

## Morning Mindfulness & Gratitude: Listening

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In seeking wisdom,  
the first step is silence,  
the second listening,  
the third remembering,  
the fourth practicing,  
the fifth teaching others.

Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol (ca. 11<sup>th</sup> C, Cordoba)

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**Slonimer Rebbe (Shalom Noach Berezovsky, 1911-2000) *Netivot Shalom on Parashat Yitro***  
*Translation: Rabbi Jonathan Slater*

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, and Moses went up to God. *YHVH* called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will listen to My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.” (Ex. 19:1-6)

In these verses God informs the Jewish people who they are, what their nature is such that they were given the Torah. Note carefully: in these verses God did not speak of any of the practical mitzvot of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah, but of the nature of being a Jew who merits receiving Torah and mitzvot.

This is the significance that here God says “if you will listen to My **voice**” and not “to My **commandments**” as in several other places in the Torah. “Listen to **My voice**.” Incline your hearts to hear what it is that God wants of you, to hear in everything the inner intention that is contained in the voice of God, what it is that God desires. This is the first element of being a Jew: to listen to the voice of God, to investigate in whatever comes your way: “what does God want of me?”; “what does *YHVH* your God ask of you” (cf. Deut. 10:12, Micah 6:8)...

There is a story told about R. Moshe Leib of Sasov who was once asked by a wagon driver to pick up something that had fallen from the wagon. When R. Moshe Leib responded that he wasn't able, the wagon driver replied, "You are able, you just don't want to." In this moment, R. Moshe Leib heard the word of God directed to him: "you are able, you just don't want to."

Similarly, it is told of the Besht (the Baal Shem Tov – founder of Hasidism) that once he saw someone desecrating Shabbat, and he thought to himself: whatever a person sees or hears has some connection to his or her own life. So, he thought deeply about his own life and deeds, and he realized... how *he* had desecrated Shabbat.

Whatever transpires during the course of our lives, whatever we see or hear, is all the voice of God speaking to us. This is what we learn from these verses that precede the giving of the Torah: "Now then, if you will listen to My voice." This is one of the first conditions that must be present if we wish truly to be a Jew even in our spiritual/inner experience: we must always be listening to hear God's voice speaking to us.

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Dear God,  
 let my heart  
 grasp  
 the profound wisdom  
 with which You created  
 me.  
 Help me understand  
 vulnerabilities  
 in fact open me to growth;  
 my limits  
 draw me to new frontiers;  
 my very failures  
 teach me to succeed