

## **Sample themes and readings for reflection at beginning of listening session or ideas to incorporate into a sermon**

### **1) Listening as a spiritual practice (sample reflection by Rev. Elsa Worth)**

A story is told about Abba Moses, one of the desert fathers:

*A brother came to Scetis to visit Abba Moses and asked him for a word. The old man said to him, 'Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.'*

In this world of ceaseless data, we sometimes forget to stop, take a breath, and listen. When a question arises, we usually don't respond by seeking out a quiet place to be still - instead we check google! There's a lot of noise, a lot of static around us all the time, as well as the demands of our daily lives. Our go go go culture hardly values sitting still. But as an unknown person wisely said - Don't just do something, sit there!

All the world's faiths recognize that there is something much bigger, stronger and wiser in this life than us. Something beyond our knowledge to comprehend, but which mysteriously unifies all of creation. Each religious tradition has its own practices for listening and opening ourselves up to this wider truth, this deeper wisdom.

And as we all know, if we intentionally make time to sit and be present with our friends and loved ones, when we practice good listening, we open our relationships up to a deeper understanding and connection. Sometimes being busy interrupts the most important things in life, but often we just don't have time to think about that....

It requires intention to take time apart from our to-do lists and many demands of this life to stop and pray, meditate or listen. But when we manage to do it, we find it's the only way to tune in and really hear what is going on inside ourselves, what's going on with others, or what God might be trying to get through to us. This is true for both individuals and for groups. One of the most important aspects of communal worship is that it gives a community of people the opportunity be still, to separate themselves from their usual daily contexts, and to open themselves to God's greater wisdom through the prompting of music, prayers, texts and human interactions.

MIP is asking us all to practice the art of listening together, as an intentional way to discern what we all feel called to work on together next. The last time we did this, the issue of affordable housing bubbled up and over time, MIP was able to get an affordable housing development fund started in the region. This project emerged out of listening sessions, in which people shared their concerns and came together to make a difference and do something about it.

MIP is now embarking on a new series of listening sessions that will give individuals, as well as whole faith communities, the opportunity to participate in discerning our next collaborative project. It will require an intentional setting aside of some space and time to be present to one another, to listen and to explore the very important things going on around us in our

wider community that all too often get lost in the shuffle of life's demands. What are our core values and how are we living them out? What breaks our hearts and cries out for us to come together around? Our listening sessions will give us the chance to share stories, to listen deeply, to deepen in our understanding and to allow our hearts to join in communal creativity and compassionate action for our neighbors and world.

## 2) Baha'i text

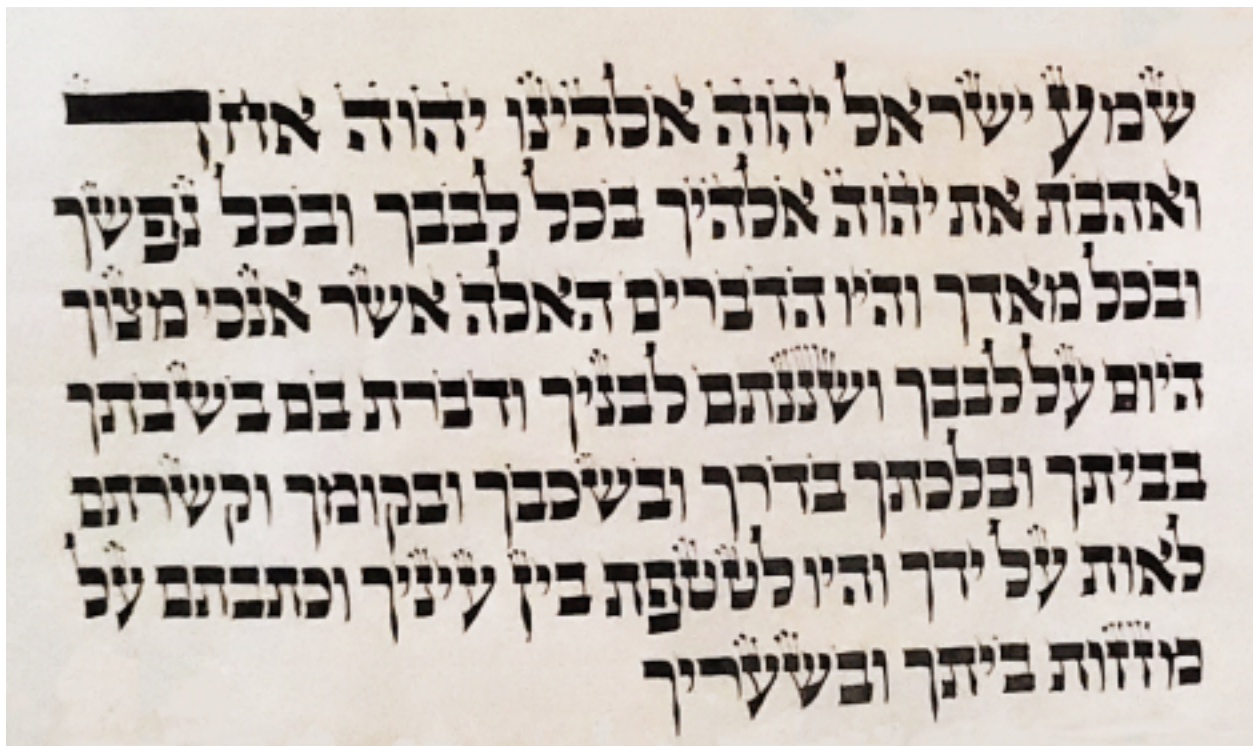
O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

