



Parashat Vayetze



English version

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Swimming in Silence

Rachel acquired the skill of silence, so that even when her father was giving her shower gifts to Leah, she kept quiet. Therefore, her descendants all mastered silence. Binyamin knew that the tribes sold his only brother as a slave. And he kept his mouth shut. This is why her son Binyamin's stone on the High Priest's breastplate was Yashpeh. Yesh – there is; Peh – a mouth. This is why her descendant Shaul became king, for his modesty in not telling his uncle that he became king. This is where her descendent, Esther, had the power to keep from revealing to Achashverosh that she was a Jewess. Leah, on the other hand, took the skill of praise and admitting. She praised G-d for giving her Yehuda, so her descendants followed. Yehuda admitted his embarrassing act. King David praised G-d in Tehillim. (See Rabenu Bachye)

Silence is referred to as a skill elsewhere. *What skill does a person need to learn? To make himself like a mute.* (Chullin 89a) This brings to mind the four monks. *Four monks decided to meditate, silently, without speaking for two weeks. By nightfall on the first day, the candle began to flicker and then went out. The first monk said, "Oh, no! The candle is out." The second monk said, "Aren't we not supposed to talk?" The third monk said, "Why must you two break the silence?" The fourth monk laughed and said, "Ha! I'm the only one who didn't speak."* Isn't silence a path to pain and self-affliction? How is it referred to in the Midrash as a skill?

Judaism maintains that when silence is balanced in a healthy way, silence can also be a path to wisdom and self-introspection. As Albert Einstein once

said, I think 99 times and find nothing. I stop thinking, swim in silence, and the truth comes to me.

Let us replay that. How does one find the truth? By swimming in silence. How does one swim in silence? By stopping to think. How does one stop thinking? By thinking 99 times and finding nothing. Silence is needed when you realize that your speech, your inner dialogue, is not getting you anywhere. When words are not doing their job. Of clarification. Of communication. Of persuasion. Of appreciation. Of praise. That is when it is time to swim in silence.

My best articles come to me when I give up trying to lay down words to direct my train of thought. I swim in silence. The ideas percolate in my mind... And then I realize the real truth of what I wanted to say and how I want to say it. סייג לחכמה שתיקה. *The [retaining] fence of wisdom is silence.* And when you want the real truth, the underlying truth, it comes only when you stop talking and thinking.

If we were to make the analogy between communication and driving a car, Silence does not mean that you are in Park. Silence is a Brake to use, to have safe driving. If you do not have the wisdom of how to use your brakes, your life is in danger. Hence, the words of King David **החיים** **הלשון** (Mishlei 18:21): *Two representatives stood in front of Andrinus, the Ceasar. One was of speech. The other was of silence. The king said to Speech, "Say why you are so important!" He said, "Because without Speech, Kings won't be able to rule. Ships won't be able to*



sail. Brides won't be able to be praised. Without speech, commerce would be impossible". The king said, "Good points! Now, Silence, it is your turn."

Before Silence even got a chance to open its mouth to speak, Speech slapped his face... "King, Speech can use speech to praise speech. But how can Silence use speech to praise silence!?! To that, Silence said, "Silence that is praised is not total silence. It is the wisdom of how to be careful when speaking. As King Solomon said, "בְּרֵב דְּבָרִים לֹא יִחְדַּל-פֶּשַׁע וְחָשָׁד שִׁפְתָיו מִשְׁכִּיל" (Mishle 10; 19) (Orchot Tzaddikim).

This balance between speech and silence is something that we see throughout Rachel's life and the life of her descendants. All of Rachel's struggles in life, and the struggles of her children, were related to balancing silence with speech. Between not saying something, to speaking up. Between hiding identity and knowing when to reveal it. Knowing when to admit, or when to rebuke. I would need another whole article just to go through all the cases of Rachel, Binyamin, Yosef, Shaul, Yehonatan, Michal, Mordechai and Esther.

