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Modesty and Silence Have the Same Root

The Gemara^[1] states that when one is relieving himself in the lavatory, he should be modest, and he should also be **silent**. From this we see that modesty and silence are related *middos*. They clearly bear the same root.

Since we know that modesty is rooted in the element of earth (as explained in Chapter 13: *Modesty In-Depth*), it follows that silence as well is rooted in our element of earth.

First we will explain the roots of this matter, and then we will expand upon it.

The Evil Use of Silence: Lack of Reaction

It is written, “*And behold, man became a living spirit*”, and the *Targum* translates this to mean that man became a *ruach memalelah*, a talking spirit. The power of speech is thus rooted in *ruach*, wind.

We know that the opposite of the element of water is fire, and the opposite of wind is earth. It follows, then, that if speech is rooted in wind, then its opposite trait, silence, is rooted in earth.

There are four kinds of organisms in Creation: *doimem* (the non-living, such as rocks), *tzomeiach* (growing organisms, such as plants), *chai* (live creatures, such as animals), and *medaber* (social creatures – human beings). When a person dies, he is no longer a *medaber*, and he instead becomes a *doimem* – he is still and silent. Such silence is not the kind of silence that we want to develop!

The custom is that a mourner is served lentils, because just as lentils do not have a “mouth”, so does a mourner have no “mouth”, for he is silent. The silence of the mourner reflects the situation of death he is mourning about, for the dead have become completely stilled and silent.

The element of earth is the source of unwanted silence. After a person dies, his body returns to the earth, and he can no longer speak anymore; the loss of the power of speech signifies the loss of his own life, for man is defined as a social creature. A person is “alive” because he Hashem blew into him a *nishmas chaim*, a breath of life, which is his *ruach/wind* (his life spirit) – defined as his power of speech. At death, man loses his *nishmas chaim*, his *ruach/wind*, his power of speech – and returns to earth, where he no longer has speech; he becomes silent. Thus, death and silence are related concepts – that much is clear.

Silence [when it is evil] comes from internal hardening in the soul [which was discussed in

Understanding Your Middos #07 Internal Hardening]. The Hebrew word for “silent”, *shatak*, contains the letters *kuf* and *shin*, which is the root of the word *koshi*, hardness. Silence is a trait that stems from *koshi*, internal hardening in the soul; it is when a person does not react, because he has become hardened inside. It is written, “*And the living shall take to heart*” – a person who has inner vitality is soft inside, and that is why he reacts in emotion to things. But when a person is hardened inside, he cannot react. He resembles “a dead person, who cannot feel.”^[2]

To illustrate, when a person is alive, his flesh and bones are intact, while a dead person only has bones, for his flesh decomposes. This hints to us that softness symbolizes life, while hardness symbolizes death.

Internal hardening, as we explained earlier, is a nature of the element of earth; the elements of wind, water, and fire are all soft elements, and only earth is a hard substance.

Silence is a lack of reaction, which really stems from an internal hardening in the soul. On a deep note, Hashem also utilizes this kind of silence, by keeping silent towards the wicked who blaspheme, [and this is the holy use of this power].

The *Gemara*^[3] discusses the case of a *shtuki*, a person who is silent when others tell him that he is of questionable status. There is an argument amongst the Sages how to view his silence: Is his silence a form of admitting to the claims against him (and there is a rule of “Silence is like admitting”), or is he remaining quiet because he doesn’t care what others think of him? According to the second opinion in the Sages, he is quiet because he hardens himself inside, and he doesn’t react to what others are saying about him.

Earlier, we discussed the trait of brazenness, which stems from internal hardening. When brazenness and internal hardening combine, the result is a lack of reaction that is silence.

Moshe was told to speak to the nation, which shows us that speech is what enables the power to lead others. If someone doesn’t accept the words he is told, he doesn’t react to them. Such silence stems from an unwillingness to accept the words he is told.

The *Gemara* differentiates between a deaf mute and a deaf person who can talk. A deaf mute is called *cheiresh* in Hebrew, which has the same letters as the word *shachor*, blackness, which hints to the darkening of the soul, a trait that was discussed in the previous chapter. This reflects a nature in which a person does not hear the words he is told because he lacks the power to react.

This was also the ability that the Snake possessed: the Snake was silent and secretive – it used the power of silence for evil. Chazal say that the way of the Snake [or the evil inclination] is to whisper silently to a person its argument.