Baha'u'llah

## 3) Jewish text

*Sh'ma, Yisrael!*  
Listen/Hear/Heed, O Israel!



## **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

(4) Listen/Hear/Heed, O Israel! The Eternal is our God, the Eternal alone.

(5) You shall love the Eternal your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6) Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. (7) Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. (8) Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; (9) inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

[myjewishlearning.com/article/the-shema-how-listening-leads-to-oneness](http://myjewishlearning.com/article/the-shema-how-listening-leads-to-oneness)

### **The Shema: How Listening Leads to Oneness**

*by Rabbi Adina Allen*

#### ***Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad***

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

These words, commonly known as the Shema, are traditionally recited by Jews as we begin and conclude each day. Bookending not just our days but our lives, the Shema is also commonly the first prayer we are taught as children and is the final prayer we utter on our deathbed as we pass from this world. The Shema is the mantra of Judaism, its message foundational to what it means to live as a Jew of faith in this world.

The Shema begins with an imperative: Listen! Just that word alone is a powerful call. Listening is not an easy thing to do. More than the simple act of hearing, true listening requires us to open ourselves up to another's experience so that heart touches heart and we are changed. It is — in philosopher Martin Buber's framework — what allows us to develop an I-thou, rather than an I-it, relationship. Buber describes listening as "something we do with our full selves by sensing and feeling what another is trying to convey so that together we can remove the barrier between us."

In Judaism, the act of listening is the key to unlocking bounty and blessing. In Deuteronomy, as the Israelites wind down their wandering in the wilderness and prepare to enter the land of Israel, Moses instructs them emphatically using this same word — shema. "If you listen, truly listen," Moses says, all will be good. If not, curses will follow.

On this verse, the commentator the Sefat Emet (Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, 15 April 1847 – 11 January 1905, also known by the title of his main work, the Sfast Emet-Language of Truth) references a line from the : "Happy is the one whose listenings are to Me." Adding his own commentary, he writes: "'Listenings' means that one should always be prepared to receive and listen closely to the words of God. The voice of God's word is in everything, since all were created by God's utterance."

Each of us, no matter how seemingly different we are from one another, are created by God. The Shema calls on us not merely to listen, but to remember that despite our

differences, there is one force of connection and transformation in the universe that animates and unites us all. “The Lord, our God, the Lord is One,” the Shema continues.

***The force that we call Adonai, others call by other names. Each of us has our own particular path, but ultimately they lead to the same place. Beginning with listening and ending with oneness, the Shema invites us to deepen our capacity to listen — to ourselves, to the Divine, and to those around us, to develop an I-thou relationship with the rest of humanity. Its daily recitation reminds us to build bridges rather than barriers so that we may touch upon — even if only for brief moments at a time — that place in which we all are one.***

*(Rabbi Adina Allen is co-founder and creative director of the Jewish Studio Project, a Bay Area start-up that utilizes the creative arts as a tool for self-discovery, social change and inspiring a Judaism that is vibrant, connective and hopeful.)*

#### **4) Christian/Jewish focus on justice**

##### **Scripture: Micah 6:6-8**

<sup>6</sup>With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? <sup>8</sup>He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

In reflection on this scripture, a person could highlight how the first calling listed is “to do justice!”. This listening process is the first phase of our community together answering this call!

#### **5) Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quotes**

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

"I am not interested in power for power's sake, but I'm interested in power that is moral, that is right and that is good."