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פרשת תצוה

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Career of Listening

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Part I. Dedicating the Ear

The Blood of the Ram

When the Kohanim were inducted into the service of the Beis Hamikdash for the first time, before they would be permitted to approach the *mizbeach* to bring *korbanos*, an *Eil Hamiluim*, a Ram of Consecration was sacrificed. And it was this inauguration service performed with the blood of the ram that empowered the Kohanim to commence their *avodas Hashem* in the Beis Hamikdash.

Now, what was the first act that was done with this blood? וְשָׁחַטָהּ – “And you shall slaughter the Ram,” Hashem told Moshe Rabeinu, וְלָקַחְתָּ מִדָּמֹו וְנָתַתָּהּ עַל תְּנוּפֵהוּ אֵזֶן אַהֲרֹן וְעַל תְּנוּפֵהוּ אֵזֶן בְּנֵי הַיְמָנִית – “and you shall take of its blood and put it on the cartilage of Aharon’s right ear and on the right ears of his sons” (29:20).

It was the ear of the Kohanim that was dedicated to the service of Hashem before anything else. Before the blood would be placed on their hands and on their feet to symbolize that the hands and feet of the *ovdei Hashem* should be dedicated entirely to His service, it had to be placed on the ears of the Kohanim. And that's something that requires an explanation. Why is the ear the preface, the introduction, to *korbanos*?

The Value of Listening

Everybody remembers the story from Shmuel Alef – it's in this week's *haftorah* too – when Shaul Hamelech was sent on a mission by Shmuel Hanavi to wipe out Amalek. He was commanded to destroy them completely; there should be nothing at all left of them. And when Shaul Hamelech and his soldiers returned from the mission he greeted the *navi* and said, "I have fulfilled the word of Hashem."

But the *navi* wasn't satisfied with that: "What's this sound of cattle that I hear?"

So Shaul said, "The people spared some of the cattle so that we could bring them as an offering to Hashem. Why should we slaughter them on the battlefield in vain? Instead we'll bring them as *korbanos* to Hashem in gratitude for what He's done for us."

Now, at that time the Navi Shmuel made a declaration to Shaul Hamelech; he said some very important words that will help us understand why it was the *ozen*, the ear, that was dedicated to Hashem's service first, before everything else: הִנֵּה – *Behold, I want you to learn something important now*: שָׁמַעַתְּ – *To listen, to obey*, מְזַבַּח טוֹב – *is better than bringing offerings*, לְהִקְשִׁיב – *to hearken to what you are told*, מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים – *is more important than the fat offerings of oxen* (Shmuel I 15:22). *Korbanos* are wonderful, they're very important. But the Navi is telling us here that to use your ears for listening – not just for listening but to be obedient – that's even more valuable.

No Substitute for Korbanos!

Now, I understand that the modern world has been propagandized and bamboozled by the gentile writers who have belittled offerings. The truth is that they have done it for their own benefit, for the greater glory of the substitute religion. So they say that Judaism was a bloody religion – a religion of slaughtering and sacrifice – and it was only when *oso ha'ish* – that man, when he came along and began preaching a religion of "love"; that's when the world became better. He introduced a new religion

of love that disdains the offerings! A new religion where instead of slaughtering cattle, from now on you slaughter Jews. That's what they've been doing for the last two thousand years after all – they've slaughtered Jews like cattle. But *korbanos*? Oh no; never!

But we, the Am Yisroel, know that bringing *korbanos* is of utmost importance. And that's why we hope that someday soon, **הָשִׁב אֶת הָעֲבוֹדָה** – *Hashem will bring back the service to His Sanctuary*, **וְאֵשִׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל** – *and we will once again bring to Him the burnt offerings*. Not just Moshiach we want – we look forward to the great day when once again we'll bring sacrifices! Don't make any mistake and think that we made improvements, that we're advancing from sacrifices to prayers. It's not advancing – it's retreating!

