



# BADERECH

## RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP HASC  
AUTHOR OF BADERECH SERIES

# To Listen & Hear

Rebbe David Cohen, zy'a, the holy Nazir of Yerushalayim, was a profound spiritual seeker, mystic, and scholar. Revered for his sensitivity and gentle ways, the “Rav haNazir” was a lofty soul and ascetic, who spent much of his life in meditation and *dveykus*. In 1915, while studying at the University of Basel for his PhD in Greek philosophy, the young searcher heard that the *tzadik* Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook was in St. Galen. The Rav haNazir describes their momentous meeting in his introduction to *Oros haKodesh*, “The Lights of Holiness”:

“Full of excitement, uncertainty and expectation, carrying a volume of *Shaarei Kedushah*, ‘Gates of Holiness’, by R’ Chaim Vital, I made my way to the Rav after taking a mikveh in



Rabbi David Cohen zt'l  
- the Nazir

the Rhine River. I found him deeply engaged in learning with his son and was welcomed as a guest to sleep in their home. My heart could not rest at night. My life’s destiny was hanging in the balance...

I awoke before dawn. Hearing the sound of footsteps back and forth, I approached the room from whence the sound emerged and came upon the Rav in the midst of *Birchos haShachar* the morning blessings. The Rav was reciting the *Akeidah*, the section of davening recounting the sacrifice of Yitzchak in a most sublime, supernal melody.

My life then stood in the balance... I listened to him and was transformed; I turned into a new man. ... I had found a master.”

ישמע יתרו

“And Yisro heard....” (*Shemos*, 18:1)

Rashi explains that Yisro — the high priest of Midian, the father in law of Moshe Rabbeinu, and a spiritual seeker in his own right — heard of the great miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and *Kriyas Yam Suf* as well as the vicious attack of Amalek. The Divine hand and *hashgacha pratis* in these events was open and revealed for all to see. While the voice of Hashem was audible throughout the world, it was Yisro who “heard” and responded to the call, joining Klal Yisrael and changing his destiny.

Our *sedra* contains the most important moment in human history, the Giving of the Torah, when we collectively declared *Naaseh*



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v'nishma, "We will perform and we will listen." Our commitment to 'perform' Hashem's commands to the fullest is expressed as *nishma*; not only will we fulfil them in action, we will 'listen' to them, understand and deeply internalize their meaning. Philosopher and street-ball legend Sidney Deane has pointed out the critical difference between 'listening' and merely 'hearing': beyond the technical auditory experience of sound-waves entering one's ears, in Yiddishkeit, the modality of "*shema*", includes attention to the implications behind the message.

The Revelation at Mount Sinai also included the *Torah sheh-b'al Peh*, the 'Oral Law' transmitted verbally, מפה לאוזן, "from mouth to ear". The Rav haNazir explains that the core transmission language of Talmud Bavli is based on different variations of the word ***shema***. That is, its didactic metaphors of instruction and understanding are based not on *seeing* but on *hearing*. A traditional teaching, for example, is called שמעתתא, "that which was heard", and the Gemara often invites us to *Ta shema*, "come and learn." Talmudic discourses also include phrases such as ***shema mina***, "infer from this," ***ka-mashma lan***, "it teaches us this," and ***lo shemiyah lei***, "he did not agree."

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook was known as הראה הגדול, "the Great Seer", and his holy disciple, the Rav haNazir, as השומע הגדול "the Great Listener". The Rav haNazir wrote extensively on Jewish mystical thought, and advanced a doctrine toward the renewal of prophecy in our age. His magnum opus, *Kol haNevuah*, "The Voice of Prophecy" describes the Torah as an account of our communication with the Ribbono Shel Olam and opens with Yeshayahu's call to Am Yisrael: הטו אוזנכם וילכו אליו שמעו ותהי נפשכם ואכורתה לכם בירת עולם, "Turn your ears and come to Me, *listen* and your souls will live, And I will hew an eternal

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covenant with you" (55:3). Hashem is always calling out to us, communicating with us. Our responsibility is not just to 'hear' His commandments and instructions, but to actively *listen* to the message of Divine communication.

This week, as we collectively 'listen' to the re-reading of the sedra, may we hear the Divine call along with Yisro, and open our hearts to the prophetic call. And as the Rav haNazir concludes his introduction to *Kol haNevuah*: "May it be the Divine will that we be worthy of the renewal of the holy, worthy of the rebirth of our prophetic auditory spirit, through our national revival in our Holy Land." ■

**Tzitzit tying with Ruti**

Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin

Mondays 1:15-4pm

Wednesdays 12-3pm

*no experience needed*

