



Listening As An Act Of Transformation, by Doug Lipman

Two villagers came to a rabbi with a dispute. When the rabbi invited them to sit down and talk about it, they glowered at each other as though to say, “If you sit down at this table, then I won’t!” At last, they sat at the rabbi’s table with arms folded, casting angry glances at each other.

Then the rabbi said, “Do you have anything more to say, Shlomo?”

Yes, Shlomo asserted, he had more to say. The rabbi kept listening to Shlomo’s answers and asking him questions about them until at last Shlomo said, more calmly, “No. I have nothing more to say.”

Next, the rabbi turned toward the other villager, Moshe, and asked, “What happened?” The rabbi listened to him and asked him questions until he, too, said, “I have nothing more to say.”

The rabbi rose from the table to leave the room, saying, “I will deliberate on this and come back with a decision.”

Less than a minute later, the rabbi returned, sat back down at the table, and said, “I have reached my verdict.” The rabbi described the verdict to them. Shlomo and Moshe looked at each other and each said, “All right. That solves it.” They shook hands and left.

Another man had been in the room and had watched all this. He said to the rabbi, “You found the solution in just a minute. Why did you let them talk so long, when you knew the answer right away?”

The rabbi said, “If I had not listened to each one’s full story, each would have resented my decision. It wasn’t my judgment that solved the problem. What solved it was listening to their entire stories.”