And therefore we look forward to the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdosh and to that great day when we will once again inaugurate the Kohanim for the *avodas hakorbanos*, exactly like was done in our *parsha*.

And yet, as important as this ceremony was for the Am Yisroel – when the Kohanim became the *kohanei Hashem* who would spend their days serving Hashem in the Beis Hamikdosh bringing *korbanos* on behalf of the Am Yisroel – it was exactly at this moment that they had to be taught that before anything, even before the *korbanos*, the *avodah* of the *ozen*, the ear, comes first. “**שָׁמַעַתְּ** – *To obey*, **מִצְבַּח טוֹב** – *is better than bringing offerings*, **לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים** – *to listen obediently is more important than the fat offerings of oxen*.” Because as tremendous as a *korban* is, as great of an effect it has on a person, we must know that listening is number one. And that's why the first thing the *kohen* did, even before he would be permitted to serve in the Mikdosh, he had to dedicate his ears to be obedient in the service of Hashem.

A Great Form of Happiness

In the second *sha'ar* of Sha'arei Teshuva, *siman* 12, Rabeinu Yonah explains there that the ears, the ability to hear, is one of the greatest gifts that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave us. You know, we're accustomed to thinking that this is how it's supposed to be – we were born with ears and we'll one day die with ears; they're always functioning and therefore we don't think about it at all. Many people might go their whole lives without thanking Hashem once for their ears.

But actually the ears are a great form of happiness. It's fun to be able to hear sounds! Hearing is an important part of our existence. We

live by means of hearing; it's our lifeblood. Without it, a man is missing so much fun, so much of life, that it's almost as if he was dead. It's a terrible tragedy to not be able to hear.

If you learned a little bit you know that when you damage another person you have to pay him for the value you decreased. *Ayin tachas ayin*, an eye for an eye, means that if someone *chalilah* disables a fellow Jew's eyes, so he is liable to pay the monetary value of that man's eyes (Bava Kamma 85b). But it says there that, "*Chirsho, nosein lo dmei kulo* – If you make a man deaf, you have to pay the value of that person's entire self!" And that's because the deaf man is like he stopped existing entirely.

Free Earphones

Your ear is very very valuable! Only that hearing is such a subtle gift that we forget about it. Some people are only happy when they buy a pair of earphones and they can walk someplace and listen to a walkman, a little tape machine with headphones. *Ooh wah! That's fun!* If they can listen to a person talk with an artificial set of ears, then it's fun times – that they enjoy. But to be happy with their original earphones, that they never thought about.

Did you ever see a man who is missing one ear? I did. I know a man in Manhattan, a very successful man, who's missing one ear. Whenever he's in a picture he makes sure it's with his profile – to make sure you don't see the other side of him. Now, if he could get back that ear, how happy he would be! How grateful he would be to Hakodosh Boruch Hu! He's a very wealthy man and he would give away a lot of his money to get his ear back. And here we are, most of us are walking around with two working ears!

Did you ever stop to think about that? Take hold of your ear and think about that – hold on to your ear and say thank you to Hakodosh Boruch Hu! Don't do it when your wife is around because who knows what she might think, but make sure to do it once in a while. "Ahh! Ahh! My ear! What a *chesed* it is to have two ears!"

What Doctors Can't See

Now, the *chesed* is even greater than you imagine, because the ear isn't just an earphone, a piece of plastic with some wires. The ear is a compendium of miracles of staggering complexity! What the process of hearing involves is even today not understood. Ahh! The ear is such a complicated piece of machinery! The ear is the receiver for sound waves.

As the sound waves come towards the eardrum it also hits the outside part of the ear. The ear is made like a funnel; it gathers together the soundwaves and funnels them into the hole where the eardrum is.

A physician once told me that most physicians never even saw an eardrum. “They go through the motion of looking into your ears,” he said, “but most physicians never saw an eardrum.” The drum is less than a tenth of a millimeter thick but it’s composed of three separate layers! And it’s especially constructed so that it should produce no after-vibrations that would blur the sound.

