

Torah Weekly

PARSHAT SHEMINI
PARHSAT HACHODESH

21-27 Adar II 5784
31 March-6 April 2024

Torah: Leviticus 9:1-11:47
HaChodesh: Exodus 12:1-20
Hafjorah: Ezekiel 45:18-46:15

ד"ב

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 (mourning period for a close relative). "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 people 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 Hanna Perlberger

Calendar

Chaplains have monthly calendars available.

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Psalms Daily

Grape Juice & Matzah

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

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The Torah Student's Fins and Scales

"This you may eat from everything that is in the water, everything that has fins and scales... those you may eat" (Leviticus 11:9). The Talmud (Niddah 51b) says that a fish that has scales also has fins and there is no need to examine for them. However, there are fish that only have fins and they are unclean. What is the lesson we can derive from the signs of the kosher and non-kosher fish? Fish in their habitat — water — are analogous to scholars studying Torah. This is obvious from that which is related in Talmud in connection to the Roman government's decree against Torah study. When Pappas ben Yehudah saw Rabbi Akiva convening public assemblies to study Torah he asked him, "Akiva are you not afraid of the regime?" Rabbi Akiva replied with a parable: "Once a fox was walking alongside the riverbank and saw fish gathering from place to place, as they

were fleeing something. When the fox inquired, 'From what are you running away?' They told him, 'From the nets people set up to catch us.' The fox said to them, 'Come up to dry land and we will dwell together just as our ancestors dwelled together.' The fish responded, 'You are a fool, for if in our habitat where our life is sustained, we are afraid, all the more so we should be afraid for our existence if we leave our habitat.' Likewise, Rabbi Akiva said, "If now when we study Torah which is our lifesaver, our existence is threatened, how much are we in danger if we would absent ourselves from Torah." Scales serve as a protective garment to the fish and through the fins it swims from place to place. When one studies Torah it is expected of him to create innovative thoughts and explanations. It is also imperative that one who studies Torah have fear of Heaven. The Talmud compares Torah study with fear of Heaven to wheat which is stored with a preservative consisting of earth with a high salt content. Just as the grain will spoil quickly

without the preservative, likewise, one studying Torah without fear of G-d, will easily forget, and his Torah study will be like a poisonous medicine for him. Thus, the fins represent the power to accomplish and reach new heights through innovative contributions to Torah, and the scales represent the essential ingredient of fear of Heaven, through which one's Torah study is preserved and becomes a source of "medicine that adds life." Consequently, if one possesses the quality of "scales," he is on the right track with his Torah study and will eventually enhance himself and the Torah with his "fins"—innovative thoughts which will be compatible to Torah truth. Such an individual is considered pure and clean. But one who studies Torah and does not have "scales"—fear of Heaven—is unclean and unfit. His Torah study and fins—innovations—are contrary to G-d's desire and it does not merit him the spiritual source of life which Torah gives to those who study it.

By Moshe Bogomilsky

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, March 31, 2024-21 Adar II, 5784
Purim Narbonne (1236)

In the course of a fight with a Christian fisherman, a Jew dealt him a blow which led to his death. The infuriated Christians of Narbonne, France, started rioting and attacking the Jewish community. The Governor of Narbonne, Don Aymeric, quickly intervened, and dispatched a contingent of soldiers to protect the Jewish community. The riot was immediately halted, and all the spoils stolen during the riots were returned to the Jews. The 21st of Adar was recorded as "Purim Narbonne," a day when the community annually celebrated this historic event.

R. Elimelech of Litzhensk (1786)

The great Rabbi Elimelech of Litzhensk (1717-1786) was one of the elite disciples of Rabbi DovBer, the Maggid of Mezritch, and a colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi. He is also widely known as the No'am Elimelech, the title of the renowned Chasidic work he authored. Rabbi Elimelech attracted many thousands of Chassidim, among them many who after his passing became great Chassidic masters in their own right. Most notable amongst them was Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer of Lublin." Many of the current Chasidic dynasties trace themselves back to Rabbi Elimelech.

Monday, April 1, 2024-22 Adar II, 5784

Earthquake Saves Jews (1430)

The church and the government of Rome set Wednesday, March 6, 1430, as the day when all the Jews of Rome must convert or face death. On that day a great earthquake shook Rome and many of the archbishops and priests who conceived the decree were killed. Following the earthquake, Pope Martin V annulled the decree.