This is the first root of silence: a lack of reaction, which stems from internal hardening.

Silence That Comes From Nullifying Oneself

There is another source which silence can be coming from in the soul, and it is a concept mentioned many times in the *Gemara*: that silence is like a form of admitting.

Evil silence is when a person is silent because he doesn’t react to what people tell him, and it comes from being hardened inside. But silence is positive and holy when a person is silent because he admits. In this instance,, the person nullifies himself to what is being said of him. This is the total opposite of silence stemming from internal hardening.

A person is silent because he is hardened inside which stems from an impaired element of earth. Such a person does not care about what people say to him; that is why he doesn't react and he is silent. Such silence is evil. But when a person is silent to another's claim because he admits to the claim, he nullifies himself. Nullification (*bittul*) is also a trait that stems from the element of earth.[4] As it states regarding nullifying the *chometz* before Pesach, "Let it be nullified and ownerless like the dust of the earth."

Bittul/nullification is a discussion for itself [see Chapter 17]. What we need to know now, with regards to the current discussion, is how nullification and silence are connected concepts.

There is a *halacha* of *shomeia k'oneh*, "hearing is like answering", that one who hears a blessing is considered as if he has verbalized it himself. This *halacha* is really based on the concept of "silence is like admitting" - the person is silent and listens, agreeing with what is being said, and that is considered as if he has actually spoken. From here we can see that in a way, silence can become a form of speech. This hints to us that the way of how silence can be rectified.

Silence that stems from internal hardening is caused by a person being silent to another's words because he does not agree, and therefore he does not care to answer the person. Such silence reflects a lack of acceptance to the words that one is told. By contrast, when one is "soft" inside - "soft like a reed", and not "hard as cedar wood" - when he listens to another's words, he can accept what he is being told.

So far we have explained two kinds of silence: a lack of reaction, which is evil, and a silence that is a form of admitting to another, which is good.

How Silence Can Be Rooted In Water

There is another root as well to silence. In *Sefer Yetzirah*[5], it is stated, ""The letter *mem* is silent, the letter *shin* hisses, and the letter *aleph*, [which stands for *avir*/air] is what decides between them."

To simplify these words: in the four elements of earth, wind, water, and fire, the active elements are fire, wind and water, while earth is the element that contains them. The three active elements are parallel to these three letters: *aleph/avir*/wind, *mem/mayim*/water, and *shin/aish*/fire. The Sages are saying that the letter *shin* is a hissing sound, which calls attention; whereas the letter *mem* is a sound that is used for silencing. Thus, silence is rooted in water, in *mayim*, which is represented by the letter *mem*, a letter which presses down the lips and puts a silence to speech.

Until now we explained that silence is rooted in the element of earth, but from these words of our Sages we can see that silence is also rooted in water, in the "silent waters" represented by the letter *mem* that stands for *mayim*/water. Although it appears that water is noisy, because the waves are crashing, that is only because of the wind which causes the water to move and be tossed around; water itself it naturally silent.[6]

Now let us reflect into what the connection is between silence and the element of water.

How Silence Can Be Rooted In Fire

The silence which stems from the element of water is represented by the letter *mem*, which produces the opposite sound of the letter *shin*. The letter *mem* is a sound that is silent, while the letter *shin* is a hissing sound. **Mem** represents **mayim**/water, meaning that water is silent. **Shin** represents **aish**/fire, meaning that fire is a hissing sound, the opposite of silence.

What is the difference between speech and silence? With speech, there are letters, and with silence,

there are no letters. Hissing also does not produce any letters.

We find two kinds of sounds – voice, and speech. The *mitzvah* to blow *shofar* is to blow and hear a shofar sound, whereas the *mitzvah* of *Kerias Shema* is only fulfilled through the power of speech; for this reason, one must say the words of *Kerias Shema* carefully and with precision. These are two opposite sounds: the sound of a voice, which has no letter, and the sound of speech, which contains letters.

Thus, when we apply this to the concept of silence, we can discover that there are really two kinds of silence. One way to be silent is when speech is silenced, and another kind of silence is when a voice is silenced. These are two different concepts of silence, as we will soon see and explore more deeply. Just as there is a concept to use our voice as well as a concept of using our speech, so is there a concept of silencing a voice as well as silencing speech; and they are not the same thing.

What does it mean to silence a voice, and what does it mean to silence one's speech?