The times that silence is important are listed by the Orchot Tzaddikim. Here are the Stop Signs. 1. *Accepting G-d's Judgement.* 2. *When being degraded by others.* 3. *In Shul during prayers-Silence there is the ultimate modesty, for it brings focus to prayers.* 4. *When sitting amongst wiser people. This way you can learn from them.* 5. *When there is no one around you than can correct you... When in doubt, and you can ask someone wiser than you, do not keep silence.*

It is interesting to see how, in all the episodes that silence was dealt with in the frame of these 5 Golden Silence Rules, the outcome was always very successful. But whenever these rules were broken, the price was too heavy. This is why winning in the game of silence is an art.

The belief of the Rasha is Lavan's belief – *My power lies in my hands* - יָשׁוּבָא לִי (Rabbenu Bachye.) But Rachel's way, the

way to swim in silence, the way to stop thinking, is by believing that any power that I have or don't have is fine, because it is all from G-d. King David said, לָךְ גְּמָלָהּ תְהֵיָלָה (Tehillim 65;2) *To you, G-d, silence is praise.* How so? There is no greater praise to G-d than accepting Him, even when you cannot comprehend or explain His ways...

It is so interesting how Silence, when accepting G-d's decree, is this art of trust in G-d, this power of humility that is able to make everything turn out for the best. *If this is the father G-d gave me, I accept. If my sister Leah is walking down to the Chuppah with my husband and I cannot do anything about it, I accept. If my husband doesn't understand me the one time I said how much I wanted a child, I accept. And, if my G-dly husband decided to bury me on the road, I won't even ask him to be buried in Maarat Hamachpela. I will give my burial spot to my sister.* Rachel accepted her husband's decision to bury her "on the road" and not next to him in prime location, in Maarat Hamachpela. In the end, in 2018 her grave is the Jewish grave that is most visited in the whole world... Why?

When someone has the power of silence, they just open their mouth to pray, and before they even start praying, G-d answers their prayers. מְנַעֵי קוֹלֶךָ מְבָרֵי On the way down to Exile, and during the Exile, every second of prayer is precious. We cannot wait for Leah's eyes to fill with tears. So Rachel is in the right place, in an accessible place, so that if she just has a tremble in her voice, G-d says, *Rachel! Stop! I don't need you to pray! I can read your mind! I'll answer your heart's wishes, even before a tear wells up...*

And this is the way we can become true Tzaddikim. As Ralph Mahana once taught me in the name of R' Levi Yitzchak Berdichever - ס ע פ צ. If you want to become a Tzaddik (letter Tzaddik), you need to learn how to close (letter Samech is a closed letter - ס) your eyes (Ayin is also Eye) and your mouth (Peh is also Mouth)...

The greatest communicators were masters of silence, knowing when to use it and for how long.

The greatest comedians, the greatest musicians and performers, were all masters of silence. G-d, Himself, runs the world in silence. The movement of the sun and moon, all of nature, grass, trees, it is

all so silent. That is how G-d communicates with us and the way we connect to nature and G-d. Only after we connect through this silence can we pray to Him a focused prayer.

A JEW OF ANOTHER LEVEL

Rachel gave her sister, Leah, the Simanim. She taught her the laws of family purity, of challah and of lighting candles. She could not bear to see her sister go through the embarrassment of Yaakov's discovering that it was Leah, not Rachel, under the chuppa.

We see later in the parasha, in the Dudaim episode, וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמַּעַט כְּחֻתְתִּי אֶת־אִשִּׁי וְלָקַחַת גַּם אֶת־דִּודָאִי בְנִי וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דִּודָאִי בְנִי (30; 15) Reuven brought home "dudaim", mandrakes, a plant whose root resembles the form of a child. (see Ibn Ezra. I saw a picture of it. It's actually very cool.) It is a Segulah for having children. Rachel asked Leah for this Segulah, and Leah said to her sister Rachel, the sister who gave her the signs that Yaakov was waiting for, "*Not only did you take **my husband**, you also want to take my son's dudaim? And Rachel said, That is why Yaakov will sleep with you tonight, in exchange for your son's dudaim/mandrakes.* Why didn't Rachel answer back - Excuse me!!! **I took YOUR husband?!!?**

R. Shwadron explains that at the wedding, Rachel never told Leah that she had already agreed on giving certain signs - simanim - to Yaakov to assure him of her identity, and that these laws were the simanim. She just told her, if you are marrying him, you have to know these Jewish laws. For all the years they were married together, Rachel never let Leah feel, even for a minute, that she, herself, was Yaakov's first choice!!!