An ingenious system of bone levers connected to the eardrums magnify the sound waves that beat against your eardrum – three tiny bones that are connected to each other and they miraculously magnify the movement of the waves so that when it finally pushes against the liquid in the inner ear, it creates a wave of motion that excites the 30,000 or so nerve endings that project into the liquid – and according to the force of the movement, so is the volume of the sound.

Don't Laugh!

And the truth is that it’s not only hearing. You need your ears for walking too. You learn how to walk when you’re a child and once you learn it seems so easy but you should know that you’re a trapeze artist when you walk. It takes a lot of work to balance yourself. And how do you do it so easily? It’s because you have in your ears, in each ear, a bed of nerves.

There are nerves sticking up out of the bed of that little chamber in your ear. On top of that chamber of nerves is a stone, a loose stone. And when you move your head a little bit, the stone moves and it tickles those nerves – and the nerves warn you, “Straighten up!” Both ears have that. There’s an ear stone in each ear – there’s a little chamber in your ear and on the floor of the chamber there are nerves sticking up out of the floor and there’s a stone lying on the nerves. And the stone is loose. And as you’re moving like this, they tickle the wrong nerve – ope! Straighten up! And you do it automatically. *Nisei nissim! Nisei nissim!* Ears are so much fun!

Now, go and tell all of this to the unthinking people outside, they might laugh at you. They’ll ask you what Rabbi Miller spoke about and when you tell them that we spoke about ears, they won’t understand. But what that means is that they’re not living according to the will of Hashem. It says *כָּל עֲצָמוֹתַי תִּאֲמַרְנָה* – *All my parts should praise You.* Each

part speaks up separately and says: הַשֵּׁם כִּי כְמוֹדָךְ – “Hashem who is like You? (Tehillim 35:10). That’s how you have to live – you have to spend time in this very important function of feeling gratitude to Hashem for each detail.

Now, even if we came merely for this it’s worthwhile because you have to give a *chesbon* to yourself. When is the last time that you thought about thanking Hakodosh Boruch Hu for the ability to hear? You know that some people never even thought about it! Very many people never even thought *once* about the great gift of two ears. So at least that we learned here tonight, that you must engender a feeling of gratitude for the ability to hear. And even if years may pass by before you actually appreciate it, it’s worth all the effort you put into it.

Part II. Paying For the Ear

Nothing In This World Is Free

Now, in this world you don’t get anything for free. Every gift requires a certain payment and the price that we pay, the minimum price, is a feeling of gratitude to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And therefore it’s incumbent upon each one of us to think, “What is the proper way to express this gratitude?”

Of course, you might want to just *patur* yourself: “I’ll say, ‘*Baruch atah Hashem – Thank You Hashem for my ears,*’” and finished. The truth is that even that is a good beginning but when we study the words of Rabeinu Yonah (*ibid.*) you see that much more is required: הָאָדָם חַיִּב לְעֹבֵד אֶת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּאִיבָרָיו וּבְצַרְיוֹ כְּלָם כִּי לְעֹבֹדוֹתוֹ יֵצְרוּם – A person is obligated to serve Hashem with all of the limbs and creations in his body because they were created for that purpose. כִּמוֹ שְׂכָתוֹב כָּל פְּעַל הַשֵּׁם לְמַעַנְהוּ – As it states: “Everything that Hashem made is for His sake” (Mishlei 16:4). It means that nothing in this world is without a purpose in *avodas Hashem*, and if we were given ears, we must utilize them for serving Hashem.

Now, I know that all this is like water on a duck’s back; I understand that the listeners think that it’s just exaggerated propaganda. But I’ll say it again and again because it’s not exaggerated at all – it’s actually a foundation of our *avodas Hashem*. Once you realize how much you’re enjoying what Hashem is giving you, you’re expected to demonstrate your indebtedness to Hakodosh Boruch Hu by utilizing the gift for His service. That’s what Rabbeinu Yonah says is expected of us – to feel that

in return for the gift of ears, you want to apply them to the service of Hashem.

