Jewish Tribune – Yisro

**Are you really listening?**

A few years ago, we had a “listening week” in school. Various lessons and assemblies focused on the importance of listening. It was an interesting and important week, giving attention to an art that is becomingly increasingly rare.

Indeed, we do not have to go further than the first word of this week’s sedra to learn this very message.

“וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ” – “Yisro heard”.

What exactly did Yisro hear? Rashi tells us it was *krias yam suf* and *milchemes Amalek*. But didn’t everyone hear that? This was front page news!

The answer of course is that there is hearing and there is hearing. Whilst the rest of mankind may have heard, Yisro *really* heard.

In his excellent sefer on the 48 Kinyonei Torah, in the chapter on שמיעת האוזן, Rav Ephraim Nisenbaum tells the following anecdote.

Rav Elchanan Wasserman was the Chafetz Chaim’s premier student. A Torah giant in his own right, each year he would leave his own yeshiva in Baranovich and travel to spend Rosh Hashana with his Rebbe. One year, after the Chafetz Chaim finished delivering words if inspiration to the yeshiva, Rav Shalom Eishishoker leaned over to Reb Elchanan and whispered, “I think he said the exact same thing last year.” Reb Elchanan whispered back, “No, this year there were eight words different!”

There is listening and there is listening.

We’ve all been there; all different types of meetings and conversations with everyone talking and not listening. Listening, really focusing on what another person is saying, is not only a common courtesy but is an art that one sees less and less.

A few months ago, I was looking at a photo of a wedding that took place about twenty-five years ago. The photo was of the guests sitting listening to a drosho. The first thing that struck me was that people were actually listening. They were not looking at their phones - it was after all a world before mobile phones.

In in a similar vein, in next week’s parsha, HKBH tells Moshe Rabbeinu to ascend Har Sinai: “עֲלֵה אֵלַי הָהָרָה וֶהְיֵה שָׁם” – “Ascend the mountain to Me and be there”. What do the words וֶהְיֵה שָׁם – and be there, mean? Moshe *is* there!

My wonderful predecessor at Hasmonean, Rabbi Barry Katz, once told me a fabulous pshat, I think in the name of the Kotzker Rebbe. Moshe Rabbeinu was about to receive the Torah. This was a momentous occasion and HKBH had to stress the importance of the moment and remind Moshe not just to be there but to *properly* be there. Mindfulness before its time.

In Dale Carnegie’s famous book “How to win friends and influence people” (what a sad title!), the author lists six ways to make people like you. One is to be a good listener.

Being a good listener may or may not help your popularity levels, but that, as well as living with a focused awareness of the present moment, are important lessons that emerge from these parshiyos.

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