

Questions for Conversation & Reflection

How do these texts challenge or affirm your understanding and experience of listening?

What does it take to leave room for “not knowing” a person?

Who or what prevents us from deeply listening?

The Gift of Listening



The Bronfman Fellowship has a meaningful tradition of exploring Jewish texts and tradition as a community. In that spirit, we're pleased to share a selection of Jewish sources and questions — on the theme of listening — to inspire understanding and empathy. We hope it generates thought-provoking conversations and reflection.



THE
BRONFMAN
FELLOWSHIP

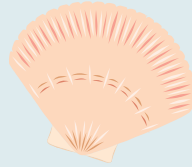
www.bronfman.org

T.Carmi | listening



“It’s hard for two seashells to share a real conversation.
Each inclines its ear to its own sea.
Only the pearl diver or the antique dealer
Can say for certain: the same sea.”

Translated by David Ilan



קָשָׁב ט. כרמי

קָשָׁה לְשֵׁתִי קִנְיֹת לְשׁוֹחֵחַ שִׁיחָה-שֶׁל-מִמֶּנֶּשׁ
כָּל אַחַת מֵטָה אֶזֶן לַיָּם שְׁלָה
רַק שׁוֹלָה-הַפְּנִינִים אוֹ סוֹחֵר-הַעֲתִיקוֹת
יָכוֹל לְקַבֹּעַ בְּלִי חֲשָׁשׁ: אוֹתוֹ יָם

from *The Book of Questions* by Edmond Jabès

*My name is a question. It is also my freedom within
my tendency to question.*

—Reb Eglal

“Our hope is for knowledge,” said Reb Mendel. But not all his disciples were of this opinion.

“We first have to agree on the sense you give to the word ‘knowledge,’” said the oldest of them.

“Knowledge means questioning,” answered Reb Mendel.

“What will we get out of these questions? What will we get out of all the answers which only lead to more questions, since questions are born of unsatisfactory answers?” asked the second disciple.

“The promise of a new question,” replied Reb Mendel.

“There will be a moment,” the oldest disciple continued, “when we have to stop interrogating. Whether because there will be no answer possible, or because we will not be able to formulate any further questions. So why should we begin?”

“You see,” said Reb Mendel: “at the end of the argument, there is always a decisive question unsettled.”

Rabbi Ariel Burger (*Student of Eli Wiesel*) in conversation with Krista Tippett in the “On Being” podcast

Rabbi Burger: I want to share that I think there are two challenges with otherness, really. One is, we sometimes fall into the trap of not listening, or feeling threatened, or closing ourselves to the other.

But we also make a different mistake, which is to be overly familiar with the other and to think that we already know the other. And one of the things I’ve been thinking about is the way in which light from a distant star arrives at our planet, arrives at the human eye after such a vast period of time. Light takes time to travel. And so, at a very, very micro, nano- scale, the same thing is true when I’m standing two feet away from someone and looking at them. There is some lag, there’s some time lapse between the light from their face reaching my eyes and when it originated in their face, which means there’s a way in which I’m never seeing you. I’m seeing you a moment ago, even though we can’t measure that.

And that means that I’m always a little bit behind, and my ideas about you are always a little bit obsolete, because in that micro, nano-, nano-, nanosecond, you might’ve changed. And you might’ve grown in some way. And to me, that’s pointing us to a great sense of openness to one another, if we could really hold that place of not-knowing.

That’s the other part of otherness, is to really allow ourselves to not know each other and to not say, “OK, I’ve heard this political position a billion times before,” or, “My neighbor or my uncle or the person I’ve had an argument with for Thanksgiving dinners for the last ten years is gonna be the same this year,” but to allow a little bit of space, at least, for not knowing and the possibility of being surprised.