



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Tetzaveh

HAMELECH

Balls and Bells

In this week's *parashah*, we read of the eight garments which the *Kohein Gadol* wears as he does the *Avodah*. One of them, the *me'il*, was a skyblue colored sleeveless robe, with little bells and pomegranates on the bottom. They were not exactly real pomegranates, just circular, hollow embroidery. The *pasuk* says that the bells were to be *inside* of the pomegranates. Rashi explains that they were not really inside, just next to, such that each bell was flanked by two pomegranates. Ramban learns that the bell was literally inside of the pomegranate.

Gemara Zevachim (88b) teaches that each of the *Bigdei Kehuna* atoned for a particular type of sin of Klal Yisroel. The *me'il* atoned for *lashon harah*, denigrating speech. This is so because the *me'il* had bells which made noise. Explained Rabbi Hanina: Let a noisy garment come and atone for a noisy sin.

How many bells were on the *me'il*? Some say 72 and some say 36. Tosafot points out that we find a striking similarity in that the opening *mishnayot* of Masechet Negaim has a similar discussion as to the number of types of *tsora'at*: 72 or 36. *Tsora'at*, as we know, is the skin disease which is the punishment for improper speech.

Think Before You Speak

Alshich explains that the bells represented speech while the pomegranates represented silence. The bell "inside" or "flanked" by pomegranates indicates that silence is to prevail and be dominant over speech. The Alshich concludes that, in general, "the less a person speaks, the better."

Malbim adds that there is another connection between the *me'il* and watching what you say. Around the neck area of the *me'il* was an additional set of stitching. In the Torah's words, "there shall be a boundary around its mouth, so that it does not tear apart." This, says the Malbim, is a reminder to one and all, to appreciate that his tongue has been carefully encased behind two sets of guards: the lips and the teeth. A person should do his best to keep his mouth zippered close and not just "rip" it open to let out every last comment that comes to mind.

One who acts in this manner will see a fulfillment of the continuation of the verse: And his voice will be heard when he approaches the holy. On a literal level, this means that the bells of the *me'il* will emit a little jingle as the *Kohein* approaches the holy sanctuary.

Allegorically, this verse can mean that one who is cautious with his speech, only opening his mouth



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to say good things, will find that his voice will be listened to as he prays and learns Torah. His prayers will be answered and his Torah learning will provide their maximum effect, providing protection and infusing energy into all of existence.

Some Advantages of Silence

Megilla (18a) teaches that silence is the cure-all medicine. Rav Dimi came to Bavel with a message from Eretz Yisroel: If a word costs a dime, silence costs two.

Pesachim (98b) teaches: Silence behooves the wise; all the much more so, for the unwise! A silent fool is thought of as wise. [The truth is: the smartest things a fool can do is to remain silent!]

In Avot (3:13), Rabbi Akiva teaches: Silence is a fence around wisdom.

Rabbi Shimon taught (ibid. 1:17): I have always grown up amongst wise people and I found nothing more beneficial than silence.

Avot de Rabbi Natan expounds: Wisdom does not bring one to words, nor do words bring on wisdom. Too many words lead to sin.

The True Winner

Rabbi Illa'a teaches (Hullin 89a): The world exists in the merit of one who holds back his mouth while involved in a quarrel.

Rabbi Yitzchak teaches: What is a person's trade in this world? To become mute! Not for Torah, but for other matters.

Some people think that success is the ability to dominate the conversation and utter witty comments, even at the expense of hurting other people's feelings. Some feel that whoever got the last word in won the argument.

Our Torah teaches that the opposite is the truth. The one who knows how to control himself and be silent, he is the true winner. Much too often, marital harmony has been shattered due to this one failing: the all-too-quick retort. Sometimes a spouse says something that really should not have been said. When the other spouse riles back, oy! That's when sparks start flying and the opposite of "fun" begins. If only the insulted spouse could just bite their lip (if necessary) and control themselves, quite often, an apology is quick to follow. But when fire is returned with fire, that sets off an explosion which even the best fire extinguishers can only put out with great effort, after much damage has already been done, some of which may likely be irreparable.

The Rambam on Silence

Here is what the Rambam (De'ot 2:4) has to say: A person should be quiet, for the most part. He should only speak of matters of wisdom or about things which he needs in life. Rav, the *talmid* of Rabbeinu HaKadosh, never uttered an idle word.



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Most people just chat about nothing. Even regarding one's personal needs, he should keep it short, etc. Even when teaching or discussing Torah matters, try to say as little as possible; a few, choice words which contain much content.

Let's Learn from Lot

The cities of Sodom and Amorah got overturned overnight. No one escaped, except for... Lot and his two daughters. In what merit was Lot saved? Says Rashi: In response to his silence! When was Lot silent? When Avraham and Sarah went down to Egypt, they knew that they had to come up with a plan. Egypt was full of people who did not respect the concept of marriage and they had their own way of "taking care" of a pretty woman's husband. Now, Sarah Imeinu was not just pretty; she was gorgeous! She was the prettiest woman in the world, second only to Chava, who had been hand-made by Hashem!

They certainly had what to be concerned with. So they decided to call Sarah the sister of Avraham, instead of his wife. If they would leave her alone, good. And if not, at least they'll shower Avraham with gifts instead of taking his life. That was the common custom of the time: take a woman, pay the brother.

