



ROSH HASHANAH



Putting on THE BRAKES

Sometimes the most important thing we can do with our mouth...is close it | BY ROBERT SUSSMAN

THERE IS AN EMPHASIS TODAY IN THE JEWISH world on learning about *loshen hara*, the laws related to proper speech, which include avoiding speaking slander, gossip, or in a derogatory manner about people. But there is another point that is even more important and fundamental than this. There is a general quality that's called *shtikah*, the silence, and not even necessarily from *losh-*

en hara, but total silence, i.e. holding one's tongue. When it comes to the things that a person says, there are those which are forbidden and those which are permitted, but there is still another ability by a person and that is the ability to be silent, to not say anything at all. And the truth is, the most beautiful moments in the history of the world involved incidents of silence.

The Midrash tells¹ us about what transpired at the time the *Beis HaMikdash* (Temple) was destroyed, Avraham Avinu (our father), Yitzchak Avinu, Yaakov Avinu, and Moshe Rabbeinu all stepped forward to present arguments on behalf of the Jewish people, asking Hashem to have mercy on their children and not send them into exile, where the nations of the world would harm them and even kill them. Avraham argued that he had been willing, upon Hashem's instruction, to offer up his son, Yitzchak, as an *olah* (a burnt offering) and Yitzchak argued that he had willingly gone through with it, allowing himself to be bound on top of the altar and even spread his neck under the knife. But, no matter what they said, Hashem would not budge.

And, so too, Yaakov and Moshe argued before Hashem on behalf of the Jewish people, but also to no avail. All seemed lost, until Rachel Imeinu (our mother) stepped forward and said:

"Master of the Universe, it is revealed

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before you that Yaakov, your servant, loved me and worked for my father for seven years to marry me. When he had completed those seven years and the time came to marry me, my father decided to switch my sister with me. This was very difficult for me because I became aware of what was happening. I told Yaakov and he gave me signs by which he could recognise between me and my sister, in order that my father could not switch us.

After that, I had mercy on my sister, and wanted to prevent her from being shamed. In the evening, they switched us and I gave my sister all the signs that Yaakov had given to me so that he would think that she was me. I did kindness with her; I wasn't jealous and I did not let her be embarrassed. Who am I? I am flesh and blood, dust and ashes. I was not jealous as a result of my pain and I did not embarrass or shame my sister. And You, the living and eternal King, who is merciful, why would You be jealous of idol worship [one of the main sins of which the children of Israel were guilty], of which there is nothing real whatsoever, and exile my children and have them killed by the sword, and let their enemies do with them as they please?"

Rachel Imeinu was a prophetess² and she knew that the 12 tribes would come from Yaakov Avinu. She knew that all of the tribes were meant to be from her

“SOMETIMES WE NEED TO PUT ON THE BRAKES EVEN WHEN THE TRAFFIC LIGHT IS GREEN AND WE HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY. SO TOO, SOMETIMES WE NEED TO BE SILENT EVEN WHEN IT’S PERMISSIBLE FOR US TO SPEAK AND WE HAVE ‘THE RIGHT OF WAY’, SO TO SPEAK.”

alone, as well as the *Melech HaMashiach* (the Messiah). The entire future of the Jewish people was resting on this *shidduch* between her and Yaakov. What about her sister, Leah? She was meant for Eisav. By allowing Leah to switch places with her, Rachel, in fact, gave to her sister the entire Jewish people, as Rachel expected that she would wind up with Eisav in place of her sister, Leah.

After Rachel finished speaking before Hashem, He immediately took pity and said, “Because of you, Rachel, I will return Israel to their place.” And so Hashem said³, “...I hear a loud voice wailing and crying bitterly, Rachel cries for her children and she refuses to be comforted...stop your voice from crying, your eyes from tears, because there is a reward for your actions...there is hope for your future... Your children will return to their border.”