This explains why, at that point, *G-d remembered Rachel's good deed for her sister, and G-d opened her womb.* What? What happened now? What about the last 6 years of Rachel's self sacrifice? The answer is that only now, Rachel's self sacrifice and G-dliness reached a new level: not only did she

give her sister her intended, not only did she hide her relationship with him from her, but even when her sister Leah told her, *Not only do you want to take **my husband**....* She just accepted what Leah was saying and went along with the conversation!!!

After learning this explanation of the story, Rachel Imenu, in my eyes, is a totally different Rachel. A whole new perspective of our Matriarch. Her self sacrifice was not a one timer, a one off. Her Avodah was a constant. We can learn from this, perfecting the good deeds we do, and taking them to a new level of serving G-d. And ultimately become the Jew we want to be.

We are all here to serve G-d in some way or another. And we all need merits. And so much goodness that is in store for us, is dependent on those good things that we do. And sometimes, it is just a drop more effort, a drop more perfection of serving G-d, that tips the scales in our favor. It is sometimes just that one thing that makes the whole difference.

Sometimes when attempting to take my service to G-d to a new level, I get this feeling. "Yosef, you gave up so much already! How much more self sacrifice do you need?" The answer is, that what we think we are sacrificing is actually not so much of a sacrifice. When we do the right thing, we are not really giving anything up, losing out on anything, or sacrificing. Allow me to explain.

Rav Zev Getzel points to something mindboggling. Imagine that Rachel would not have told Leah the simanim. Yaakov would discover Lavan's scam at the wedding, and tell her that this is obviously some sort of misunderstanding, and take Rachel instead. And then what? Then, Rachel would not have the merit of self sacrifice, the merit for which



G-d would open her womb!!! Now, fast forward. So, they would stay married for 10 years, and then Yaakov would see that they are not having children. He would end up divorcing Rachel and marrying Leah!!! And then, *Rachel* would end up marrying Esav!

It turns out that Rachel's self sacrifice was actually her saving grace. This is so powerful, so transforming, in so many ways!

The everlasting, ironic, and sometimes annoying truth is, that the only choice we have in life is between doing the right or the wrong thing. Whatever is going to happen, is going to happen anyway. So we are not sacrificing those things that are important to us when we give them up for doing the right thing, because whatever our destiny is, is going to be our destiny anyway. We can only make our destiny better, when we do the right thing.

The Chafetz Chaim says that it can't be, that a person who sits in Kollel, or another year or two in Yeshiva, trusting G-d and lasting as long as his Rabbis recommend him to stay in learning, will

end up losing out because he did the right thing. This is because, we are so dependent on G-d's Plan. And when G-d sees that we are moser nefesh, that we give up things that are important to us for His sake, He "gives up" things for us. He is, so to speak, moser nefesh for us. And when we are moser nefesh, we will find that not only did we not lose, but the very thing that we thought we lost, what we thought we sacrificed, turned out to be our greatest asset!

In the area of coaching, this is of key importance. The 6 P rule, Proper prior planning prevents poor performance, is only true for performance, not for destiny. All we can plan for in life is personal performance, aiming to be the best people we can be. But our destiny, the outcome, is entirely in G-d's Hands. All we have to do in this world is to ask ourselves what it is that G-d wants from us, according to His Torah. Not to live with long term plans, unless they are plans for our own performance. Planning is good for me when I use it to clarify what my expectations are from myself. It is not effective when it builds inside me expectations of G-d. This is a fine line, and a very important one to remember.

Shabbat Shalom, Yosef Farhi

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