Speech is rooted in the element of wind, for man has a *ruach memalelah* (talking spirit) breathed into him from Hashem that enables him to talk. Hearing a voice, which is reminiscent of hissing when there are no words, is a power that stems from the element of fire. Since earth is the opposite element of wind, and water is the opposite of fire, it follows that silencing one's speech is a power that is rooted in the element of earth, whereas silencing a voice is rooted in the element of water.

Fiery, Wordless Speech

This can be further applied to the concept of speech which we find in animals. Animals can communicate with each other, but this is not the power of speech that is rooted in the element of wind which humans possess. Only man contains the element of wind, for man has the *ruach memalelah* from Hashem. Animals can speak and communicate with each other, but their speech is rooted in the element of fire. The birds chirp with each other and communicate, but we don't hear it, because the chirping of the birds is a form of hissing which we do not register as understandable speech.

The Sages state that there were ten measurements of speech given to the world, and the women took nine of them, while the remaining amount was given to the all those remaining.^[7] The nine measurements of speech which women took refers to a lower kind of speech, not the elevated kind of speech that is rooted in the element of wind. A woman's main element is fire [and man's main element is water], thus, her speech is mainly derived from the element of fire.

This is related to the fact that that "women have light *daas*." It is well-known that the *daas* is rooted in the element of wind.^[8] Thus, a woman, whose *daas* is not so dominant, has her power of speech mainly derived from fire, not from wind.

Wind is the connecting element between fire and water, because fire and water are two opposing ends, with wind in the middle to mitigate between them and connect them. *Daas* is also called the connecting power, as we see from the *possuk*, "And Adam knew Chavah", meaning, he became connected with her. Speech, which comes from the element of wind, is thus the connecting force between water and fire.

By contrast, the speech which animals possess, as well as the speech of women, is speech rooted in the element of fire, and a fire itself cannot connect with water.

We can see this clearly from our world: when a woman talks, she talks much more enthusiastically than when a man talks. The deep reason behind this is because the speech of a woman is rooted in

fire, [whereas a man's speech is rooted in wind]. Therefore, a woman's speech is of a more "fiery" nature.

Rochel Imeinu Exemplified The Trait of Holy Silence

Which of our *Avos* and *Imahos* exemplified the trait of silence? The Sages praise Rochel Imeinu for being the epitome of silence. She is the mother of Binyamin, who knew about the sale of Yosef yet he did not tell his father; and she was the ancestor of Shaul, who did not tell others that he was king; and she was the ancestor of Esther, who kept her lineage a secret from Achashveirosh. All of these *tzaddikim* exemplified the trait of silence, and they all descend from Rochel Imeinu, thus, our Sages praise Rochel Imeinu for being the one who "grabbed the art of silence."^[9]

Esav is called the "evil fire", while Yosef Hatzaddik is called the "holy fire" who will in the future burn up the evil "fire" of Esav; "*Esav will be like straw, and the house of Yaakov will be like a fire (that burns the straw), and Yosef will be like a great flame (which will completely burn Esav).*" The fire of Yosef will silence the fire of Esav, and he received this power of holy silence from his mother, Rochel. This is also the depth of the possuk, "*Are My words not like fire, so says Hashem.*"^[10]

The speech of women is not the regular kind of speech which man possesses, for speech of women is rooted in fire.

Women took more percentage of speech than men did; if so, why don't women have a *mitzvah* to learn Torah, since Torah is a *mitzvah* that utilizes the power of speech? However, the answer is because only a man's power of speech is the kind of speech that is used to learn Torah. The words of Torah are called the "*ruach*" (wind) of Hashem, and man's speech is rooted in wind. A man can learn the Torah through the power of *daas*, whereas women possess a lighter form of *daas*, which is not sufficient enough to learn Torah. A woman's speech is rooted in fire, not in wind, and that is why her speech cannot be used to learn the Torah. With regards to learning the Torah, a woman utilizes the trait of silence, which is the trait exemplified by Rochel Imeinu.

Rochel Imeinu exemplified silence not only with regards to being silent from talking, but also because she knew how to silence her voice. The sound of a wordless voice is rooted in the element of fire, and Rochel knew how to use this power to silence her voice when it came to the marriage with Yaakov Avinu [the fact that she didn't reveal what Lavan was going to do, so as not to shame her sister].

She silenced her voice, and her son Yosef therefore merited to inherit her holy power of silence, which will be the future destruction to the "fire" of Esav and silence the evil fire.