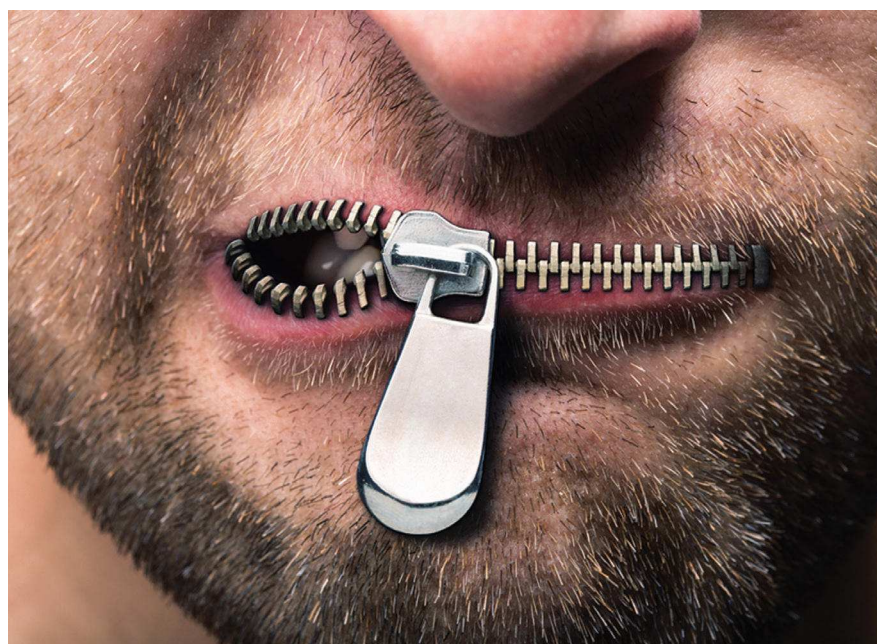
Avraham comes and says to Hashem,

“For nothing I withstood 10 tests?” And Hashem answers, “What can I do? *Am Yisrael* has done many *aveiros* (sins).” Yitzchak comes and says, “For nothing I spread my neck to be *shechted* (slaughtered)?” And so too, Hashem gives him this same answer – and so also to Yaakov Avinu and to Moshe Rabbeinu. Not one of them was successful in saving *Am Yisrael*. Until Rachel Imeinu came along. What, in fact, did Rachel do? She was silent! But this action of being silent blew up the world. She saw how the entire House of Israel would be taken from her, how her future was to be with Eisav. She saw terrible things, and, yet, what did she do? True, she also did wonderful things, but mainly, she was silent! This is the wondrous ability that’s in a person – to restrain himself from speaking.

PUTTING ON THE BRAKES

Everyone knows that the first rule of driving is: if the brakes don’t work, don’t get in the car. The brakes are the most important thing in the car. And, sometimes we need to put on the brakes even when the traffic light is green and we have the right of way. So too, sometimes we need to be silent even when it’s permissible for us to speak and we have ‘the right of way’, so to speak.

What would Rachel have been doing wrong if she had revealed to Yaakov that she had given her sister, Leah, to him in her place? She wouldn’t have been doing anything wrong; just the opposite, she would have been doing a *mitzvah*, as Yaakov Avinu had instructed her to guard the signs so that Leah would not be given to him and she would have fulfilled her word and her promise. Nevertheless, she didn’t do so. Why? Because her sister would have been embarrassed.





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The power to press the brakes is the power to be silent at the moment that we feel we must speak and must respond.

WHAT WAS SO GREAT ABOUT THE AKEIDAH?

What was the greatness of the *akeidah* (the episode of the binding of Yitzchak in order to offer him as an offering as Hashem had instructed Avraham)? Avraham's willingness to shecht (slaughter) his son? Hashem commanded Avraham to bring up his son as an *olah*, was Avraham able to not shecht him?

