



Parashat Bo



English version

THINKING about ME.org

THE ART OF HOLDING BACK THE BARK

The best investment in a volatile place like Covidland is saying Perek Shira each day. Perek Shira, a compilation of praise from the elements of creation, is one of the most amazing segulot, with the greatest perks. A promise of longevity, financial stability, Olam Haba. A promise that you will learn, keep and teach Torah, be saved from your Evil Inclination, from Gehinom and bad occurrences. It brings your prayers up to the highest Heavens, brings you great goodness, protects you from sickness, and will give you a life as good as it will be in the times of Mashiach.

The end praise of all the creatures mentioned in Perek Shira, is that of the dogs. **כְּלָבִים אוֹמְרִים בָּאוּ** The dogs, say, *Come! Let us prostrate ourselves, bow our heads, bend our knees in front of YKVK, the One who makes us great.* This is so interesting, for a couple of reasons. 1. The only living creature mentioned in Perek Shira in plural form is the dogs. All other creatures are referred to in singular form, Snake, Rooster, Dove, Elephant, Lion, etc. 2. Why is it that all the praises of the Universe end, specifically, with the praise of the dogs? 3. Snake says, **סוֹמֵךְ גִּיּוֹן לְכָל־הַנִּפְלִיּוֹת וְזוֹלָה לְכָל־הַכַּפּוּפִּים** *G-d supports all the fallen ones and makes those who are bowed down, erect.* This is *appropriate* for Snake, to be hopeful for his future. Wolf speaks of wrongdoing appropriate to its species, **עַל־פְּלִדְבַר־פֶּשַׁע**. But why should the dogs be the “tzadikim” that call out to all others to come and praise G-d? This bothered “R’ Yeshaya”, a student of R Hanina Ben Dosa, so much, he fasted 85 fasts, equal to the numerical value of פה, Mouth. “How

could it be that the dogs, that are considered brazen (Yeshaya 56;11), merit saying such praise?”

An angel told R’ Yeshaya that this secret was not to be revealed, but there would be an exception for him. It is not what the dogs did; it is what they did *not* do. During the Firstborn Plague, the dogs did not bark like they usually do when they see the Angel of Death in town. They did not disturb the Jews, who were rushing to pack their bags for the Exodus. They would be rewarded for their silence, **וּבִשְׂרָר בְּשִׂדָּה טָרְפָה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ לְקֶלֶב תִּשְׁלַכּוּן אֹתוֹ** *All unkosher meat – should be given to the dogs.* They are to be rewarded by having the parchments for Torah scrolls, Tefillin, and Mezuzah made from skins, processed in dog’s excrement. And they are to be rewarded with being the ones to end Perek Shira, praising and calling others to give praise. In the merit of the dogs going against their nature, keeping quiet for just that one night, they merited these HUGE, eternal rewards.

This explains a lot. All other creatures are referred to in the singular, for that is the original form of creation. But the Dogs were rewarded for what the Egyptian dogs *didn’t* do that night of the Egyptian plague. Of course, it is not the same dogs that get rewarded with the non-kosher meat for what was done that night. It is not the same dogs’ excrement being used for making the holy parchments. But this is to teach *us* the lesson from this brazen species that went against their nature that night and held themselves back: **how golden holding silence is.** As the angel finished, by saying **וְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ**



שֹׁמֵר מִצְרֹות נִפְשׁוֹ: *one who guards his mouth and tongue, guards himself from all harm.*

There is no greater praise to G-d than holding our tongue. לִהְיוֹת הַמְּיָהּ תְהִלָּה. The most significant praise to G-d is silence, acceptance, holding back “the bark”. The dogs merited for their silence, measure for measure, being the ones to sing and praise G-d, and calling others to join them. A person who holds his tongue to listen, who avoids speaking when it has no purpose or avoids adding that tactless comment – such a person is promised immeasurable reward. The reward for that one moment of silence is unfathomable, even to the greatest angels. (Vilna Gaon)

Holding your tongue when you are supposed to is rewarded, even more than passing all the ten tests of Avraham Avinu, and here is proof: when the Jews sinned and needed to be exiled, the transgressions were so great that they deserved never to come back to the Holy Land. Avraham Avinu attempts to defend the nation with the merits of all the tests he passed; Yitzhak and Yaakov try to defend the nation... but nothing is strong enough to nullify the decree. But then, Rachel Imenu turns to G-d. In the merit of her silence, her not revealing that Leah was the bride – she won the case and saved the entire nation from the worst decrees!

Many tests that we go through are just tests of our ability to hold our tongue in disguise. Even the tests of Avraham were, to some degree, to see if he had enough faith to hold his tongue. He did not have much choice whether or not to sacrifice his son Yitzhak. If G-d wanted to take Yitzhak's life, there was nothing that Avraham could do. But the test was to see if Avraham would ask G-d about the

apparent contradiction to G-d's previous words, that Avraham's offspring would be from Yitzhak. The test of going to the Promised Land and finding famine there was, also, a test to see if Avraham would say anything. When Eliezer made a deal with G-d that the girl that offers to give his camels to drink would be the girl for Yitzhak, and Rivka offered this service, Eliezer still waited until after she finished. Why? Eliezer wanted to see if Rivka would ask for something, even just a thank you, in return for her services. But when Rivka finished giving the camels to drink, she turned around and started walking home, happy to be a nice, kind person. That is when Eliezer proposed Yitzhak to Rivka, after her silence! (Seforno)