What Are Ears For?

If the ears are such a great pleasure – of course not everybody’s convinced of that yet; it still requires a great deal of talk and a great deal of practice until finally we arrive at the conclusion that it’s fun to have ears – but once we start understanding the great gift of hearing, right away we should ask ourselves, “How can I serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu with my ears to demonstrate my gratitude for this gift? After all, it states, כֹּל פְּעַל הַשֵּׁם לְמַעַנְהוּ – *Hashem made everything for His sake* – and therefore, I’d better start thinking, what are the ears for?”

Now of course it sounds like an exaggerated demand on us. How are we going to serve Hashem with our ears? They’re just there hanging on the side of my head; what am I going to do already? But there’s no question that this is what the verse is demanding. In return for all of the great gifts we should endeavor to use them to serve Hakodosh Boruch Hu. It means we have to take our two ears and put them to use the way Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants. Did you ever think about that? You can’t do whatever you want with your ears. You have to be aware of what you’re doing with your ears! When we sit down somewhere, when we walk in the street, wherever it is we are, we should be aware that we’re wearing our earphones now and we should be applying them for the purpose of *avodas Hashem*.

Digging Tunnels

It’s a very big subject, the subject of ears and so we are going to listen now to what an expert said on this subject. I want to quote for you the words of Dovid Hamelech: זָבַח וּמִנְחָה לֹא חִפְצָתָּ – *Hashem, You don’t desire our sacrifices and our offerings*, אֶזְנִים כָּרִיתָ לִי – *You dug for me ears* (Tehillim 40:7).

Dovid Hamelech became king when Shaul Hamelech was deposed by Hakodosh Boruch Hu for putting *korbanos* before listening; and Dovid therefore learned very well the lesson that there’s something much greater than *korbanos*. So much greater that when we compare the two it’s as if the offering is nothing. Of course, Hakodosh Boruch Hu *does* want sacrifices but it means that Dovid understood the lesson of the placing of the blood on the *tnuch ozen*. As great as a *zevach* or *mincha* is, the service of the ears – listening and obeying – is so great that it dwarfs

the importance of an offering and it makes it like **לֹא הִפְצַתָּ**, as if He doesn't desire it!

“And what is it that You desire more than my *korbanos*,” said Dovid? **אָזְנַיִם כָּרִיתָ לִּי** – *You dug out ears into my head*. Now, we should pay good attention to those words of Dovid because he didn't say “the ears that You gave me,” or “the ears that you placed on my head.” He said it's the “ears that You *dug out in my head*, that's really what You desire.” It's a *chiddush* to most people that the ears aren't just hanging on the side of your head; that actually they are tunnels that lead into your brain and they're bringing the words and ideas to the most sensitive of all places in your body – to your mind.

Conscious Listening

And so, if we want to demonstrate gratitude to Hakodosh Boruch Hu for our ears, the first thing we should do is to make up our minds that from now on we are going to serve Him with these gatherers of information by gathering only the information that He wants us to hear.

Imagine that there are two funnels in the sides of your head into which you can pour important essential elements that will mold your personality. You wouldn't just pour anything in! The purpose of the ears is that they should gather all the necessary information which Hakodosh Boruch Hu is sending to you; and by means of using the ears for that purpose, we are fulfilling their function in life: **הִנֵּה שָׁמַע מִזְבַּח טוֹב** – *Behold listening is better than an offering*, **לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים** – *to pay attention is greater than the fat of offerings of oxen*.

Now, let's get this in the right perspective because we're not talking here merely about listening to information – we're talking now about serving Hakodosh Boruch Hu with your ears. So let's say you're a *yeshiva* man and you're going into the *beis hamedrash* to hear the *rosh yeshiva* or the *mashgiach* deliver a *shmuess*. Now, of course you're going to listen; of course you're going to pay attention and be interested and you're going to try to fulfill what you hear. But we're not talking about that; we're adding something new here. We're adding a new element now, that as you come in you're thinking, “I'm now taking my two ears, this great gift that Hakodosh Boruch Hu bestowed upon me, and I'm going to utilize these ears to serve Hashem in order to show my gratitude. I'm going to lean in with my ears to gather in the information Hashem wants me to hear.”

Inclining Your Ears

In the Tanach when we want to describe how someone should listen we find the expression, *hatayas ozen* – *Inclining your ear*. Now, actually you can hear without inclining your ear. You can lean back in the chair and relax and listen too. But when somebody leans forward, what he's doing is making a demonstration, "*Hineni muchan umezuman* – I'm now bringing my ears to You, Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and I am listening; I'm applying these gifts that You gave me to Your service." Isn't that a beautiful thing to do if you want to thank Hashem for your ears?

So next time when you come to a place where somebody is teaching or preaching some *divrei tochacha* or *divrei yirah*, so instead of leaning back like somebody who is taking a ride in the car and enjoying the scenery and his mind is asleep – no, that's not called listening. Instead, you demonstrate your gratitude by leaning forward – you feel you're bringing your ears closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. That's a thing you should practice. Some people even cup their ears – not because it's necessary, but because they want to emphasize the importance of listening. "I'm dedicating my ears to the service of listening to Hashem."

The Most Important Purpose

Of course, while the ears are still attached to our heads, we are permitted to use them for other things too. So when you're crossing the street, in addition to looking both ways – by the way, even on a one way street you should look both ways because young people with bicycles are a menace today – but you should use your ears to listen for cars as well. Why not? There are a lot of kosher things you can use your ears for.

But at the same time, the most important purpose of our ears is to act as funnels! Above all, a Jew must make up his mind that his ears are for the purpose of hearing what Hakodosh Boruch Hu is telling him in the Torah. The function by which we demonstrate most our awareness of the purpose of ears is by using them to funnel Torah information, Torah ideals and attitudes, into our heads.

Now, you'll find many observant Jews who are deaf to the messages of the Torah because they don't really listen. Even Jews who "keep everything" must know that actually they're not keeping a great part of the Torah because they're not *listening* to the Torah. Of course they "keep everything," but they're listening only to what their neighbors say. They're listening to the radio and to the words they hear on the street.

Listen to Tanach

You have to utilize your ears chiefly to hear Torah. And Torah means everything. It means Shulchan Aruch. It means *halacha*. It means *dinim*. It means Mishnayis and Gemara. These are elementary things – it goes without saying – but if you want to listen to the Torah so you learn everything; *Torah, nevi'im, kesuvim*, everything you have to learn. If you don't learn *nevi'im* and *kesuvim* it's like taking the bran out of the wheat. Just white bread you'll eat? It's not nourishing.

You need Mishlei, you need Iyov, you need everything. You need it. And if you can't read it in *lashon kodesh*, I urge you to read it in English at least. Isn't that queer advice? No, it's not queer at all. If you have no time to learn Tanach so read it in English at least. Find out what it's all about!

You never read Ezra in your life?! You mean to say you're going to go your whole life without reading Ezra? How could you do such a thing? A newspaper you'll read, but Ezra you won't read?! Even if you read a *frum* newspaper, so you'll skip Ezra and Nechemia for a *frum* newspaper? At least once you should read Ezra and Nechemia. Read it in English! Why not? "I'll get around to it someday," he says. When he'll be 199 years old in the old age home – he thinks he'll still be there; so that's when he'll get around to it.

Listen To Rashi

You have to study the words of Rashi. Let Rashi's words enter into your ears. Rashi is full of wisdom. I myself have a compendium, a collection of statements from Rashi that you can live by. Rashi's statements – you could live by them! Gems of wisdom in Rashi! Rashi was a remarkable commentator and he put in a few words here and there – gems that you wouldn't see in the Gemara. Good advice, how to live successfully and happily too.

