

Moreover, I have heard the groan of Bnei Yisrael. (6:5)

Listening is a fundamental value in many aspects of life – be it relationships, communication or spiritual growth. Listening goes beyond mere hearing; it means internalizing and comprehending what the other person is conveying to us and acting upon it. Active listening fosters a sense of connection to and validation of the speaker, that you are hearing and respecting him. This, in turn, builds trust and fortifies relationships.

We can break listening down into different forms. When someone shares his struggles and pains, he is often seeking validation more than solutions. By simply listening, without the ability or wherewithal to help him, you are acknowledging his emotions and experiences, which, in and of itself, validates his feelings. This reassures him that his pain is real (and significant), even if he cannot immediately resolve it.

The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, related the following story which supports the notion of listening just to show that you care. Following the Holocaust, the broken shards of humanity who had survived and were now in displaced person camps were compelled to cope with their devastating losses. The overwhelming pain and anguish which these survivors sustained took its toll, not only physically and emotionally, but spiritually as well. They had questions, and the answers could only be provided by Hashem. As a result, some of these poor souls could no longer maintain their original religious affiliation. One fellow whose despair led him to drop *Yiddishkeit* altogether was no better off, but he was still not prepared to return. His friends felt his pain, and they did everything to convince him to return to *Yiddishkeit*. They were unsuccessful. One of them suggested that he go speak to the *Klausenberger Rebbe*, and let it all out. At first, he was resistant to the idea, but, after a little nudging, he reconsidered and agreed to visit the *Rebbe*.

He left the *Rebbe* after an hour, a totally transformed person. He immediately began to pick up where he had left off, and he started observing *Shabbos* once again. His friends were shocked. What could the *Rebbe* have said that impressed him so? He told them.

“I went into the *Rebbe*, and I began to tell him about all my family members who were brutally murdered. As I spoke, I was overcome with weeping. The *Rebbe* turned to me and said, ‘I also lost my family. Before the war, I had a wife and eleven children. Now I have no one.’

“With those words, he took my hand in his and began to cry with me. We sat like that for an hour, two broken-hearted individuals mourning what we had lost. Finally, I felt that my tears had dissipated, and I had gotten all my pent-up grief out of me. I felt that someone cared about me, more than about my forsaking *Yiddishkeit*. I now felt that I could get over it and continue living as a Jew should live.”

What did the *Klausenberger Rebbe* do that was different than what this man’s friends had attempted? He listened. He did not lay blame; he validated the man’s grief. He understood his

pain, because he, too, was suffering.

A *Yid* was bowed in prayer in the *Kotzker Rebbe's shul*. From beneath his *tallis* there emerged the mournful sound of a *krechitz*, sigh. The saintly *Rebbe, zl*, who was standing nearby, heard and remarked, "Every *Yiddishe krechitz* is precious and holy in Heaven." A few moments passed, and the Jew sighed again, but this time a little longer and more painfully than the previous time. The *Rebbe* said, "But it must be a true, sincere *krechitz*. A false *krechitz* has no value." Hashem hears the pain – not the words, the accompanying noise – just the cry emanating from the deepest recesses of his soul.

The *pasuk* addresses the groans emanating from the Jewish slaves as *V'gam*; "Moreover, I have also heard the groans." What is the meaning that Hashem "also" heard the groans? Who else but Hashem should hear the pain of the Jew? The *Chasam Sofer* explains that it refers to each Jew; each brother heard the anguish of his brother. They felt bad, not only for themselves, but for their brothers as well. This compassion led to Hashem's "remembering" the covenant.

In the *Haggadah of the Gerrer Dynasty*, authored by *Rabbi Yisrael Besser*, the author relates that, at times, the saintly *Pnei Menachem* would have visions of deceased *tzaddikim* in his dreams. (Obviously his dreams were unlike our dreams, but then his sleep was unlike our sleep.) One night, the *Rebbe* came upon his uncle, *Horav Menachem Mendel* of Pabnetz (who had been murdered by the Nazis), in a dream.

He asked his uncle, "Why are we suffering so many personal tragedies today, so many illnesses, suffering and hardships?"

In the dream, his uncle replied, "There was a time (apparently in Europe pre-World War II) that when a *Yid* had a personal tragedy, when a *Yid* was in pain, it meant that the entire *shteibel* also felt the anguish. When a brother was in pain, everyone was in pain. People were bound to one another in such a profound manner that each person personally felt his brother's pain.

"Thus, when a bitter decree was directed against someone – he was spared, because if he, in fact, deserved the blow, his brothers did not. So why should they both suffer? Today, sadly, people do not feel empathy for their brothers' *tzaros*, trouble, travail, in the same manner. That world is gone."

In Egypt, explains the *Chasam Sofer*, brother heard brother. Therefore, Hashem "also" heard and intervened. Veritably, whenever a *Yid* cries out in pain, Hashem hears his plea. He answers every *tefillah*, prayer. At times, the answer will be "no," but the *tefillah* is not wasted. It will be used to benefit another Jew, who perhaps has much for which to *daven*, or is himself yet incapable of properly expressing His emotions. We find that Avraham *Avinu* prayed fervently that the city of Sodom be spared from destruction. His *tefillos* did not help Sodom, but Hashem saved and treasured them. One day, He will open up that reservoir of prayers and use it where necessary.

The *Maggid, zl*, of Dubno explains this with an insightful parable. An elderly man went to purchase a coat. He made certain that the size was perfect for him. Immediately afterwards, a young man entered the store and asked to purchase a coat. He proceeded to buy two coats without even bothering to try them on to see if they fit properly. The elderly man stood looking on in wonderment. "How can you buy a coat without first trying it on?" he asked. The man replied, "If the coat does not fit today, it will fit tomorrow. If it is too small for me, I will give it to my son. I will always have an opportunity to use these coats."

Likewise, concerning *tefillah*. If the prayers do not find efficacy today, they will be used tomorrow -- if not for the petitioner himself, then for others. No Jew's prayer is left behind.