Why is silence the strongest merit in the Universe? The answer is so profound. We constantly remind ourselves, in the Mitzvot we perform, that G-d took us out of Egypt. What is the purpose of this constant reminder of Exodus, which, if not understood, can even seem redundant? It is to constantly remind us that each Jew is G-d's Firstborn Son, and G-d cares while we suffer, even if He is “silent”. And that G-d has a plan to reveal, soon, why He was silent for so long. As the Jews realized this at the splitting of the Sea, they sang מִי כַמוֹכָה בְּאֱלֹהִים ה' *Who can be compared to You among the gods, YKVK.* R' Yishmael teaches, that this should be read, with a twist. מִי כַמוֹכָה בְּאֱלֹהִים. *Who is comparable to You G-d, amongst the mutes?* No one can keep silent for so long, as G-d does. (Gittin 56b) And, all for a purpose, at the end. When G-d reveals Himself, He does so, in silence, קוֹל דְּמַמָּה דַקָּה, (Melachim A:19,11-12) We have a Mitzvah to go in G-d's way, וְהִלַכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָיו, and part of this lifelong mission is mastering silence. (Hullin 89a)

Selfie steps to master golden silence and hold back your bark:

1. Silence does not mean being a social outcast, anti-conversationalist, subject of abuse, never speaking up, or passive. Silence is the golden balance in People Skills called assertiveness, an art of standing up for your rights without stepping on anyone else's toes. Assertiveness is a delicate balance between the two ineffective extremes. Aggressiveness: Offensive, personal, judgmental, insulting, obnoxiously opinionated, over-responding. And Passiveness: Defensive: victimized,



abused, mistreated, used, ignored, being withdrawn. Silence is speaking with C4 power: Constructive, Concise, Clarity and self-Control.

2. Patience is the key to master the art of speaking only what is effective and important. Holding the bark is the greatest challenge in life. But it is the key to focusing, humility, and fear of Heaven. One of the reasons why, at times, our prayers are not answered, is because we speak words without meaning and purpose. (See P. Yoetz יח"ט)
3. Realize that G-d created His world with the most advanced, precise, built-in, voice to text speech recognition that writes every word ever said. After 120, Heaven reads you the sets and sets of unedited encyclopedias written from your speech. What a shame to see useless books of nonsense, meaningless talk at the end of a lifetime. (Vayikra R. 26;7) Make sure that you speak words of meaning.
4. Judaism has a unique definition of a good conversationalist and a guideline to precisely what is effective schmoozing. Differentiate between rambling, which is negative, and rumbling, which is positive. Rambling is diverting from the original topic, purpose, or meaning of the conversation. Rumbling, literally means a continuous, deep, low sound. In People Skills, though, "rumbling" is an art of conversing with a continuous thought, with meaningful depth, and in a soft tone of voice. Rumbling is opening up an openminded conversation, even if it is a challenging conversation over a "messy topic" that makes you vulnerable. Rumbling is making conversation with the potential for some purposeful breakthrough, identifying a problem and solving it, or making someone feel good.

THE ART OF EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

Martin Seligman, the author of Learned Optimism and founder of modern-day Positive Psychology, writes that successful people are usually positive people. Positive people are masters at the three Ps. They believe that 1. Problems are not **permanent**. 2. Problems are not worse than they are; they are not **pervasive**. 3. Positive people don't take things **personally**.

How does one who is disliked not take it personal? "My Rebbi/ teacher/ friend/boss/ in-laws doesn't like me anymore!" "No one wants to date my daughter/ son!" "Nobody likes Baalei Teshuva" "Nobody likes Sephardim" "Nobody likes Ashkenazim" "Nobody likes Jews" The thought that you are not wanted or liked, by family, by society or by the community, can scar. How do we train ourselves and others to cope with not being liked?

Judaism teaches us that if someone does not like us, it is because G-d does not want them to like us. And if someone does like us, it is because G-d

allowed it. It is not that the person decided not to like you. It is that G-d does not want that person to be fond of you, for some reason. It has little to do with that person, and a lot to do with G-d, something that we learn from this week's parashah.

G-d could have taken us out of Egypt with one Plague. Instead, G-d preferred ten plagues to show humanity once and for all, that all of nature is subservient to Him. Exodus is a glimpse of how much G-d is involved in every part of our everyday lives. When G-d introduced Himself at Mt. Sinai, He presented Himself as the G-d that took us out of Egypt, not as the G-d who created the Universe. Because G-d wants us to recognize Him as forever alive in our every breath, thought, and reality.

R Friedlander points to something that I felt that every Jew who feels disliked deserves to know. When G-d kept His promise to Avraham that his descendants would leave their slavery with great wealth, He did so in such an unusual way. G-d asked Moshe to tell the Jews to *borrow* goods from



the Egyptians so that they leave with the not returned goods. The Egyptian neighbor, who until now was only disgusted from the Jew, was now ironically pleased to lend their best utensils and possessions to the Jews.

Why did G-d make this seemingly superfluous miracle? G-d could have forced the Egyptians to give up their possessions, even against their will! Why did G-d specifically want the Jew to borrow, and depend on the Egyptian being nice to him? Dependent on the Egyptian liking the Jew?

The answer is because G-d wanted the Jew to know that the antisemitism was only possible because He allowed it. Once G-d wanted it to stop, the Egyptians were happy to do favors for the Jew! All of a sudden, all the gentiles liked the Jews! G-d was showing the world, once and for all, that G-d is in charge if people will like you or dislike you!