And so, this never-ending amount of Torah information that you can be funneling into your head by means of the ears, is an important part of the service of the ear. You have to listen to the words of the Chovos Halevavos! And to the Shaarei Teshuva too. And what about the Mesillas Yesharim?! As much as possible you should be funneling the words of the *seforim* into your mind by means of your ears! Say it with your mouth and listen to what you're saying. Even if you read the Mesillas Yesharim only one time you're already a different person altogether.

Part III. Opening Your Ears

Virtues of Obedience

Now, when we speak about the subject of listening, we must not limit ourselves to just filling our minds with Torah information. Because there's another tremendous subject – it's part of the Torah but it's a separate branch – and that's the great subject of **אָזְן שְׁמַעַת תּוֹכַחַת הַיָּיִם** – *an ear that listens to the instructions of life* (Mishlei 15:31). It's not talking here about an ear that only *hears* words but an ear that is *obedient* to the words it hears; a person who reacts to what goes into his ears. “What am I supposed to learn from this?” he thinks. “How can I apply what I'm hearing to my own life?” “How can I get better?”

Because no matter what the people outside in the street say, no matter what's written in books and magazines, and what the radio says, we have to live with the ideals of Torah, and Torah tells us that listening, obeying, that's the great offering. Now I know that in our day, according to the winds that blow now in our culture, the word obey is an unpopular one, but the truth is that the absence of that word is the cause of all our misfortunes. That's why the youth are running wild today.

Mankind must overcome the great propaganda that has been erected against the humbling of oneself before criticism. The principle of *shema*, obedience, must once again be learned because **אָזְן שְׁמַעַת תּוֹכַחַת הַיָּיִם** – *the ear that is capable of hearing the instruction of life*, that's one of the great functions of our ears in this world.

With Friends Like These...

Dovid Hamelech, the one who taught us about our ears, said the following: **בְּקָמִים עָלַי מְרַעִים תִּשְׁמַעְנָה אָזְנִי** – “When the wicked rise up against me, let my ears hear” (Tehillim 92:12). Now, it's usually understood to mean, “Let me hear of their downfall,” but Rav Yisroel Salanter explained it a different way: “When the *merai'im* – those who want to say bad about me and criticize me, when they stand up against me, *let my ears hear their critique.*” Not like people think today, that if someone criticizes you then he's already your enemy. No! That's your best friend. That's the one to listen to because that's the person who's going to bring you to Olam Habo.

Rabeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 2:11) says that anybody who comes along and criticizes you, he's a *malach* from Hashem. You hear that?! And

here you thought that your neighbor criticizing you is your enemy, and Rabeinu Yonah comes along and tells you that he's a *malach* from Hashem! What that means is that anybody who comes along in this world and says something to you of *mussar*, of rebuke, something that could be useful for you to hear, he's called a *malach* – he's your best friend.

Your Wife Knows the Truth

And so, if once, for a moment, the heavens opened up and there was a flash of lightning, a flash of clarity – let's say your wife said something to you and you saw a little spark of truth – so don't close your ears. Don't huff and puff and make excuses, because she's your best friend. A wife is an excellent opportunity for hearing the truth about yourself. Oh yes, a wife who criticizes you is a glorious opportunity! Lucky is that man whose wife has a big mouth and tells him what she sees. Because in the *kollel*, and at work, and in the synagogue, nobody is going to tell you too much about your sore points. Usually they're too polite. Or it could be that you put on a good show in public. Who's going to tell you the truth outside the home?! Nobody! And after a while you begin to think, "Maybe I really am a good person after all."

But your wife knows the truth! She knows you better than anyone else. So this important man comes home from shul and his wife deflates him – she sticks a pin in his balloon and it bursts. That's a tremendous achievement; it's a *shleimus*, a perfection of character to be put down to size once in a while. But if you don't open your ears to it, so what is it worth?

Acquiring Diamonds

The truth is that criticism from anybody is a gift. Let's say someone happens to hurl a diamond at you and it hurts – it pokes you – you're not going to be angry at him; you'll grab it and pocket it. Seventy years ago a homeless man, a bum on the street, told me something – he criticized me about a detail of my behavior. I'm not going to tell you what it was, but to this day I still remember his every word. And I'm a better man because of it.

And so, if it happens that somebody will give you some criticism you have to seize it like a diamond because you won't get many such diamonds in your life. All you'll hear your whole life is perfumed spitballs; flattery and *shkarim*; and you'll never open your ears to criticism and discover the truth – you'll walk in darkness all your life.

Closing Your Ears

Now, before we end, we must not forget another function of the ear – to know when not to listen, to know when to close the ear.

Now pay attention. The Gemara (Kesubos 5b) asks an interesting question: Why is it that the *alyah*, the bottom part of the ear, the lobe, is soft? Further up on the ear there's cartilage, but here on the bottom there is nothing but soft tissue. Why is it that the bottom is soft? That's the Gemara's question. A good kasha. So the Gemara answers like this: *Im yishma davar she'eino hagon* – If you're in a place where they're saying things that you shouldn't hear, so you should turn up the *alyah* and press it into your ear. You plug up your ear so you shouldn't hear it. I once did that. I was in a meeting of *rabbonim* and one of the people got up and he said something, so I closed up my ears. "What's that?" he said. I said, "It's a Gemara!"

Now, if it wasn't for this Gemara, we would have other ideas about the lobe of the ear. Because we know that when the outer ear gathers the soundwaves to funnel it to the eardrum, the ear trembles a little bit from the soundwaves; it shakes. And that shaking would interfere with the sound. And therefore, Hakodosh Boruch Hu put a lobe down here on the bottom of the ear – the lobe doesn't shake because there's no bone at all in it, and therefore it absorbs the shaking. So we're able to hear better because the lobe absorbs the tremors that the ear would have experienced from the soundwaves. It's there to help us hear more clearly, more sharply. Otherwise we'd hear everything with a shake.

But along comes the Gemara and says no – there's an even more important reason for the earlobe – it's there in order to help you close up your ears in case someone is saying something that is not worth hearing.

Toras Avigdor Should Be Prized

And that's because even one foolish remark can overthrow a hundred edifices of *avodas Hashem*. That's the language of the Mesillas Yesharim: *לְצַנֵּת אֶחָת דּוֹקָה מֵאָה תּוֹכְחוֹת* – *One hundred rebukes can be pushed away with one wisecrack.*

Now these talks – I think we should prize these Thursday night talks. I'm not rebuking anyone here but I know that idealists come to this place and I try to raise myself up to talk to you on that plane of idealism. We talk about important things here. So let's say you listen to a hundred

of these tapes – it’s a good idea by the way; you and your wife should listen to one hundred tapes. Now let’s say you did that – let’s say you listened to a hundred of these tapes and didn’t talk to anybody in between. So now, you are already at some *madreigah* of idealism. You’re already a head taller than a lot of other people.

But now along comes a *leitz* – *leitz* doesn’t mean a wicked person; people with beards can be *leitzim* too – so a *leitz* comes along and he says one wise-crack. Let’s say your friend comes along and he says, “Oh, you’re trying to be *frum*, heh?” And now the whole edifice of idealism, the whole skyscraper that you built up, all hundred floors, come crashing down. It explodes into smoke; nothing remains. That’s what the Mesillas Yesharim is saying: One hundred rebukes, one hundred lectures – serious talks on noble themes – and at the end, one *leitzanus* can overcome those one hundred edifices that you built in your mind.