Our Sages^[11] revealed that Yosef was punished for not defending his father's honor when he heard his brothers calling his father "your servant." This was the downside to his power of silence, because he used his power of silence in the wrong place. But in the future, the power of silence which Yosef possesses will be the power that silences all voices of falsity, and it will reveal the voice of truth in the world.

Holy Silence: How The Voice of Hashem Can Be Revealed Amidst Speech

Now we will reflect: What happens when a power silences his speech, and what happens as well when a person silences his very voice? When a person silences his speech, he is left with his voice. At Har Sinai, there was a "great voice, and it did not increase." According to one of the Sages, this voice never stopped, and it still continues.

The understanding of this is that after the Ten Commandments were given at Har Sinai, the Torah was no longer being spoken in the word, but the voice of the Torah still kept going on. It was the voice of

the Torah from which the Ten Commandments were carved from. The great *shofar* sound at Har Sinai was that great voice which did not stop, and it continues until this day. Thus, at the giving of the Torah, only speech was silenced, whereas sound itself was not silenced.

Here we can see a kind of silence in which speech is silenced in order to reveal the sound behind the words, the voice behind the words, which is the essence behind the words.

When Rochel Imeinu was silent it can be understood as a silence that stems from the element of earth, for she was silent from talking. But in her silence, she also revealed the “voice of Yaakov”, the voice of truth. She revealed silence that is rooted in the element of water, but she also ascended speech and revealed the essence of speech, which is sound. She silenced her speech, and she revealed the voice behind it, the voice of Yaakov.

“Their Hearts Cried Out To Hashem”

Where can we see this concept manifest?

All speech is essentially a division of Hashem’s voice, revealed through the human mouth, which can pronounce 22 letters of the *Aleph Beis* (and if we include the five “ender” letters, it’s 27 letters). A sound, however, is just a sound/voice, as it is not pronounced. (Although we find different sounds of the *shofar*, it doesn’t have 22 different ways of being pronounced). This is the power of wordless sound, a power of the soul.

Every sound can be clothed with any of the 22 letters, and that is how speech is formed. Speech takes sound and splits it into different combinations, whereas sound is unclothed by any letters. In simpler language, our voice begins in our lungs, travels up through the windpipe, and exits through the mouth. When the sound of a voice reaches the throat, it is there that speech takes over and splits into different sounds, such as the different sounding letters produced by the tongue, teeth or lips. That is our power of speech.

But there is another kind of communication, which does not involve speech: “*Their hearts cried out to Hashem.*”^[12] Their speech was silent, but the very voice of their souls came forth, in the form of a wordless cry to Hashem, screaming out from their hearts.

This is the depth behind the prayer of Channah the prophetess, whose “lips were moving, yet her voice could not be heard”.^[13] She was davening *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is usually referred to as the silent prayer, for it is whispered. However, the Baal Shem Tov explained that even though our mouths are whispering the prayers, our heart is still crying out the words. Our speech is being silenced, for our mouths are not producing any sound [only quietly], but the voice still remains in our heart. This is the depth behind the concept of silencing our speech [during *Shemoneh Esrei*]: the speech is silenced, but the voice behind it is revealed.

Of course, *Shemoneh Esrei* is not a total verbal silence, because we are still saying the words. But to a certain degree, our speech is silenced during this time, and it can be a revelation of the voice of the soul, which remains resonant in the heart even though it cannot be audibly heard. “*Their hearts cried out to Hashem.*”

This is the holy kind of silence, the kind of silence which reveals the cry of the heart. It is a cry that comes from the depths of the heart. When a person is crushed and he feels that he is at the lowest point, it is precisely then he cries out to Hashem very strongly, from his heart, even though no words are leaving his mouth.

This is the secret of how the element of earth is rectified. It is the element of earth which can reveal

this power of the silent cry, the inaudible sound of the soul which does not take the form of any letters.

Silencing Sound

There is also a deeper form of silence. Earlier, we mentioned how the letter *mem* is a silent sound, while the letter *shin* produces a hissing sound. Hissing, which is a wordless sound, is rooted in the element of fire, and it is the language of the animals and birds.

There is a concept of silence not only with regards to silencing speech, but even with regarding sound itself. When a person wants to silence others, he says, "Ssssshhhh!" He hisses, with the "*shin*" sound. Thus, when we want to silence all sounds, we use the letter *shin*.