Here is where Lot comes into the story. He was Sarah's real brother. And he was in on the secret. At border control, when Avraham and Sarah

claimed to be brother and sister, Lot could have opened his mouth and said, "They're lying! He's the husband and I'm the brother." Money-thirsty Lot would have come out a whole lot wealthier. Yes he got some gifts, only as a tag along. Avraham got a whole lot more.

So when Lot was in Sodom, which merit got him out of there, just in the nick of time? Not his *hachnosat orchim*, although done with *mesirut nefesh*. His *midat hachessed* was second nature. His reward was in response to his effort, and his real inner battle was fought when he chose to remain silent, forgoing material gain.

We too, must learn how to hold our tongues, even if it seems that we may lose out by doing so, if, in the long run, seeing the big picture, it is the right thing to do.

The Silence of Rochel

Who else excelled in silence? Rochel Imeinu! Yaakov came to Charan to marry her. He met her and they agreed. She told Yaakov that they have to devise a plan to outsmart her deceitful father. So they did. But, at the last moment, Rochel could not bear to see Leah embarrassed, so not only did she not protest the exchange, she even went ahead and informed Leah of the secret "simanim" which Yaakov had told her.

In this merit, her son Yosef achieved *malchut*, sovereignty. Yosef saw in his dream that his



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alumah, his bundle, stood up staunch and all the other bundles bowed to his. The Medrash says that the word for bundle – *alumah* can also be read as silence – muteness. In the merit of Rochel's silence, he was given dominion over his brothers.

Silence of Yosef

Yosef himself also knew how to keep quiet. During his prolonged absence from his father's house, he never sent any messages home. Why not? The Alshich explains that he did not want to tell his father that his brothers had sold him. He wanted the brothers themselves to be the ones to let Yaakov know that Yosef was still alive.

Ramban (Bereshit 45:27) says that even after they were reunited, Yosef made every effort not to inform Yaakov that his brothers had sold him. As much as Yosef loved Yaakov and enjoyed his company and as well aware he was that he had much to give and to gain from spending quality time together, Yosef avoided being alone with Yaakov, throughout Yaakov's 17 years in Mitzrayim, lest the secret of the sale become known.

It Runs in the Family

Binyamin, too, Rochel's younger son, excelled in this trait. When the goblet was discovered in his sack, his brothers began beating him, calling him, "thief, son of thief," alluding to his mother's theft

of her father's *terafim*. What was Binyamin's reaction? Nothing. He knew that he hadn't taken it. But he would not shift the blame upon his brothers. Therefore he merited to have the *Shechinah* reside in his portion. Yes, in response to Binyamin's silence, the *Beit Hamikdash* was built in the portion of Shevet Binyamin.

The Chain Continues

As she was taken away, Mordechai told Esther not to reveal that she was a Jewess. Had it been a known fact, then Haman would have been on guard and would have found a way to include her in the decree as well. Since Esther kept her secret, Haman was unsuspecting and at the perfect moment, she was able to arouse the king's wrath against him.

Three or Four Words

Mishnah Berurah (571:2) teaches: It is better to abstain from excessive speech than to fast, for to go a whole day without eating and drinking could weaken the body and limit one's ability to do *mitzvot* properly.

The Vilna Gaon, in his famed letter, also addresses this point. He says that maintaining tight control and restraint in the area of speech is more beneficial than fasting or other such self-afflictions.

Someone once asked the Chazon Ish to attempt to influence a certain influential person, as that



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could help to get things moving towards funding a most significant endeavor; namely, building a *mikveh*.

The Chazon Ish responded, "Reb Yonah, do you know why people listen to me? Because I know when to keep silent."

Reb Yonah kept trying. "Maybe just say three or four words?"

The Chazon Ish replied, "Three or four words? Do you know what three or four words are?! They could change the status of a girl into a married woman! And you say 'just!'"

Silence Speaks Volumes

Rav Ben-tzion Abba Shaul would point out that people are very careful when sending a telegram to keep things as short as possible. Why? Because they pay per word. If only we would realize that we, too, 'pay' per word!

On a number of occasion, meetings of accomplished Rabbis and community leaders took place in his home. On one such occasion, heated discussions took place for an hour and a half. As the meeting came to a close, Rabbi Yehuda Adas noted, "We came to Chacham Ben-tzion to hear his opinion. Yet, he just sat here the whole time and said nothing."

Message from Heaven

Maran Beit Yosef was visited regularly by an angel, who taught him many valuable lessons,

some of which were recorded in the Sefer Maggid Meisharim. One such lesson is: Before a word leaves your mouth, think if you can manage without saying it! If you are in doubt, just stay silent until you are sure that you need to say it.

Proper Balance

Certainly, one cannot go to the other extreme. Need we repeat that sad story of the *avreich* who thought he was being self-righteous when he chose to be silent and not utter a word to his wife! The poor woman could not take it any longer! She went to the Maharal Diskin, who called for the *avreich* and then ignored him for several hours, until he got a "taste of his own medicine."

Certainly, healthy conversations and communication is the cornerstone of developing relationships. The "silence" we are promoting here is mainly in the realm of not being hasty to responding to insults, and to think before you speak.

Speech was created for a purpose. When used right, it can build worlds, most importantly, your own. But when misused, there is not enough ink in the world to describe the harm it can do.

So let us be wise and speak with discretion.

Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka