

4G TMI CHABURA: SHTIKA



FINDING HASHEM THROUGH SILENCE

The Albert Einstein Journal of Medicine conducted a study asking participants to spend less than 20 minutes in a room alone by themselves, without any phones, items, or external stimuli to distract themselves with. Essentially, they wanted to see what participants would do when placed in a room by themselves with nothing to do but think.

These were the results:

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Just think: The challenges of the disengaged mind

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In 11 studies, we found that participants typically did not enjoy spending 6 to 15 minutes in a room by themselves with nothing to do but think, that they enjoyed doing mundane external activities much more, and that many preferred to administer electric shocks to themselves instead of being left alone with their thoughts. Most people seem to prefer to be doing something rather than nothing, even if that something is negative.

Questions to Consider:

- What might be the reason that the study participants preferred to feel something painful rather than sit with their thoughts alone?
- In what ways in our own lives do we find ourselves doing something rather than nothing, even if that something is negative.

שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּנִי אָמַר, כָּל יְמֵי גִדְלָתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים, וְלֹא מָצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב אֶלָּא שְׁתִּיקָה

Shimon, his son, used to say: all my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence.

משלי י"ז:כ"ח

(כח) גַּם אִוִּיל מְחַרֵּשׁ חֶכֶם יִחְשַׁב אִם־שָׁפְתָיו נִבְּזוּ:

(28) Even a fool, if he keeps silent, is deemed wise; Intelligent, if he seals his lips.

משנה אבות ג':י"ג

רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אָמַר... סִיג לַחֲכָמָה, שְׁתִּיקָה:

Rabbi Akiva said... The fence of wisdom is silence.

Question to Consider:

- Why do Chazal place such an important emphasis on silence?
- Is Shtika/Silence important to prevent bad things occurring, or is a way to gain beneficial things?

Only through stopping, can we begin to think:

In ירמיהו, the Navi asks Hashem why the Jewish people were continuously doing עבירות and refusing to do Teshuva. Yirmiyahu says that he keeps trying to get them to change their ways, but all they do is “כלה” *“persist in their wayward course Like a horse dashing forward in the fray.”*

On this the Mesilas Yesharim writes:

שהיו מעלימים עיניהם ממעשיהם בלי שישימו לב לראות מה הם: הלהעשות אם להעזוב.

ואמר עליהם (ירמיה ח'): אין איש נחם על רעתו לאמר וגו' כלה שב במרוצתם כסוס שוטף במלחמה

They would turn a blind eye to their deeds, not putting heart to consider what they were doing, whether to do or refrain from doing it. Regarding them he said: “no man regrets of his evil, saying, What have I done? Each one running to his own course, as the horse rushes into the battle.” (Jer. 8:6)

Yirmiyahu here perfectly describes the root issue of the inability to enact real change into our lives. We simply run through life like a horse running to war, never stopping in silence for one moment to reflect on who we are and where we want to be heading.

If stopping and thinking through silence is such a positive thing, then why is it so difficult for us?

1. Our thoughts are ours alone:

Hakhsharat HaAvrekhim 5

ההסתכלות בקרבו קשה מפני שהבטה ברוחני כמעט בלא לבוש ממשי הוא, וגם עצמית היא ומיוחדת לכל אחד לבדו. כי למשל לא בהשם "ירא"ה האיש מסתכל עתה, ולא בהענין יראה כשלעצמה הוא מתבונן. רק בנפשו פנימה ובפעולתה הוא מסתכל, האם יראה היא את ד', והאם התרשותה זו עתה באמת יראה היא, או מרמה היא את עצמה, הסתכלות כזאת רק לפנימית כל אחד היא, ולא יוכל לשאל על זה לזולתו לאמור אמור נא לי האם פעולת נפשי עתה יראה ואהבה טהורה היא או לא, כמו שאומר על דבר שכל לחבירו ויוכח.

Introspection is difficult because it involves looking at a spiritual matter that is almost completely undressed by a material garment. Moreover, it is a personal matter, unique to each individual. Take, for example, the fear of God. The man of introspection is not looking at the word, “fear.” Neither is

he looking at the subject of fear as an intellectual study. Rather he is looking inside his soul at the real effects of fear on his life. Does he fear God? Is the hisragshus that he now feels truly the fear of God, or is it his soul deceiving itself? Such introspection is a completely personal matter, and its veracity cannot be corroborated with anyone else. He cannot say to his friend, "tell me whether or not the activity that is going on right now in my soul is truly fear and love," and have his friend verify it the way he can with an intellectual matter.

2. Our thoughts are limitless

"In the world of potential all things can exist, but in the physical world only one version of a thing can exist at any one time. Here things are crystalized, frozen into physical form, and the physical can be only one thing at a time. The body lives in the outer world It is physical, it can be perceived easily, mechanically, with finite tools. The Neshama (soul), the personality, lives in the inner dimension; it can be perceived only with an inner faculty.

- World Mask, Akiva Tatz (Pg, 83-84)

3. Our thoughts create change (and change can be scary):

The Chofetz Chaim, Chapter 11 of his Likutei Amarim:

And it's not enough for a person to pray the shemonei esrei three times a day, rather a few times per day, a person needs to pour out prayers and supplications in solitude, in his house, from the depths of his heart. Because the three prayers (shemonei esrei) are already fixed in his mouth and he doesn't take them to heart so much. But if a person would contemplate in solitude and make a cheshbon hanefesh on his personal situation... then he will pour out his heart like water in front of Hashem, yisborach, and the prayer will go out with deep kavana and with a broken heart and a lowly spirit.

Thinking brings Doubt

Thinking can make us reconsider our way of living, allowing us to see things from different perspectives.

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Doubt brings Responsibility

Doubt makes you aware of problems that currently exist in your life, urging you to find the solutions to them.

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Responsibility brings Change

Finding solutions to our problems prompts change in the lives we are currently comfortable living.

Questions to Consider:

- Which part of silence, and the thinking that comes along with it, do you think scares us most?

Using our words right can only happen if silence is the first step:

World Mask, Akiva Tatz pg 127

“Just as children are an outward expression of the body of the parent, so two words are the outward expression of the mind of the speaker.

Orchot Tzadikim

“Before you speak, you are the master of your words. After you speak, your words master you.”

Shelah, Ki Teitzei, Torah Ohr 128

The use man can make of his mouth is what basically distinguishes him from other living creatures. The Torah describes Adam as having become a living creature in Genesis 2,7. Onkelos renders this as “man (Adam) became a talking creature.” From this stems the duty of man to fulfill all the promises he makes with his mouth.

The Torah (23,24) specifically commands: מוצא שפתך תשמור, “*You must fulfill what has crossed your lips.*” ...From this it is clear that such utterances are binding upon us. The formula וידבר... לאמר which we frequently find in the Torah may be a warning that what is uttered externally, i.e. דבור, should reflect what has been formulated already within us, i.e. אמירה. The ability to formulate thoughts into words is almost divine; this is why we must take great care with everything that crosses our lips.

How to use Silence to find our inner voice of God:

The Time for Silence: To Hear God You Need a Listening Soul, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, 2016

The desert is a place of silence... To be sure, when the Israelites received the Torah [in the desert at Mt. Sinai], there was thunder and lightning and the sound of a shofar. The earth felt as if it were shaking at its foundations. But in a later age, when the prophet Elijah stood at the same mountain ...he encountered G-d not in the whirlwind or the fire or the earthquake but in the *kol demamah dakah*, the still, small voice, literally “the sound of a slender silence.” I define this *as the sound you can hear only if you are listening*. In the silence of the *midbar*, the desert, you can hear the *Medaber*, the Speaker, and the *medubar*, that which is spoken. **To hear the voice of G-d, you need a listening silence in the soul.**

STORY:

For his military service, a man served on a submarine that regularly used Morse code. He became a respected expert able to quickly send and decipher messages. Sadly, after completing his navy service, away from strict military protocols, he fared less well. He was let go from a good job in civilian life because of a gross misunderstanding. Not sure what to do next, he saw the army was looking for a Morse code specialist, and he decided to apply. He was told to come anytime between 10:00 a.m. and 12 noon and he arrived at 11:50 a.m. At the office, he saw a waiting room full of applicants and a secretary at a desk in front of an inner room that was empty except for an interviewer quietly reading to herself. The man sat down and listened to the music playing in the background for a few minutes. Then he got up and approached the inner office door. The secretary stopped him, “Sir, there are many people waiting in line ahead of you,” he said. “Wait your turn.” The man hesitated, remembering how he had just lost a job through a misunderstanding, but then he continued onward into the inner room. The interviewer in that room immediately got up, went out to the waiting room and told everyone, “Thank you all for coming. You can go home, we have chosen someone.” Those in the waiting room called out in unison, “It isn’t fair. This man came in last. Why did you interview him before us?” The interviewer replied, “Did you not pay attention to the music? It was in Morse code, and it was saying: “if you’ve come for the interview, just walk through the door and come in. Even if the secretary tells you to wait, just go straight to the inner room.”

