to the sound that was issued by Hashem on the two great occasions of *Maaseh Bereishis* and *Matan Torah*. We listen to the Voice of the Torah and also to His Voice in creation, and we thereby grow great and fulfill the purpose for which Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought us into the world!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

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Let's Get Practical

Be Easy of Hearing

In this week's *parsha*, we have the great declaration of *Shema Yisroel*, the clarion call of the Am Hashem. Although this *possuk* has infinite layers of meaning, the first two words themselves set forth our life's career: to be a discerning listener.

This upcoming Shabbos, *bli neder*, I will make a point of using the day — and the night — for its intended purpose, spending at least an extra half hour learning Torah, thereby inclining my ear to Hashem's voice.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

211 – Hear O Israel | **231** – Service by Ear

657 – Shofar of Rosh Hashanah | **747** – The Voice of Hashem

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Q&A

WITH
**RAV AVIGDOR
MILLER ZT"L**

שאלות ותשובות לרבי אביגדור מילר ז"ל



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QUESTION

What does the Torah say about dinosaurs?

ANSWER

What does the Torah say about avocados? Same question. I'm answering your question.

Q: But this is an animal that lived 15 million years ago and people lived only 5 thousand years?

A: You saw a date on the dinosaur? When you walk into the Museum of Natural History and you see dinosaur bones, how do you know how old he was?

The dinosaur is meaningless. It has no date on it. And therefore the dinosaur is just as meaningful as the avocado. There are a lot of fruits that we lost in the course of history. They're not being reproduced. We see pictures of them. But man neglected them and they went lost.

And so too there are also many species of animals that went lost, and birds and other creatures. They went lost. But they all existed at one time. They were created together with Adam Harishon. And Adam Harishon and his offspring saw them and they hunted dinosaurs. And the bones of dinosaurs are found mingled with the bones of men. The bones of dinosaurs are found together with the bones of ordinary men.

The fact is, if you want to spend money you can buy a film strip, you can rent it too if you want — I'll give you the address where it can be procured — and you'll see there photographs of footsteps, fossilized footsteps, where you see a dinosaur was waddling. Its footsteps are imprinted forever on a rock. And together with his footsteps are footsteps of a man. Human footsteps! Which means that the dinosaur was contemporary with man.

Now that doesn't fit according to the timetables of the evolutionists, but it's proven, so what can you do?

Therefore, a dinosaur is a contemporary thing with all the other creatures.

December 1975