Tuesday, April 2, 2024-23 Adar II, 5784

Mishkan assembled; 7 "days of training" (1312 BCE)

The Children of Israel began building the "Mishkan" (also called the "Tabernacle" - a portable sanctuary to house the Divine presence in their midst as they journeyed through the desert) on the 11th of Tishrei of the year 2449 from creation (1312 BCE) - six months after their Exodus from Egypt, four months after the

revelation at Sinai, and 80 days after their worship of the Golden Calf. The construction of the Mishkan, which followed a detailed set of instructions issued to Moses on Mount Sinai, lasted 74 days, and was completed on the 25th of Kislev; but the Divine command to erect the edifice came only three months later, on the 23rd of Adar, when Moses was instructed to begin a 7-day "training period."

During the week of Adar 23-29, the Mishkan was erected each morning and dismantled each evening; Moses served as the High Priest and initiated Aaron and his four sons into the priesthood. Then, on the "eighth day" -- the 1st of Nissan - the Mishkan was "permanently" assembled (that is, put up to stand until the Divine command would come to journey on), Aaron and his sons assumed the priesthood, and the divine presence came to dwell in the Mishkan.

Passing of 1st Rebbe of Ger (1866)

Chassidic Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Altar (1799-1866), author of Chiddushei Harim (a commentary on the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch), was a disciple of the Maggid of Koshnitz and Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, and the founder of the "Ger" (Gerer) Chassidic dynasty. All his 13 sons had died in his lifetime, and he was succeeded (in 1870) by his young grandson, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter (the "Sefat Emmet").

Death of Ari Halberstam (1994)

On 18 Adar (March 1) a terrorist opened machine-gun fire on a van filled with Chabad Yeshiva students as it began to cross the Brooklyn Bridge from Manhattan, critically wounding two young men and injuring two others. The killer had wished to fire at the Lubavitcher Rebbe—Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory—but could not get close enough. While three wounded students—including one who had a bullet lodged in his brain—recovered, 16-year-old Ari Halberstam succumbed to his wounds five days later, on 23 Adar.

Wednesday, April 3, 2024-24 Adar II, 5784

Blood Libel Declared False (1817)

On Adar 24, Czar Alexander I of Russia declared the Blood Libel - the infamous accusation that Jews murdered Christian children to use their blood in the

baking of matzah for Passover, for which thousands of Jews were massacred through the centuries - to be false. Nevertheless, nearly a hundred years later the accusation was officially leveled against Mendel Beilis in Kiev, then part of the Russian Empire.

Thursday, April 4, 2024-25 Adar II, 5784

Nebuchadnezzar died (397 BCE)

Death of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian emperor who conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the first Holy Temple 26 years earlier, died on the 25th of Adar of the year 3364 from creation. (*Jeremiah 52:31*)

Rebbitzin's Birthday (1901)

Rebbitzin Chaya Mushkah Schneerson (1901-1988) of righteous memory, wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe of righteous memory, was born on Shabbat, the 25th of Adar, in Babinovich, a town near the Russian city of Lubavitch, in the year 5661 from creation (1901). In an address delivered on the 25 of Adar of 1988 (the Rebbitzin's 87th birthday, and about a month after her passing), the Rebbe initiated an international birthday campaign, urging people to celebrate their birthdays and utilize the day as a time of introspection and making resolutions involving an increase in good deeds.

Shabbat, April 6, 2024-27 Adar II, 5784

Passing of Zedekiah (397 BCE)

Zedekiah was the last king of the royal house of David to reign in the Holy Land. He ascended the throne in 434 BCE, after King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia (to whom the kingdom of Judah was then subject) exiled King Jeconiah (Zedekiah's nephew) to Babylonia. In 425 BCE Zedekiah rebelled against Babylonian rule, and Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem (in Tevet 10 of that year); in the summer of 423 BCE the walls of Jerusalem were penetrated, the city conquered, the (first) Holy Temple destroyed, and the people of Judah exiled to Babylonia. Zedekiah tried escaping through a tunnel leading out of the city but was captured; his sons were killed before his eyes, and then he was blinded. Zedekiah languished in the royal dungeon in Babylonia until Nebuchadnezzar's death in 397 BCE; Evil Meroduch -- Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor -- freed him (and his nephew Jeconiah) on the 27th of Adar, but Zedekiah died that same day.