

LISTEN WITH YOUR HEART by Rochelle B. Weinstein

It is the eve of Yom Kippur—Kol Nidre to most—and Vanessa smiles at me and says, *g'mar chatimah tovah*. I am ashamed to admit I have no idea what that means. All week long we have been sharing *Shana Tova's* with one another; this puzzling new phrase baffles me and it shows. "You've never heard that before?" she asks, surprised that someone with children enrolled in a Jewish Day School and attending Kol Nidre services could be so malnourished in Jewish sentiment. "It means," she continues, "May you be inscribed for a good life in the Book of Life." Such a greeting is the essence of the Yom Kippur holiday. How had I not heard it before?

But I had. Surely, the words had leaped off of similar tongues and found their way into my attentive, waiting ears, and the sounds and the texture of the phrase had been heard. Like cars honking outside our windows, nagging parents and whining children, or the monotone voice of the radio personality, these are sounds and words we claim to hear. But what do the words mean when we haven't listened?

Take for instance my friend Elizabeth. Every morning around 8:15 AM, we call each other after the children have been dropped off at their respective schools and we discuss our days. She starts. "Today I'm going to exercise and then I'm going to Publix and then I have a meeting at the school followed by an overdue dental exam." Then I begin. "I'm going to run the circle, take the dog to the groomer, and then I have to go help my mother move some furniture in her house." It's a tumult of activity marked by the mundane and an occasional left hook. By noon, I have called her three times wondering why she hasn't picked up her cell phone. I could not for the life of me recall what her plans were for the day.

Now, I don't expect those around me to hold on to every word and silly nuance of the modern, albeit, ordinary life in suburbia, and, while approaching forty has depleted parts of my capacity for memory, there is no excuse. The question begs to be asked: How many extraordinary ideas, suggestions, conversations, phrases, details or facts are we missing when we *hear* what people are saying without *listening*?

In 1982, the band, Missing Persons, penned a song titled *Words*. In the absence of computers and cell phones, at a time when communicating was done predominately on the telephone or in person, words were unveiled and less open to misinterpretation. And yet, the song captures a timeless problem passing from generation to generation, and weakened further by electronic gadgets (and impulses) that while they claim to improve communication and "connect" us to one another, have proven to pull us further apart.

What are words for when no one listens anymore
What are words for when no one listens it's no use talking at all

We pass along gigabytes of information through the air and across the information super-highway yet we are a generation of non-listeners. And while recent technology has spiked a rise in a culture resistant to actual speaking, when we do finally put one of the five favored senses to work, we are unable to communicate successfully. That means not only speaking effectively, but understanding what it is that we are hearing.

A growing epidemic with massive ramifications seems impossible to fix, but it is not. In fact, it's very simple to correct. Just listen. Not just to words, not to phrases alone. Listen. Really listen. If you're in person, look the person in the eye and not at the table of women beside you. If you are on the telephone, stop texting your next door neighbor or flipping through a magazine while they're talking. If you are on the cell phone, think twice before making that phone call if you may be too distracted to take it all in. And listen. The ability to conquer this feat is far more than energetic vibration and the passage of sound. Listening is what happens when we are truly focused and care. Oftentimes there is much to learn from what someone's not saying or what we think we can't hear. When you master the art of listening, it will feel less peripheral, and more meaningful. I say this because there will come a day it will happen to you when your words have gone unheard and it will hurt. If you choose to listen with your heart you will find it is the purest expression of love. And when I say to you, *g'mar chatimah tovah*, you will understand.

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