Why did G-d want that the Egyptians should not like the Jews until the Exodus? Our Rabbis tell us that there was a reason for this. During the years of the Egyptian exile, the Jew would attempt to blend and be as Egyptian as possible. G-d did not want us to lose our Jewish identity in Egypt, so He caused the Egyptians to hate us. But now, that the Jews were at the Exodus, G-d wanted to show the Jew, that it was G-d who caused the Egyptian not to like the Jew! G-d preferred that the Jew borrows from the Egyptian, to show, that He is in control of who likes who.

The secret to emotional resilience is to bring G-d into the equation. If you are disliked, and you have no control over it, it is because G-d for whatever reason wills that this person dislikes you.

If you want to do great things and become great, you need to do what is right and ignore what people might say. You cannot anchor yourself on what people think is "normal." After all, there is no one "normal." "Normal" is only a setting on washing machines and dryers. If you follow the Torah's way and you are disliked, then G-d does not want you to be liked for some amazing but unknown reason. It is only to help you, not to hurt

you. If you are being the best person you can be, and still you are not liked, G-d has His plan. Only by living this way, we can become emotionally resilient, and our child follow.

One of the most excellent questions to ask someone who is feeling not liked, not accepted, is, "Aside from G-d, which three or four people do you care what they think about what you do or what type of person you are?" If you cared about what everyone thought about you, you would become a slave to society!

I care what my Rebbi thinks about me. I care about what my Rabbi-mentor feels about me. I care what my wife, mother, and father think about me. That's it! From the moment that I embraced this new mindset, I felt like I free man. A real, personal, emotional Exodus!

I began meditating on not caring if others like me, so long I am doing the right thing. What a powerful emotional exercise! Here are some of the thoughts that I came up with; some of them are empowering, and some are just funny!

I don't care if you tell me no when I ask you for a favor. I don't care if you don't want to donate to the causes that I feel important enough to get involved in and collect for. I don't care if you don't like my Sephardic accent, or the fact that I am a Jew. I don't care if no one responds to my ads of Effective Learning Specialist. I don't care if you don't like this article or the way I write.

Wow! That felt so good! That felt awesome to *think* that and *write* that! Can you feel the power in meditating on all the things that you really could not care about? Do you realize how emotionally liberating this can be? If G-d wants me to be disliked, and I am doing the right thing, it means that He has a reason for it!

Social media taught us that people could become addicted to checking if they are liked, and for the dumbest of things. How many hearts were broken because of the lack of a "like"? Whatsapp groups and status, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have shown us how much people need to feel liked,



by anyone, for anything. But what if it is all G-d? What if, for some reason, G-d does not want you to be popular in this area at the moment?

If you are liked or not, it is not "them"; it is G-d. That is what G-d wants. It could be a test, and it could be a blessing. Whatever it is, it is because that is what G-d decided.

So what are the Selfie Steps to cope with not being liked?

- Stop overthinking what you have no control over. Recognize that G-d can

EMOTIONAL OXYGEN TUBES

At the beginning of the Parasha, before the plague of the locust, G-d tells Moshe, לְמַעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי-בְנֶיךָ. I will bring these plagues on Pharaoh, in order for you to tell of it in the ears of your children and grandchildren. What was so special about the plague of the locust that only here, not in reference to any other plague, G-d said that we are to tell our children and grandchildren?

It is interesting. Each plague was a month. A week of plague and three weeks' break. That means that the plague of Firstborn was Nissan, Darkness was Adar, (ליהודים היתה אורה ושמה ושון ויקר), And Locust was Shevat. Even before this plague of Locusts, in the beginning of Shevat, Pharaoh had tried to bargain. Let only the men go now. The children stay in Egypt. Only the men need to go to serve G-d, not the kids. Moshe said, nothing doing. We are not leaving anyone behind. So Pharaoh refused, and opted for the plague.

In essence, if we wanted to worry about our own spirituality, alone, we could have just left the children behind, for the meantime, while we go to Har Sinai and accept the Torah. But, by staying for another three months, until Pharaoh gave in, by slowing down our own spirituality for the sake of the spirituality of the children, we merited וְלְמַעַן תְּסַפֵּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי-בְנֶיךָ. The power of connection, that our children will be willing to listen to religion, and to trust in it enough, to pass it down to their own children. Because the only way we can

switch things around faster than you can blink! He changes people's hearts all the time.

- Meditate often on all the things you do not care about.
- Carefully choose the three or four people that you care what they think about your decisions and behavior.

affect our children, to keep them religious, is to slow down for them.

Slowing down does not mean lowering our own level of observance, for their sake. It means having patience with them; it means taking interest in their seemingly simple values. It means recognizing that they are not moving at our pace, and it requires us to learn what is on their mind. To be emotionally present with them.

There is a power-question I use when trying to connect with people. *What do you do in your spare time?* This question helps me find the values of the person I am trying to connect with. And in order for me to coach someone successfully, I need to build rapport. And rapport is dependent on how well you connect. It is a mistake to think, "I am too much above this", "My Shabbat table should be only Divrei Torah". If you want to influence, you need trust. If you want trust, you need rapport. If you want rapport, you need to slow down.

When R Moshe Feinstein came to test yeshiva bachurim on the Perek they learnt, R Moshe did not end up testing them. He asked them, What do you do in your spare time? They said, "We play basketball". R Moshe opened up the conversation: "In what ways can you play basketball like a Jew, differently from a Gentile?" Because R Moshe knew that to influence, you need rapport, you need to bond. To be Mekarev effectively, you cannot use the "Join Us" method. That one does not work.



Effective Kiruv is about getting a person from his own point A to his own point B. From the Jew he is, to the Jew he wants to be. ON THEIR TERMS. Because *the only way you can connect*, is on their terms.

This reminds me of a story from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. There was once a prince who went through an identity crisis and came to the conclusion that he was really a turkey and not a human being. The king was ready to do anything to cure his son. The finest doctors and psychiatrists tried to cure the prince, all to no avail. The king was at a loss, until a gentle-looking, wise man came to the palace. He offered his help, which the king and queen were ready to accept.

The following day, the prince had company under the table. It was the wise man. "What are you doing here?" asked the turkey prince. "Why are you here?" "I am a turkey" "Well, I am also a turkey," The wise man began to gobble like a turkey and peck at the crumbs on the floor. The prince was convinced. A few days passed in this fashion.

One morning, the wise man signaled to the king to bring him a shirt. He said to the prince, "I don't see any reason a turkey can't wear a shirt." The prince thought about it and agreed, and soon the two of them were wearing shirts. The wise man asked to be brought a pair of pants. He said to the prince, "Is it forbidden for turkeys to wear pants? Of course not!" The prince thought it over and agreed, and soon the two of them were wearing pants.

The process continued. The wise man convinced the prince that it was not forbidden for turkeys to eat human food, which surely tasted better. Then came sitting at the table and enjoying human conversation. Within a short time, the turkey prince, although still maintaining that he was a turkey, began conducting himself exactly like a regular person.

So many times, we can't help others because we are so busy with our own spirituality, projects, or just busy being busy. Rabbi YY Jacobson said, in

the name of his Rebbi, something very powerful. We know that Reuven saved Yosef from his brothers, by putting him in the pit. Then, the brothers sat down to eat lunch, and during lunch, Shimon and Levi decided to kill Yosef. Yehuda saved Yosef by selling him. Reuven came back to the pit, and Yosef was gone. Reuven tore his clothes, and asked his brothers what they had done. And, now, how was he to face his father?

Rashi asks, where was Reuven at the time of the sale? Why did he disappear when his brothers sat down for lunch? Because Reuven went to do his fasting, sackcloth and ashes, for his hasty act of moving his father's bed next to his mother, Leah's, so many years earlier.

But Reuven! You could have saved us all from 210 years of slavery in Egypt, if you would have just stayed there at the pit and watched over your brother! If you would not have been busy doing Teshuva, but instead, had kept your eyes on your brother in the pit, you could have gotten forgiveness for your mistake from your father, just by being responsible and saving your brother Yosef's life!!

How many times do we not notice our "brother in the pit", because we are too busy with our own lofty levels of spirituality? How many times in life could we have just said the right thing, or just done the right thing, if we would have not been so busy with our own selves??!!

This reminds me of a sad Mashal. Chaim had been a faithful Jew and was in the hospital, breathing his last. The family called their rabbi and asked him to be with them. As the rabbi stood next to the bed, old Chaim's condition appeared to deteriorate, and he motioned frantically for something to write on. The rabbi lovingly handed him a pen and a piece of paper, and Chaim used his last bit of energy to scribble a note before he died. The rabbi thought it best not to look at the note at that time, so he placed it in his jacket pocket.

At the funeral, as he was finishing his eulogy, he realized that he was wearing the same jacket that



he had been wearing when Chaim died. He said, to himself and the crowd, “You know, Chaim handed me a note just before he died. I haven’t looked at it, but knowing Chaim, I’m sure there’s a word of inspiration there for us all.” He opened the note, and read, “Hey, you’re standing on my oxygen tube!”

THE P3 TREE MODEL OF THE SUCCESSFUL

On Tu B’shvat, we don’t say Tachanun; we do not confess our sins, for it is a day of celebration. We celebrate the trees, *הג לאילנות*. It is considered a new year in regard to tithing. Why does the birthday of the tree fall at a time when it is bare of fruit? Why does the birthday of the trees effect *our* saying or not saying Tachanun?

The Torah compares Man to a tree, *כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה*, for *The Man is a tree of the field* (Devarim 20; 19). Why? What is the parallel between a man and a tree? The secrets of life success can be learned from a tree. There are certain things in life that we can’t understand without an analogy. The Torah uses the power of parable to explain the essence of life to Man. There are a few types of trees, as there are a few types of people. There are those who produce beautiful fruit, there are those who produce regular fruit, and there are those who do not produce at all. The secret of successful living is to learn from the life cycle of the tree, to bring out the best of oneself in life. It is broken down to P 3.

Successful people Project. They plan ahead, Projecting into the future. Most people overestimate what they can produce in a year and underestimate what they can produce in 5 years. The successful people project, in great detail, how things *can* look in 5 years from now, and work each day on attaining their new goal. They know what type of “fruits”, what type of life they want to have in five years from now. And in accordance to the dream, the vision, the Product, they know which seeds to plant, when to plant them, and where. They guard their time, like a hawk, to get the most out of every minute to get them where they want to be.

How many times do we not realize that because we are so busy with our own growth, or with our “status”, that we are stepping on the emotional oxygen tubes of our loved ones?

Successful people are aware of their Potential. The first Man was called Adam, because that expressed his essence. That he came from the Adamah, the earth, dirt. Sounds insulting? Yes, and no. If you do not see your potential, then you will return to the ground as earth. But earth has, also, a flip side. With earth, one can create so many amazing things. The parallel of Man to dirt is potential. There’s another meaning concealed in the name “Adam”: man has a lofty potential of “*adameh*”, I will be similar to G-d; I will try to emulate Him.

This is the idea of being Tree-like. Successful people see if they have the right seeds, the right strengths, to do what it takes. They have enough self-awareness to know clearly if they have the Potential to make these fruits develop. Now, once they see the potential, they celebrate. Because once you catch a glimpse of your potential, passion is born. The idea of Tu Bishvat is celebrating the potential.

And, the third P, successful people have Patience. According to Business Expert Brian Tracy, It takes 7 years to establish a successful business. The first two years, you lose money and time as you learn the new business. The next two years, you have enough experience to know what your Unique Selling Proposition is, and you start breaking even. The next three years, you are living comfortably, as you pay back your debt. Once you are seven years in the business, you have the experience you need to reach the top 10 percent of your field. Once you reach that, you will be earning 20 to 30 percent more than the average worker in your field. Any business that can be successfully built in a year or two will be met with a flooded market of competition. And you will always be under threat of strong competition, until you are able to become



one of the top 10 percent experts of your field. So, you need patience, in order to build any healthy business.

We live in a Microwave generation, a Smartphone “scatterbrain” generation, and it has become extremely difficult to simply wait patiently for anything good, no matter how important. Whether it is Torah learning, business, Shalom Bayit, or raising wonderful children. But the trees that grow slowly, but steadily, tended with patience and care, bear the best fruit. A tree has a whole root system, beginning with very thin, hair-like roots and developing into thick ones. A Talmud scholar will not find himself rooted in Torah learning, if he keeps ripping out the tree from the ground to check if he is “getting anywhere”. The tree won’t grow, and he won’t see the fruits of labor.

And, one last analogy from human life to a tree. In Ramat Shlomo, Jerusalem, two weeks ago, the Jerusalem Municipality painted the parts of the trees where the non-productive branches had been removed, with a blue glue/paint. My student asked me why. I responded that in order for the tree to give you its max, it needs every drop of water and energy to go up from the roots to the right places. If we want the tree to grow its best, the non-productive parts of the tree need to be sealed or closed off, so that they do not take away precious energy and materials necessary for growth.

In order for a person to grow, he has to be careful not to waste his time or energy. Now, generally speaking, no one “wastes” time. But people *spend* their time on actions that don’t give them high return, or actions that are not necessarily

A WORDLESS THOUGHT

There is one thing you can do to your child that is worse than smacking him in the face. There is one thing that will drive your spouse to distraction, even more than getting into a fight. This one thing is probably the most powerful relationship-tool you have. It can also build relationships, trust, and make you look wise. *It is so powerful that most of us do not know how and when to use it.* And, it is sometimes very difficult to implement it. **Silence.**

in line with what is important to them in life. Even when a person realizes the importance of using his time more effectively, often, he is unwilling to give up those time-wasters; he is hesitant to part with the “low-return” activities and exchange them for high-value tasks. In order for you to grow in the best way possible, for you to use your potential to the fullest, you need to invest your time only in those activities that bring you closer to your goal. According to Time Management specialist Michael Fortino, over an average lifetime, you will spend *seven* years in the bathroom. You will spend *six* years eating. You will spend *five* years waiting in lines. You will spend *four* years cleaning your house. You will spend *three* years in meetings. You will spend *one* year searching for things. You will spend *eight months* opening junk mail. You will spend *six months* sitting at red lights. You will spend *120 days* brushing your teeth. Whether you believe Michael or not, you can see how much time slips through our fingers without our realizing it. And on the weirdest of things.

So, I believe that, yes, a man is a tree. If you can see your whole life collectively like this, you might find the internal motivation to take control of your tree, to make it bear the best possible fruit. You will be able to see the process with one collective picture in your mind. And, you won’t need to say Tachanun, to focus on your shortcomings, because you will be focusing on the possible new you. You will be able to have the patience to cultivate your self-growth, as you celebrate your potential, even if you do not yet bear any fruit.

It can be your most powerful position in a conversation. At times, it can be deafening. At times, it can be golden. Silence has an energy all of its own. It can force people to think. It can force people to act. You can attain this power now... Just read ahead.

The Chafetz Chaim says that silence is something which human beings must strive to master. It does



not come easily. The Talmud (Megilla 18a) says: *מלה בסלע שתיקוּתא בתרי*, a word is worth one gold coin. Silence is worth two. There is great power in the spoken word, but there is a far greater power in silence. This should not be taken to mean that a person should strive to be always quiet. It means knowing *when you are supposed to be silent*. A student once asked the Chazon Ish, “According to this piece of Talmud, if I am quiet the whole day, I get only two coins. But, if I talk the whole day, I get one for every word!?!” The Chazon Ish answered, “You get two coins for *each time you keep silent when you have something that you want to say but do not need to say, or should not say*.”

It is hard to keep quiet, when you have something you want to desperately say, and you know that it will get you nowhere. We see an astounding thought in the parasha. The dogs did not bark when the Jews left Egypt, so as not to scare them. Also, the dogs did not bark in the Jewish neighborhoods during the plague of the first born. For this silence, they were rewarded in Parashat Mishpatim. *בשר בשדה טרפה לא תאכלו לכלב תשליכון אותו* Meat of an animal that is a *treifah* (A *treifah* is an animal that is slaughtered properly, but the animal was not able to live much longer due to a blemish, such as a hole in the lungs etc.) *you may not eat. You should throw it to the dogs...* Why the dogs? The midrashim tell us that they are forever rewarded for not barking during the exodus from Egypt. *For remaining silent...*

But what about the frogs? The frogs jumped into burning ovens in the second plague. And the Torah does not reward them for that! How can the dogs get rewarded for just remaining silent, while the frogs did not get anything, despite their having been ready to die? The answer is, *sometimes it is easier to jump into a fire than to stay quiet*. It is easier to be burned than it is to hold back your bark...

I sat with a young grandmother who was reminiscing about her earlier years of parenting. She sipped her coffee as she recalled, out loud, her experiences of raising one of her difficult children.

This specific son had so much energy, wit, and brazenness. He got sent home from school more than he was sent to school from home. I asked the mother, a woman with patience and wisdom, if she was ever successful in getting this child to listen to her. “Never”, she said, as she looked into her coffee. She was silent for a minute, as her eyes drifted. And then, she said, “Just once. Nothing was working. Even when my husband hit him. Even when we threatened him that he won’t come on trips with us. And then, I gave him the silent treatment. I did not look at him, or answer him. I pretended he was not there. It went on for a few days... and then I got a phone call from his teacher. She said that my son is going crazy. He cried to the teacher like a little baby. He will do anything so that I will speak with him again. He just did not want to lose his mother... I put down some rules, which he kept for a little while. Ever since, he knew the score. Ever since, I was able to talk to him calmly, and somehow, he got passed those difficult years...”

In public speaking, or while teaching students, knowing how to use silence can be the deciding factor in your success. It is the instinctive knowledge when to pause while talking, while getting the audience into an emotional state that brings power to the communicated concept. Just standing there, confidently and silently, in front of them will magically cause all the people in your audience to quiet down and shift their focus in your direction. Just because you have the guts to stand there and face them all, silently.

Silence is even more powerful when you *stare* confidently. It can fend off verbal abuse more than almost anything you can answer back. One of my students used this technique of silently staring with a blank face when he needed a haircut on Erev Shavuot. The barber shop was fuller than full. The barber told him that none of the three barbers would be able to take him before Yom Tov. The barber was pushing off people that he could say “no” to. This student just stood there, silently, looking at the barber, who continued working. After four minutes, the barber said, “O K,



I'll stick you in today. Just stop standing there, looking at me..."

Silence is the secret of powerful negotiators. They know when to be quiet, when to listen. They use quiet to get the other person to *feel uncomfortable* and to come up with a better offer, or to take action. You know what is the greatest thing you can do on a date, interview, negotiation, meeting, etc...? Get the other person to talk as much as possible, by asking them an open ended question (one to which they cannot give a short answer, like "yes" or "no"), and then just listen quietly and respectfully. The more you get the other person talking *while you sit there listening*, the more he or she, with whom you are trying to build a relationship, will find you interesting and smart. While coaching, I found that the greatest sessions are when I get the person I am coaching to do most of the talking. Something like 80/20.

One of my favorite coaching sessions went like this: The 20-year-old yeshiva boy had great difficulty talking to anyone in the world, except his parents. He was down about himself, and also, he did not want to be pushed by his parents or teachers to start opening up to people. When we sat down together, I asked him to write on a piece of

YOU MAY NOT KNOW

There is a joke that the kids say here in Israel. *Father and son were going on a long walk together. The son asked his father, "Dad, why does fire rise upward?" His father answered, "I do not know, dear son." A couple of minutes later, the son asked his father, "Dad, why is the sun yellow and not red?" The father answered, "I do not know, my dear son". A little while later, the son asked his father a third question. "Dad, why is the sky blue?" "I don't know, son". The son was quiet for a couple of minutes. He then looked up to his father and asked, "Dad, does it bother you when I ask you questions?" The father answered him – "Son, if you do not ask, you will never know".*

The Rebbe R' Zusha brings out an important lesson from this week's parasha, a lesson for life. G-d told Moshe in Egypt that at midnight, (בַּחצוֹת) *exactly*

paper what bothers him the most in the world. He looked at me, looked around the room, not making a sound. *This silence went on for fifteen minutes!* I just sat there waiting. *If there is quiet, then there is thinking.* I hoped... (When it got hard to stay quiet like that, I started mumbling Tehillim very quietly – quietly enough so that he would not hear – just not to say anything!) After fifteen minutes, he picked up his pen to write something. He wrote, "I want people to stop running my life." I said, "Now, change it into a positive statement... Try to state what you *do* want..." Again, fifteen minutes of silence, and thinking. Suddenly, I heard him mumble, "I realized that no one is pushing me to do anything..." He was now smiling. He was in a much better mood. I did not say anything. I just asked the right question, and then remained quiet. End of session.

In marriage, some couples find it hard when there is quiet. They find it uncomfortable. The Kotzker once said, "Silence is the nicest sound." Today, in the younger generation, people are not comfortable with silence, for they have no inner peace. For everyone, the most relaxing thing is silence. Even those who need to make noise also love silence. *They are just making noise to quiet down their inner noise.*

at midnight, will be the plague of the first born. Now, it is nearly impossible to know exactly when that is – the split, split second of it. On the other hand, when Moshe relayed the prophecy of the tenth plague, he did not say "at midnight", but rather "approximately midnight" (כְּחֻצוֹת). This change needs explanation.

The Talmud in Berachot (4a) says that Moshe himself *did* know exactly when midnight is. Still, our rabbis tell us, למד לשונך לומר איני יודע שמא תתבדה , ותאהז , *Get into the habit of saying "I don't know, for you might make up something inaccurate, and you will be caught as a liar.."* Rashi explains this behavior of Moshe, "If I say that the plague will begin precisely at midnight, the people who do not know exactly when midnight is might think that I was off by a couple of seconds, casting doubt on



the accuracy of the prophecy . They might say that it was not an act of G-d. Better that I say that *I do not know* the exact split second when the plague will be, so that people will not make such a mistake.”

R' Zusha was asked by his students: But Moshe *did know* when exactly the plague would begin. Why, then, did he say to them. “I don't know”, if he really did know?

R' Zusha answered his students that Moshe said “*I don't know*” with all honesty. *He really did not know how to answer them in such a way that they would make no mistake about what he said.* A person may know *what* to say, but if he does not know how to say it so that the person he's speaking to will understand him, it may just be better to say, “I don't know”.

I have seen this happen all the time. People who are approached for advice in all areas of life – spiritual, physical, mental health, finance, child rearing and more answer questions without being sure about what they are saying. They might sound smarter if they say first, “*I don't know, but I believe...*” – If you are not sure, just say so. People will respect you more, not less. Not only that- when you are not sure that the person will be able to understand what you mean to say, you should also say, *I don't know.*

I recently experienced this myself. A boy that I was coaching was in a life dilemma. He was pushing me for an answer to help him make his decision, but I answered him that this is not a “one liner”. In

the meantime, I went to my rabbi and brought up the client's question to the best of my understanding. The rabbi answered me, “I don't know; I was never in the type of situations that this boy is dealing with, so I don't know what to tell you.” We spoke about the problem for a while, and we came up with something that I could tell the boy. Then my Rabbi told me, “I know that this is the answer, but I don't know how to say it to the person in such a way that he will understand what I am saying. And if he misunderstands me here, chances are that he will make the wrong decision, under the mistaken impression that this is what I told him to do.”

What makes someone smart is not only what he knows; it is also “knowing what he doesn't know”. I find this to be one of the greatest tools for learning. When there is something that you don't understand, instead of just thinking about it or rehashing it in an attempt to figure it out, it is worth clarifying what you know about the subject first, and pinpointing exactly what you don't know. Then, sometimes the brain just does wonders, and things start making sense. The problem is when we don't understand – say, 25% of the information – and exaggerate, saying that we don't understand the whole thing. Then we shut off our “learning engine” in despair and start “spacing out”, losing focus. But if we clarify first what we know, and see exactly what we don't understand, things sometimes just start making sense. Then eventually, one can get up to 100% comprehension. This is a great learning tool. Try it. It works.

A LESSON FROM AN OLD EGYPTIAN WOMAN

The human mind's ability to believe whatever it wants against all odds is fascinating.

The Midrash Hagadol writes the following story: *Moshe prophesied in Egypt about the coming plague of the Firstborn. He mentioned that there will be a great outcry in all the land of Egypt, that there had never been anything like it until then and that there would never be anything like it again.* (Shemot 11;6) *An old Egyptian woman*

approached Moshe and said: “Moshe, you are a false prophet! I am an old woman, and I do not have a father, brother, sister, son or daughter. I do not have anyone to cry for. When you said that all the land of Egypt will cry and scream, you lied. I will not cry. I will not scream.”

Moshe answered her – “I swear – you will be the first to scream.”



The common practice in Egypt at that time was to sculpt the likeness of a deceased firstborn out of clay or dough to serve as a remembrance. This woman had had one son, a firstborn, who had died earlier. Every day, after she would eat and drink, this woman would stand and dance before the sculpture of her deceased son. (Egyptians revered their firstborn as gods.) She took her son's sculpture upstairs to the roof, so that it would not be touched by the plague. She understood the words "for there was no house that did not have a dead person in it" (Shemot 12; 30) literally. She believed that Moshe's prophecy did not include the firstborn that were outdoors in this plague. She thought that if she would bring her sculpture upstairs and place it on the roof, it would remain unharmed.

Sure enough, at the outset of the night of the plague, dogs came and dragged the bust of her firstborn around and then ate it up! She cried; she shrieked; she wailed. Her cries were heard all over the land of Egypt...(Midrash Hagadol). She was, indeed, the first to scream.

This is quite strange. What exactly was this woman's claim? She *did not* have a live firstborn. How could she have the audacity to approach Moshe and call him a liar? And who cares what this woman had to say, anyway, especially after Moshe's proven credibility due to the previous ten plagues that he had accurately predicted? Also, how did this woman's cry over her sculpture outweigh all the cries of all the Egyptian mothers who cried for the loss of their real live firstborn sons on that night?

I believe the answer is that this woman was in denial. She did not want to believe that G-d of the Universe was against the Egyptians. When someone is in denial, what is perceived by them as even a small question which casts doubt on the truth is enough to make them feel that they have validated their position. This old Egyptian woman

QUESTIONS OF THE COURAGEOUS

G-d asked of Moshe the following: *Please speak in the ears of the nation and they shall ask (borrow), a man from his friend and a woman*

found something in the words of Moshe that enabled her to prove, or at least, so she believed, that he was a false prophet. Once she found something seemingly inaccurate on which to focus, she would claim that the whole prophecy was bogus. When she saw that she was wrong, she cried louder than anyone else. This cry, the cry of one who realizes that he was in denial all along, is greater than the cry of one who has lost his firstborn.