This is a kind of silence which we use our lips for. Until now it was explained about silence rooted in the element of earth, and now we will explain what silence rooted in water is. This is a kind of silence which is used to silence all sounds, even hissing sounds.

There are two ways for one to silence himself. Either he can press down on his lips, which will block any sound from escaping him; or, he can silence his voice within himself. Both of these methods are a kind of silence that is rooted in water of the soul, as we will soon explain.

The first method of silencing is mentioned in the *Gemara*[\[14\]](#): "Press your lips against each other, and do not be overcome with a desire to answer back [when you get insulted, don't respond]." In other words, one way to silence your voice is by simply pressing your lips together and holding yourself back from talking.

This is how your lips can be used to silence yourself; when the lips are pressed together, the resulting sound is "*mmm*", the *mem* sound, which is rooted in *mayim*/water. However, this is the superficial method, because although the person still doesn't answer back to his insults, inside he is still full of protest. His speech has been silenced, but his inner voice has not been silenced.

But when a person "shushes" others with the "sssshhhh" sound, it is a deeper kind of silence; it is putting a silence to all sound. This represents a power in a person to silence all sounds, all his inner voices. When a person does this, he enters a higher kind of silence.

What is the difference between the two kinds of silencing? We can see it brought out from the following.

The *Gemara*[\[15\]](#) recounts that when Moshe went up to Heaven to receive the Torah, he saw that Hashem was tying crowns upon the letters of the Torah; when Moshe asked Hashem the reason for this, Hashem explained to him that in a later generation, there would arise a man who would expound halachos from every crown on each of the letters of the Torah, and that this would be Akiva Ben Yosef (Rabbi Akiva). Hashem also showed Rabbi Akiva all of the *halachos* that Rabbi Akiva would expound, as well as the great reward in store for him; then Moshe was shown the death of Rabbi Akiva, in which he would be martyred by the Romans. Moshe asked Hashem, "Is this the Torah and its reward?!" Hashem said to him: "Be silent. This is what has arisen in My thoughts."

How are we to make sense of this?

Moshe was drawn from the water, so he is connected with water. His power to be silent stems from his element of water, which is the power to silence speech. He could silence his speech, but when it came to his inner voice, he could not silence himself. Hashem said to him, "Be silent. This is what has arisen in My thoughts!" This was referring to the higher kind of silence: the power to silence one's

inner voice. When the inner voice inside a person is silenced, a person reaches the power of holy thought in the soul. This is the kind of silence which is referred to in the statement of our Sages, “A fence for wisdom is silence.”

Two Levels of Silence: During An Argument, and Calming Down

It has been explained, thus far, how to silence one’s inner voices of frustration. One way is to simply “ssshhhh” with the mouth, which holds down the lips so that no voice escapes it. The more inner method, however, is to silence the inner voice from within.

How can we see that the element of water is the root of either method? We find that sometimes water can act as a boundary, stopping something from spreading past its path. Water can also put out a fire, which shows us that water can silence sounds that are rooted in fire. We will explain this more in detail. Water acted as a boundary by the episode with the Yam Suf. The Egyptians were on one side, and the Yam Suf was on the other side, so they were trapped. Here, water acted as a boundary which didn’t let us get past it.

We mentioned this concept earlier (in Chapter Six). Earth was first created from water and the water was made into snow, and from the snow came the earth. Thus, the power in earth to create limitations really stems from the water that it came from. Today we can see that it is earth which doesn’t allow the water to get past it, for the ocean waves recede from the beach. But at its root, the ability in earth to create limitations really came from water originally. Water does not silence sounds; rather, it places limitations so that things won’t spread past it.

The Sages said, “The world does not stand except upon the merit of one who holds himself back at the time of argument.” When a person shuts his mouth, the only sound he can produce is “mmmm”, the letter *mem*. He uses *mem/mayim*/water to silence his speech. But he still has not yet silenced his inner voice; deep down, he is still raging at the one who has insulted him.

But there is a deep form of silencing, by using his water to put out his fire. When one chooses to be silent instead of responding to insult, he can silence his inner voice as well from its rage.

When a person is being insulted in middle of an argument, one kind of proper reaction is that he can choose not to answer back, and hold himself back. This is the kind of silence that is rooted in water, that a person has the ability to silence his speech. But the deeper kind of silence is as Hillel would do: He was “not easily angered, and easily appeased.”

