

Torah Weekly

ת"סז

March 20-26, 2022
17-23 Adar II, 5782

First Torah Reading:
Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47

Second Torah Reading:
Numbers 19:1-22

Haftarah:
Ezekiel 36:16-36

PARSHAT SHEMINI

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

When Saying Nothing Is the Right Thing to Say

I ran into a friend at the market, and she looked sadder than when I had seen her recently at her father's *shiva*. "It's hitting me harder now," she paused, looking down, "and there was so much family business going on." At first, I thought she meant those nasty family dynamics that can be catalyzed by a death in the family, but she meant it literally. The people around her were very focused on the "business" of her father's estate, despite her repeated requests that these conversations wait until after the mourning period was over.

Proper *shiva* protocol requires that who want to pay their respects do not initiate the conversation; instead, they are to sit quietly and wait for the mourner to speak. They follow the mourner's lead. After all, it's the mourner's show, so to speak—we are there to comfort them, not add to their pain with inappropriate conversation or behavior. Why is that so hard to do? It's challenging enough to "say the right thing" under difficult circumstances. When we are given a pass, however, where we don't even have to speak except to offer simple mandatory scripted words of condolences, why are we so uncomfortable with silence?

I tried to explain to my friend how people react to grief and mourning differently, where some negate or avoid pain by becoming preoccupied with busy work or mundane matters to feel a sense of control. Looking back, I wish I could take back my words. In a misguided attempt to make her "feel better" or "fix the situation," I was negating her emotions, whereas I should have held the space to witness and validate her experience. Instead of giving her the "gift" of my wisdom and advice, I wish I could have given her the gifts she really needed: empathy, compassion and a silent but warm embrace.

What Is Silence Anyway?

It's one thing to shut down external noise, but what about the noise inside? Have you listened to yourself lately? Research has clocked the average person as having 12,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day, 95 percent of which are the same thoughts from the day before. And what's worse, 80 percent of our thoughts are negative. Despite the books on mindfulness that I leave strategically around the house, my husband isn't fooled. When he catches me staring into space with darting eyes, he'll ask: "How's the conversation going in your head?" *Umm, you probably don't want to know; it's not pretty in there.*

Is silence just the absence of noise, the mere cessation of the inner chatter? Try to

stop thinking and pretty soon you'll be thinking about how you're trying to stop thinking. Instead of picturing silence as a mere empty void, however, imagine silence as a gateway to another dimension. Silence leads to stillness, which leads to awareness, which leads to presence—the state of being that accepts the present moment as it is. It is the mindful pause that leads us to our center, the natural place of self-regulation, resilience and choice.

Whether you call it emotional mastery or emotional intelligence, it's the space from which we can choose to operate and respond from our highest self, that part of us that is in harmony with our deepest values. Otherwise, the noise in our head that judges, condemns, blames and resists keeps us in a reactive state, and that leads to adverse and undesirable outcomes.

The Silence of Aaron

In *Shemini*, after the consecration of the *Mishkan* (the portable tabernacle in the desert), Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, were consumed by a "heavenly fire" when they entered the Holy of Holies without permission or authority to do so. When Aaron learned the heartbreaking news, however, he was silent. He was without emotion; the commentaries tell us that he was weeping! But when Aaron heard Moses'

explanation for their deaths, that G-d considered this to be sanctification, Aaron was silent. Silence allows us to

hear profound messages. When we face significant upsets and disappointments or when we incur the unjust

wrath or accusations of others, silence gives us the space to consider, *what else could this be?*

We don't all have the luxury of Moses softening the blow with consoling messages from G-d.

Sometimes, there are simply no answers—at least none that we can comprehend with our limited intelligence. Sometimes, life makes absolutely no sense. Someone is in distress, and you struggle for answers as to why they are suffering or why an inexplicably horrible event has happened. When we accept that we don't have the answers, we can open ourselves up to the wisdom of silence. Then, if and when we choose to speak or act (because there are times when we must speak and times we must act), we will serve the moment or the person or the situation in the right way.

So This Time, I Got It Right

Last week I was in synagogue with a woman whose mother recently died after a protracted and painful illness. With tears welling up in her eyes, she shyly confessed how in the last days she was praying for G-d to take her. "I feel a little guilty about that. Was that bad?" Words of advice streamed into my head. *Of course, it's not bad! You were an amazing and loving and devoted daughter who couldn't bear to see her mother suffering.* But I said nothing, because the real question ("Why did my mother have to suffer so?") could not be answered. Instead, I looked into her eyes with soft tearful eyes of my own and with silence held the space for her to accept it all—the grief and the love, the guilt and the relief.

When in doubt, pause and say this acronym to yourself: WAIT, which stands for: "Why Am I Talking?" Just as we are to use the gift of speech for the good, let us also learn to use the gift of silence. Sometimes, it's just what is needed.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Parshat Parah The Torah reading of Parah (Numbers 19) is added to the weekly reading. Parah details the laws of the "Red Heifer" and the process by which a person rendered ritually impure by contact with a dead body was purified.

(When the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, every Jew had to be in a state of ritual purity for Passover.)

Sunday, March 20, 2022 --- 17 Adar II, 5782

Torah Sages Escape (c. 75 BCE)

In the year 91 BCE, Alexander Yannai of the Hasmonean family succeeded his brother Yehuda Aristobolus to the throne of Judea. Alexander Yannai was a Sadducee who virulently persecuted the Pharisees. At one point during his bloody reign, following a victory he scored on a battlefield, he invited all the Torah scholars for a celebratory feast. During this feast he was slighted by one of the guests, which led him to execute all the Torah scholars in attendance.

A few of the sages managed to escape to the town of Sulukus in Syria. There, too, they encountered anti-Semitic enemies who murdered many of the exiled sages. The handful of surviving Torah scholars went in to hiding, finding refuge in the home of an individual named Zevadai. On the night of the 17th of Adar they escaped the hostile city of Sulukus. Eventually these surviving scholars revived Torah Judaism. The date they escaped the clutches of death was established as a day of celebration.

Tuesday, March 21, 2022 --- 18 Adar II, 5782

First Jewish Governor (1801)

When Governor of Georgia James Jackson resigned his post to serve as a US senator, the president of the Georgia Senate, David Emanuel, was sworn in as governor. March 3, 1801, was the first time that a Jewish person served as governor of a US state.

Emanuel served the remaining eight months of Jackson's term, but did not seek re-election, opting instead to retire from politics. In 1812, Georgia named a new county in his honor: "Emanuel County."

First US Jewish Periodical (1823)

The inaugural edition of "The Jew," the first Jewish periodical in the United States, was published in March of 1823. It was published in New York City and edited by Solomon H. Jackson.

The subtitle of the paper was "Being a defence of Judaism against all adversaries, and particularly against the insidious attacks of Israel's Advocate." Its major aim was to combat missionaries, and specifically "Israel's Advocate," a Christian conversionist periodical published at the same time.

The periodical was issued until March 1825.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022 --- 19 Adar II, 5782

Passing of R. Chaim Halberstam of Sanz (1876)

Israel Secures Ein Gedi (1949)

Following the War of Independence, Israel needed to secure its borders against the hostile Arab nations which surrounded it. Ein Gedi, on the western shore of the Dead Sea, was secured on Sunday, March 20, 1949.

Passing of R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1932)

Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld played a leading role in the Jewish community of British-Mandatory Jerusalem for almost six decades. He authored the book of responsa *Salmas Chaim*.

Wednesday, March 23, 2022 --- 20 Adar II, 5782

Choni the Circle Maker prays for rain (1st Century BCE)

"One year, most of Adar went by and it didn't rain. They sent for Choni the Circle Maker. He prayed and the rains didn't come. He drew a circle, stood in it and said: 'Master of The World! Your children have turned to me; I swear in Your great name that I won't move from here until You have pity on Your children.' The rains came down." (Talmud, Taanit 23a)

Passing of "Bach" (1640)

Adar 20 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Yoel Sirkes (1560?-1640), Rabbi of Krakow and author of the *Bayit Chadash* ("Bach") commentary on the great Halachic work, the *Arba'ah Turim*.