

Text Study - Preparing to listen and to hear

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After saying the blessing before study, read the following texts and discuss the questions that follow each text in small groups.

דברים פרק ו פסוק ד

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד :

“It is no accident that *Shema Yisrael*-Listen, O” Israel” has become imperative in Judaism. G-d needs an audience. Thus, the quality of any exchange depends upon the listener. (Elie Weisel, “The Storyteller’s Prayer.”)

“When G-d asked Solomon to choose what he wished for himself, Solomon requested a *lev shamaya* (I Kings, III:9), a “heart that listens” or often translated as “an understanding heart.” (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt on Listening by Peninah Schram)

QUESTIONS:

1. When we rise up and when we lay down we are reminded to listen. Why do we need the reminder? What makes it easy to forget to listen? What is the Shema asking us to listen to? Can that infuse our daily listening? What does that kind of listening look like?
2. What do you think Weisel means by the words, “the quality of any exchange depends upon the listener?” Can you think of an experience, in your role as educator, that this has been true? Can you think of an experience in the RE-IMAGINE Project that this has been true?
3. What is the connection between the art of listening and the heart? Why do you think the text did not say, Solomon requested “ears that listen?” What is the connection between understanding and listening?
4. As you move ahead, what do you anticipate may be difficult to hear with your heart? What will help you have a *lev shamaya*?

BACKGROUND:

Deuteronomy: *Devarim* in Hebrew is the Fifth Book in the Torah and follows Genesis, Leviticus, Exodus and Numbers. It focuses on Moses' farewell address to the Israelites as they prepare to cross over to the Promised Land.

I Kings: One of the early books of the *Nev'im* (Prophets) that is written in a narrative style that recounts the history of the Israelites. The story of Solomon is recounted as part of this section of the Bible.

Peninah Schram: Is a modern day Jewish storyteller and author who is an associate professor of speech and drama at Stern College of Yeshiva University. She has written many books on Jewish folktales.

Elie Weisel: He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. The author of over 36 works on Jewish life, morality and the Holocaust, he was born in Romania in 1928. His world wide read book NIGHT captured his own experience of living through the Holocaust.