We find that Moshe was extremely cautious not to leave any doubt or ambiguity in the words he prophesied. Although Moshe heard from G-d that the plague of the firstborn would take place exactly at midnight, Moshe did not convey the message that way. Instead, Moshe said "approximately midnight". This was because he feared that the Egyptians would deny his prophecy, saying that the plague was not midnight exactly. They would not be able to know precisely when midnight was, and they would say, instead, that Moshe was a phony.(Rashi 11;4)

There is no greater believer than the atheist. He believes – against all odds – that there is no G-d. He has no proof – just a handful of questions to challenge the opposite belief. The fact that there are many more questions challenging his own belief does not bother him in the slightest. That is what he chooses to believe.

So many times, we are in a position of preferring not to believe something that is hard (or inconvenient) for us to believe. We do not accept truisms that add to our responsibility. This is a shortcut to nowhere. In the end, when we see so clearly that we cannot possibly deny that we have made a mistake, the cry will be earth-shattering, like the cry of the woman who clung to her belief against all odds. It is so much healthier to face reality and to live with it. After all, that is all that is left. Reality.

from her friend, utensils of silver and of gold(11;2). The Ibn Ezra (Shemot 12;35) writes that each person would ask for items according to



his level of character (כפי מעלתו). He points out that we find, later, that the Nessiim (tribe leaders/representatives) asked to borrow special things that no one else was able to ask for. We see how they alone brought the *precious stones and the perfume and the oil in the preparation of the Mishkan*. They got these special items from the Egyptians by asking them for it. No one else asked to “borrow” these special things.

The question here is, what privilege did the Nessiim have that they alone were able to ask for these special items? Couldn't *anyone* ask the Egyptians for such things? Did someone have to be on a high level of character even in order to ask to borrow these expensive commodities?

R' Chaim Chechik, zt"l, answers this question with a beautiful thought. The Jewish slave needed to muster up an enormous amount of courage to approach the Egyptians and to ask to borrow expensive things. After 210 years of slavery and belittlement, humiliation and disgrace, the Egyptian Jewish slave, wearing his ripped and dirty blood-stained clothing was asked by G-d to simply walk up to the luxurious home of his masters and ask to borrow their most expensive household items. Many could not face what seemed to them to be an impossible assignment! Instead of asking to borrow the most expensive things in the house, they sufficed with asking for a simple pin or a salt shaker cover.

This low self image of the Egyptian Jew was exactly what Pharaoh had planned for: as evidenced in their difficulty to obey G-d's command and ask the Egyptians for their valuable possessions, many of the Egyptian Jews had lost their self esteem. Even idol worship was rampant among the Jews in Egypt. However, there were certain things that the Egyptian Jew would never give up. A Jewish name, the Jewish language and way of speech, and the Jewish way of dress. This is all the Jew had left.

But there were some Jews who were able to stand proudly, fully aware of who they really were. They had no problem asking for the most expensive item

in their master's house. This required a great deal of courage from the Jew after the physical and emotional holocaust he had gone through. This is exactly what G-d wanted from before the Redemption. We find that in the original prophecy to Moshe by the burning bush, when G-d saw all the pain the Jews were enduring, he told Moshe, *“And a woman will borrow from her neighbor and from the one who resides with her utensils of silver and gold and clothes, and they will put it on your sons and daughters (Shemot 4:22)*. One may ask, although G-d was fulfilling his promise to Avraham that the Jews would leave Egypt with great wealth, why did He want it to be acquired specifically in this way, by the Jew having to ask his master to borrow his household items? And – who cares, in middle of such a holocaust, about such material things? Who is even thinking about it? But, no. G-d wanted the Jew to muster up courage and even ask to borrow the favorite dress of his Master's wife. And, of course, we must take a closer look at these words. *And a woman will borrow from her neighbor... clothes and ... put it on your sons and daughters*. This is quite strange. How could the clothes of the Egyptian women be put on the Jewish children? Why not on the Jewish mothers?

I once heard a clever answer from a great Chassidic master: *This is because the clothes of the Egyptian mothers were not modest, short skirts and short sleeves*. This was not the style of the clothes of the Jewish women. But on their little daughters, such clothing fit, as on the children the skirts were long, and on little girls, the sleeve length was just right, modest enough for the righteous Jews of Egypt! Modest dress is what got us out of Egypt. Being proud of our modest identity. Being able to muster up courage to ask for that favorite dress, knowing that after the Egyptian woman lent it to her neighbor, she would see little Jewish girls wearing it. What determined the level of a Jew's greatness was the amount of courage and self pride he had *as a Jew*, despite all the Egyptian oppression. The Nessiim were able to stay proud enough to go right up to the richest and most powerful Egyptians and ask for the most expensive diamonds and rare



stones of Egypt. And, of course, they got them. And this is because when a Jew believes in who he is despite what he has gone through or was put through, he can get very far. This courage and self-pride is probably what separated the Nessim from all the rest. Courage. Jewish courage.

If only we could look into ourselves and ask the questions of the courageous. We have to ask

ourselves to pull out the diamonds from within. We have to ask ourselves to reveal the beautiful personality that we have inside. The middot. The happiness of being a Jew. We have to insist upon our own recognition of the pride we have in our nation's past. The times have changed; the roles have changed. The principal remains the same. All we have to do is ask.

IF YOU ARE ENJOYING THESE ARTICLES FREE EACH WEEK, PLEASE HELP SPREAD THIS PUBLICATION SO OTHERS CAN ENJOY AS WELL!

SPECIAL OFFER! Take upon yourself to spread the papers/emails and receive free coaching sessions with Rabbi Y. Farhi! Send an email to rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com for details.

To support this publication, or receive it by e-mail, please email rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com

IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H and לעילוי נשמת ר' חיים צבי ב"ר יואל

