

The Month of Av:

Listening to Hashem's Messages in our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Decoding Hashem's Messages: "A Turn for A Turn"

This morning, when I went out to water my garden, I was met with a cold shower from a humongous hole in our new garden hose, which my husband had just bought and hooked up yesterday. When I complained that I had requested a green gardening hose, he explained that this yellow one had a 15 year guarantee! Last week and the week before I had found holes in the old garden hose – the exact same ugly yellow kind which we had for less than 15 years. After my husband had fixed it repeatedly, he decided it was time to buy a new one, and voila the next day this one too has a huge hole. So I'm thinking, this is really not normal. We do not have any dogs that could be chewing the holes and our chickens are safely in the coop. Could the occasional stray cats that drift through our plot be the culprit? Even if so, or if it is some other wild animal that only emerges at night when we are unaware of its presence, it's still quite bizarre that specifically our garden hose had been selected for repeated onslaughts! What is going on??? I've just planted new flowers before *shmitah* (the Sabbatical year for the land), how will they survive if I can't water them? Although I prefer this kind of suffering to any kind of health issue, G-d forbid, this reoccurring problem is more annoying than a trifle nuisance. The Talmud teaches, "There are no tribulations without sin" (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a*), perhaps Hashem is sending me a message here about something I need to fix in my life!? But what could it be? What are some of the clues to learn to interpret Hashem's messages in our lives? One of the main codes to decipher Hashem's messages is based on the principle of, "A turn for a turn." Hashem operates in this world by means of *מדה כנגד מדה*/measure for measure (*Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 90a*). I like Rabbi Lazer Brody's translation "a turn for a turn," it sounds less judgmental and punishing and more like giving us a turn – an opportunity to benefit us.

Becoming a Pure Channel for Greatest Reception

Knowing and believing that Hashem loves us, and that He only gives us the minimum discomfort we need to make the necessary changes in our lives, I'm determined to find out what I need to work on. So looking into the message of the leaking garden hose, it seems to me that the hose is a channel for water, but when filled with holes it is no longer the channel it was supposed to be, hmmm.... This reminds me of the other reoccurring problem I have been experiencing regarding my internet connection when giving online EmunaHealing courses. Last week, after three hours of trying to get my internet provider on the phone, and having about 8 different technical support people working on figuring out why my internet keeps going on and off, it turns out that my cable is loose. Again, the channel for reception is not working properly. The word 'cable' itself derives from the Hebrew word *לקבל*/l'*kabel* which means to receive or to accept. Likewise, the word Kabbalah derives from the same root and means reception, as no one can make Kabbalah up on their own, it has to be received from a teacher who received it from his teacher all the way back to



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Moshe at Sinai. To learn Kabbalah we have to be a pure channel to listen and receive from our teacher. In general, one of the main ways to receive is to listen up. This fits in with the sense of the month of Av, which is 'hearing' (*Sefer Yetzirah* 5:8). Av is the month to develop sensitivities to hear the messages for growth that Hashem is sending us through the difficulties we come up against in our lives. "A Whisper suffices for the wise, but a fool needs flagellation" (*Midrash Mishlei* 22). The more eloquently we decode Hashem's messages for our lives the less we will need uncomfortable reminders.

Removing Negative Expectations which Block us from Hearing

The month of Av is the month of the destructions of our Temples because of senseless hatred between us (*Babylonian Talmud, Yoma* 9b). Whenever people have a hard time getting along it's usually due to communication problems and misunderstandings. The story which originally led to the destruction of the second Temple was based on a misunderstanding and mix up between the names of Kamtza and bar Kamtza (*Babylonian Talmud, Gittin* 55-56). When we feel animosity towards someone, it's because we are not making the effort to really hear where that person is coming from. Bottom-line, most of the problems between people are due to our difficulty with truly listen to one another. We often have preconceived notions about what we expect the other person to say, which block us from really listening to them. Instead, what we are hearing is our own voice, which we read into theirs. For example if we experienced a lot of criticism in our childhood, then we may read criticism into everyone's words. If we have trust issues we may believe that people are saying things to take advantage of us and trick us, even if this may not be the case at all. When we keep showing suspicion, rather than openness to listen and receive what others have to offer, by way of the law of attraction, others may actually begin to harbor resentment. So, the month of Av is about fixing our relationships by removing negative expectations and really opening our hearts to hear what the people in our lives are telling us.

Listening with our Hearts

When we learn the skill of listening with our hearts, we may even develop a flair for detecting unspoken words, hearing what others are not telling us, but what they meant to say. Their facial expressions and body language may give it away. We can then be preemptive in our communication, saying words of comfort for unexpressed pains. A good practice for the month of Av is to listen intently to others and note the deeper truth behind their words. This takes time, patience and slowing down our fast-paced, multi-tasking, accelerated routine. Our children really need us to listen to both their spoken and unspoken words. This attention from those who love them is like fertilizer for the trees, and help them develop confidence and a positive self-image. When my children were young I learned one really phenomenal book on childrearing, and repeated it when raising each of my two sons. It is called, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will talk* written by Adele Faber. I highly recommend this book, also named the ultimate "parenting bible." I still keep the summary of this classic book in my bedroom drawer, perhaps I get to use it with my grandchildren, or I may pass it on to their parents.

Frontal Communication

As in any relationship, front-to-front communication is vital in a marriage. The messages we hear when we are busy taking care of things in the home don't always sink in. If something is important, come close (definitely don't yell something from a different room), make eye-contact, and then check that your partner is ready to listen before speaking your truth. Usually, the month of Av is the month of vacation for the family to spend quality time together. It's the time to leave our daily routine behind and put our relationships before the things that need to get done. This is, therefore, the prime time to show unconditional love by working on listening with our heart and full attention.

Strengthening Inner Hearing When Coming of Age

Perhaps one of the reasons that people lose hearing when they grow older could be according to the principle of "a turn for a turn." When someone didn't take proper advantage of the sense of hearing, then he may lose it. Moreover, being harder of hearing causes people to come closer to one another in order to be able to hear. When their external hearing is weakened it prompts them to strengthen their internal listening skills. This way Hashem helps people open their heart and grow closer as they gracefully age.

Listening to the Words of our Own Prayer

When we call out to Hashem in *tefilah* we expect Him to hear us, but do we hear our own prayer? Sometimes we may be rambling off the words of Grace after Meals, for example, while our mind is drifting to the preparations of tomorrow's dinner or who knows what. In honor of the month of Av, and Hashem's messages to me at this time, I decided to really listen my own prayers. This includes looking intently in the prayer-book and focusing on the words of the *tefilah*. So far it's been quite an exhilarating experience, really tuning into what I'm asking of Hashem, rather than just getting the prayer ritual done. As I'm writing these words an email is flying in announcing how 1,000,000 Jews around the world will be reciting *Shema Yisrael* at the same time for the success and protection of our soldiers. The *Shema Yisrael* prayer has its source in last week's *parasha* (*Devarim* 6:4), which not by chance is read during the zenith of the month of Av. As much as the *Shema Yisrael* – the centerpiece of Jewish Prayer, is about unifying Hashem in the world, it's also about amplifying our sense of inner hearing. When we open ourselves to truly hear with our heart, we open ourselves to hear the inner voice of our own *Neshama* (soul). May we merit during the month of Av to really hear each other, Hashem and the words of our own prayers. May we thereby fix our relationships and become a pure channel for love and acceptance, and may we merit hearing the prayers of the Kohen *Gadol* in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple)!