מלכים א' י"ז

וְרוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה וְחֹק מְפָרֵק הָרִים וּמִשְׁבֵּר סִלְעִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לֹא בְרוּחַ יְהוָה וְאַחֲרֵי הָרוּחַ כַּעַשׂ לֹא בְרַעַשׂ יְהוָה:

There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind—an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

וְאַחֲרֵי הַרַעַשׂ אֵשׁ לֹא בָאשׁ יְהוָה וְאַחֲרֵי הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּמָמָה דָּקָה:

After the earthquake—fire; but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire—a soft murmuring sound.

Tehillim 37:7

דוֹם לַיהוָה וְהִתְחַלְלֵל-לוֹ,

“Be silent before Hashem, and wait patiently for Him.”

Questions to Consider:

- What is the voice of Hashem that we are promised to find when silent?
- Do you find yourself listening to that voice often?
- How can we learn to stop and listen to this voice through all the noise in life?

Rebbe Nachman's Tefillah for Being Alone in Silence:

*Master of the Universe,
help me always with the ability to be alone;
may it be my custom to go out into the field every day among the
trees and grass — among all growing things of the field
and there may I be alone,
and enter into verbose conversation — prayer —
between you and me, my beholder,
to converse over everything on my conscience.*

רבונו של עולם
ובני להתבודדות תמיד,
ואזכה להיות רגיל לצאת בכל יום לשדה
בין אילנות ועשבים וכל שיח השדה,
ושם אזכה להתבודד
ולתקבול בשיחה זו תפילה
ביני לבין קוני,
לשוח שם כל אשר עם לבבי

In 2020 Rabbi Sacks joined a famous podcast, The Time Ferriss show, and was asked to share what purchase of a hundred dollars or less that had he felt most positively impacted his life in the past six months.

This was his answer:

“Without a shadow of a doubt, buying Bose noise-canceling earphones. These are the most religious objects I’ve ever come across because I define faith as the ability to hear the music beneath the noise”

Question to Consider:

- What did Rabbi Sacks mean by defining faith as “The ability to hear the music beneath the noise”?

Later on in the interview, Rabbi Sacks clarified his answer:

Rabbi Sacks: “Somebody once asked Harold Macmillan, the British prime minister in the 1950s, “What is the biggest challenge of being Prime Minister?” And he replied, “Events, dear boy. Events.”

So there’s so much going on. And you are buffeted by this wind, this whirlwind of swirling pressures. And life can come to seem, as the book of Ecclesiastes calls it “Meaningless, meaningless, all is meaningless.” Faith is the ability to go deeper than that and to sense the real wonders, the miracles that surround us... And when you sense the majesty of existence, of life, of beauty, of nature, of the human person, of love, of becoming a parent, those are the things we tend to miss because we’re so preoccupied by the noise. And if we could find a way of generating a noise-reduction system in our minds, we would actually see and sense the beauty of life.

Now, I once said to Richard Dawkins, whom I regard as a beloved friend, but he is a pretty angry atheist. And I once said to Richard, “Richard, your problem is you are tone deaf. You can’t hear the music.” And he replied to me. He gave me a lovely reply. He said, “Yes, it’s true. I am tone deaf. But there is no music.” So there we are. I think that’s the difference really between Richard and myself, that I can hear the music.”

Summary:

- **Naturally we as Human Beings would rather be doing something rather than nothing, even if that something is negative**
- **Only through stopping and finding silence can we begin to truly think**
- **Truly reflecting on our thoughts through silence can be scary and difficult, but it is for those exact reasons that it is inherently valuable**
- **It is only through silence that we can find the voice of Hashem within us**
- **Being a frum Jew can be defined as the ability to hear the music beneath the noise**