He would calm down right away as soon as he felt any anger like using water to extinguish a fire. In the first kind of reaction, a person places limitations on himself, using the element of water/silencing in the soul. In the second kind of reaction, which is deeper, a person calms himself and therefore he does not respond – he puts out the “fire” completely.

Thus, there are two ways to utilize the power of silence. Any mature-thinking person can feel this clearly in himself when he doesn’t respond to anger: either he doesn’t respond, but deep down he is still seething; or he calms himself down, and that is why he doesn’t respond.

Anger, a trait rooted in fire of the soul, can be put out by “water” in the soul, in either of these two ways: 1) either by holding back from responding which uses “water” to place limitations upon oneself, or 2) by calming down internally, which uses “water” to put out the fire completely.

How Silence Can Bring One To Wisdom

This deeper kind of silence which we are addressing is the kind of silence that can bring a person to

attain the power of holy thought (*machshavah*) or wisdom, which is called *chochmah*.

Our Sages said[16] that “Silence is good for the wise, and surely for the foolish, for it is written, “*A fool is silenced, while a wise person thinks.*” The commentators explain the simple meaning of this *possuk* to mean that if a person remains silent and he doesn't respond to insult, those who observe him will realize that he is really a wise person for not responding to the insults, instead of viewing him as a fool who doesn't defend himself from false accusation.

On a more subtle note, he is silent because he is merely taken aback and overcome with indignity, and he is merely ignoring the other person. This trait was discussed in the beginning of this chapter, and it is not the holy trait of silence. It is rooted in the element of earth, and it is simply a negative character trait in which a person hardens his reaction towards another and ignores another person's comments.

But the deeper meaning of the *possuk* is that the fool can get used to this trait of being silent, and though that, he will reach wisdom. If he responds to insult, he will not become wise, and he will remain an ignoramus. The silence of fools – to ignore others and not react to their comments – is a silence that stems from the element of earth, and it comes from internal hardening in the soul.

But when a person knows how to use silence for holiness, what happens when he is silent (even if this person is right now a fool, and he only knows how to have a fool's silence)? If he keeps learning how to remain silent in this way, his silence will eventually bring him to understandings. Hashem told Moshe to “be silent, for this is what has arisen in My thoughts”; our Rabbis explained this to mean that if a person acquires the trait of silence (by getting used to being silent and not responding to insult), he ascends to the power of thought – he gains *chochmah*, wisdom. As the Sages said: “A fence for *chochmah*/wisdom is silence.”

Thus, the deep meaning of the *possuk* is that when a person doesn't respond to insult, not only will those who observe him realize that he is wise, but that he will merit to leave the evil silence rooted in the element of earth. He will ascend to the higher kind of silence rooted in the element of water which is the power to silence one's inner voice making a person wiser.

Silence In Action, Speech and Thought

There is also an even higher, deeper kind of silence. One of the Sages in the *Gemara*, when he was proved wrong, was silent for some time, and later he gave an answer[17]. This is not because his mind had gotten confused. Rather, it means that he has reached the point of inner silence in himself.

This can be understood based on what we brought earlier, that Hashem told Moshe to be silent and not to question His ways, for His thoughts cannot be understood. The simple meaning of this is that the thoughts of Hashem are above human comprehension, they cannot be verbalized. Therefore, silence of the matter is preferred over asking about it. The deeper meaning, though, is because Hashem was telling him that if you are silent, you will be able to transcend thought.

Thus, there is a silence that is applied to action, speech, and thought: We can silence our actions, silence ourselves from talking, and we can silence our thoughts.

All of these are actually found on Shabbos Kodesh. On Shabbos, we are

- 1) silent from action by refraining from the 39 forbidden labors.
- 2) We are silent from speech by refraining from idle chatter[18], and Shabbos was given mainly for the sake of immersing ourselves in more Torah study,[19] and

- 3) the depth of this is because Torah study is in the realm above speech, for thought is a higher spiritual realm than speech.
- 4) Soon we will see how Shabbos also contains a silence of our thoughts].

The *Gemara* says that silence is a trait that should be used with regards to insults, but when it comes to Torah learning, one should not be silent; he should speak words of Torah[20]. The Baal Shem Tov puts a twist on these words of the *Gemara* and explains it to mean at if one is able to learn Torah, he should think of its words, which is a higher level than speaking of its words.

Silence In Speech and In Sound

But there is a fourth, higher level as well to silence: to reach the inner silence that is beyond thought. This was the meaning behind the above-quoted *Gemara* in which the Sage did not respond for some time and only gave an answer later.