It’s Dangerous Out There

And therefore it’s of the utmost necessity to keep away from shallow and foolish people. Now it doesn’t mean only people who murder or people who are *michalilei Shabbos*. It means people who aren’t interested in living lives of idealism, people who disdain the attitude of seeking perfection. As long as you’re sitting here you’re okay. But once you walk out the door you have to be very careful with your ears. Unless maybe you take along the tapes and they’re glued to your ears until next Thursday night – otherwise it’s dangerous out there. Once we understand that the ear must be dedicated to *avodas Hashem*, we begin to understand how important this tunnel to the mind really is.

It’s because of the importance of the ear, because of its function as a tunnel to the mind, that’s why the first thing the Kohanim did when they became inaugurated to serve in the Beis Hamikdosh was to dedicate their ears to the service of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

We Are All Kohanim

And actually what the Kohanim did in the Beis Hamikdosh was a symbol of how we all are expected to live our lives. Because when Hashem told the Am Yisroel **לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים** – *You’ll be for Me a special treasure from all the nations* (Shemos 19:5), what did He mean? What is our function as Hashem’s treasured nation?

Hashem answers that in the next *possuk*: **וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מִמְלַכְתַּת כֹּהֲנִים** – *You’re going to be to Me a Nation of Kohanim* (ibid. 19:6). Here Hashem

declares that He has chosen us to be a “Nation of Priests.” What that means is “a kingdom consisting of priests” – a nation in which every individual, man, woman and child, is a Kohen, trying to live a life of holiness in the service of Hashem. Hakodosh Boruch Hu said to the Am Yisroel, “All of you, are My *Mamleches Kohanim*, and I want you to act in the same manner as My Kohanim – I want you to emulate the principles that I teach them.”

That’s why the clarion call of the Am Yisroel is “*Shema Yisroel. Listen!*”

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶחָד means you have to listen diligently – your ears must be dedicated to the service of Hashem. You have to open your ears and listen to how to fulfill Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s will. It’s a career of listening – that’s our job in this world – to listen and learn.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET’S GET PRACTICAL

Embarking on the Career of Listening

I understand the lesson of our parsha that the first step in Hashem’s service is dedicating our ears and am getting ready to embark on this glorious career of listening. I understand that the ears are a gift and I am ready to repay Hashem by consciously employing them in His service. This week, I will *bli neder* set aside five minutes each day to learn *mussar* out loud and listen to the words as I’m reading them from the *sefer*.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

9 - Illuminating the Mind | 24 - A Career of Listening | 231 - Service by Ear
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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

How much extra time is a newly married man supposed to spend in the company of his wife?

A:

No time at all. Now, let me explain that. Here's a man who is newly married, so according to the Torah we cannot take him out of his home into military service during the first year. But that doesn't mean that he sits at home and talks to his wife, no. He's home, but he's plowing his field, he's out taking care of the sheep and the cattle. He's working. Only that he's home.

Let's say he's a kollel-man. So the first year, if he wants, at night he can sit and learn at home. But he has to learn. And it doesn't mean he *has* to learn at home – he can learn in the *beis medrash* too. But he can learn at home if he wishes. But it doesn't mean that he sits and talks to his wife. He's not supposed to waste his life. And she shouldn't waste his life.

So he has to do what's necessary to do, only that he has to give a certain amount of consideration to his new wife. So the first year נקי יהיה אחת לביתו שנה אחת – “He should be free for his house for one year” (D'varim 24:5). He doesn't go away to the army, but at home he does his business. He doesn't sit and talk to his wife all the time. אל תרבה שיחה עם האשה – Don't talk too much to your wife. Even the best wife, if you talk too much, she'll find ways and means of criticizing you. You'll tell her your faults, your weaknesses, and it will be a handle for her to grab and utilize against you. Whatever you say will be used against you. So the less you say, the better off you are. And the same is true for a wife as well. The less she says to her husband, the more he'll think of her.

TAPE # 921

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In honor of Dovid Chesir