At the Yam Suf, when the sea was split, they transcended thought. How? Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped in, from his *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). The level of *mesirus nefesh* is above logic, so it is above thought; if something can be logically explained, there is no *mesirus nefesh*. When you do the right thing even when you don't understand - that is *mesirus nefesh*. Nachshon ben Aminadav reached it.

On a deeper note, this was revealed as well by Har Sinai, when the entire Creation became silent. Chazal[21] recount that "When Hashem gave the Torah, not a single bird chirped or flew in the sky... the angels did not move, and they stopped chanting "Holy, Holy", the oceans did not move, and no creature spoke. The entire world was silent and deafened, and Hashem's voice came out and said, "I am Hashem your G-d."

This was a deeper kind of silence. Silence is usually referring to silence of speech, which is called *shetikah*, while a deeper kind of silence is when all sound is silenced; this is called *sheket*. At Har Sinai, not only was all speech silenced; all sounds in Creation were silenced. There was a silence to all speech, to all sounds, and to all thoughts.

"For every word that was uttered from Hashem's mouth, their souls left them." [22] The depth of this was because the soul/*neshamah* is called the intellect/*seichel*, and at the giving of the Torah, even their intellect was silenced. Thus, their "souls left them" - they ascended to above thought.

Silence - The Way To Transcend The Limits of Creation

Now that we have seen the above concept, we will ask: what is the depth that silence must bring a person to?

The world was created with ten utterances. Silence can bring a person to the point that is above the limits of the Creation.

When Yehoshua told the sun to stand still in Gibeon, the Sages explained that Yehoshua sang *shirah* instead of the sun. The sun is able to move only because it sings *shirah*, so when it stopped moving, the *shirah* stopped with it, and that is why Yehoshua had to sing *shirah* in its place.

Thus, what happens when the song of Creation is silenced? All movements in Creation are essentially being silenced!

All of Creation is always moving. When speech is silenced, and when fire and water as well are

silenced (when all sounds are silenced) Creation returns to the nothingness that it was originally; when the earth was completely filled with water. In the original state of Creation, the entire Creation was completely nullified to Hashem.

All of Creation was created from Hashem's speech, and behind each utterance was the voice of Hashem that empowered it. At Har Sinai, there was a silence all speech, and the voice of Hashem was revealed. The entire Creation was silenced, and returned to the state of being totally nullified to Hashem, when there was nothing in Creation except for the presence of Hashem.

At that moment of total silence in Creation, the entire Creation came to a standstill. All of Creation stood silent, and this revealed the One Who is Unchanging: the Creator, Who always was, is, and will be.

When we stand before Hashem [in Shemoneh Esrei], we must realize that we are at a standstill in Creation and standing "in the place" in front of Hashem, Who is Unchanging. That is the depth of why Shemoneh Esrei is called the *Amidah*, to "stand" in front of Hashem.

This is the depth of silence. As long as Creation is in movement, there can be destruction taking place. The word for silence, *shetek* (from the word *shtikah*) is the same letter as the word *keshes*, rainbow, because Hashem shows the rainbow to remind us of the original state of Creation, in which the original waters filled the world, when all was still.

The bond with the Creator is complete when it comes from the depths of the soul, from the inner silence in the soul, the "calm waters" in the soul which are represented by the letter *mem*, in which there is no movement. It is there that the total connection with the Creator is reached.

[1] Berachos 62a

[2] Shabbos 13b

[3] Kesubos 14b

[4] See Understanding Your Middos #017-Nullification

[5] Sefer Yetzirah 6:6

[6] As explained by The Vilna Gaon

[7] Kiddushin 49b

[8] **Editor's Note:** Perhaps the connection between daas and the element of wind is because both of

these are known as connecting forces. In the four elements, wind is always seen as the connecting element between fire and water, and daas is the connecting force in the mind which combines the information and knowledge in the mind and produces the mature understanding of the information.

[9] Beraishis Rabbah 71:5

[10] Yirmiyahu 23:29

[11] Sotah 13b

[12] Eichah 2:18

[13] Shmuel I, 1:13

[14] Avodah Zarah 35a

[15] Menachos 29b

[16] Pesachim 99a

[17] See Shabbos 47a and Kiddushin 39a

[18] Shabbos 113b

[19] Yerushalmi Shabbos 15:3

[20] Chullin 89a

[21] Shemos Rabbah 29:9

[22] Shabbos 88b

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