Our Sages reveal⁴ to us the secret. At the end of the *akeidah* it says, "By myself I swear, the word of Hashem..."⁵ And Chazal say, what need was there to swear? Rabbi Bibi Bar Aba in the name of Rabbi Yochanan says: Avraham Avinu stood in prayer and supplication before Hashem and said to Him, "Master of the Universe, It is revealed and known before You, at the time You said to me to 'take your son, your only one'⁶, there was in my heart what to answer You and there was in my heart what to say: "Yesterday You told me that [my descendants will come though Yitzchak]⁷, and now You say to me, 'bring [Yitzchak] up there for a burnt offering'⁸ [ie. sacrifice your son from whom I previously told you that your descendants would issue!]" Just as I had what to answer You and conquered my inclination and I didn't reply, like a deaf person who does not hear, like a mute who does not open his mouth; so when it will be that the children of Yitzchak come to do *aveiros* (sins) and evil deeds, it should be that You should remember for them the *akeidas Yitzchak* (the binding of Isaac) of their father, and rise from Your throne of judgment and move to Your throne of mercy."

When Hashem commanded the *akeidah*, Avraham could have said, "Master of the Universe, I'm prepared to do it, but just explain to me something – just one small question: You promised me that from me will be built Am Yisra-

el?!" But Avraham Avinu didn't respond; he didn't ask questions; and he asked, in the merit of this, that Hashem would also not respond when *Am Yisrael* would commit *aveiros*. To ask from Hashem that He will forgive – that much Avraham wasn't able to do. How could he ask Hashem to forgive for *aveiros*? Only this he asked: I closed my mouth – so too You, Master of the Universe, don't do anything, so to speak.

A DEAFENING SILENCE

And this wasn't the first test of Avraham. Hashem commanded Avraham to "*Lech lecha*", "Go for yourself" – to leave his home and travel far away to a foreign land. And this was an extremely difficult thing for Avraham to do. Avraham built his home in the city of Charan. He worked hard to cause all the men in that place to return in *teshuvah* (repentance) to Hashem and he still had much work to

do. Hashem said to him, "*Lech lecha*", to leave his home. Hashem promised Avraham that everything would be good for him in his new place. What did Avraham do? He didn't ask questions, instead immediately it says, "And Avraham went as Hashem told him to."⁹ He left everything behind him and he went.

And still this isn't everything. In the end, Avraham made it to the land of Israel and, for the first time in the history of mankind, there was a famine in the world. There was nothing to eat. Avraham could have come and complained to Hashem and said, "Master of the Universe, You said to me to go to the land of Israel, and that there would be for me *bracha* (blessing) and *hatzlacha* (success) and all good. And now, I reach here, and I don't have what to eat. This has never happened before – it's the first time that the world lacks what to eat. What about the promise that You promised to me, Hashem?" But Avraham didn't say a word!

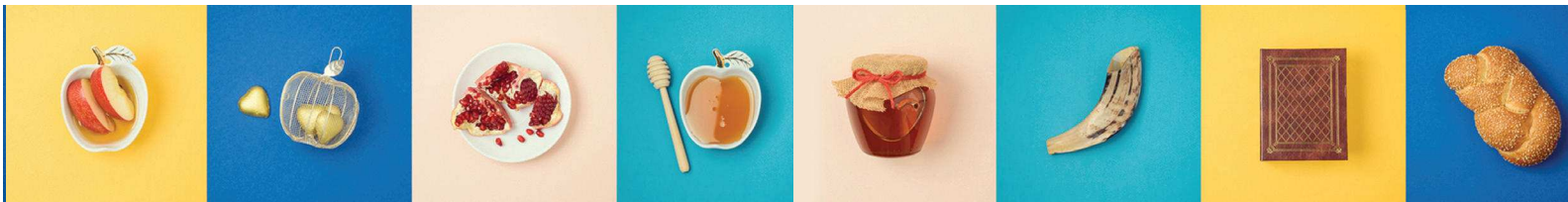
And on all of this – on these episodes of deafening silence of the *Avos* and *Imahos* (of the patriarchs and matriarchs) – we live until today! Silence is everything.

SHHHH....

In fact, the ability to remain silent is one of the *middos* (character traits) of Hashem. Our Sages teach¹⁰, Aba Chanan says: Who is like You, O' Mighty G-d – who is mighty and hard like You, as You hear the cursing of the wicked and You remain silent. Bei Rebbe Yishmael teaches a similar lesson via a play on words: Who is like You among the gods? Who is like You among the mute? [The words being very similar (a difference of one letter): *elim* (gods) vs *ilmim* (mute).]

The gemara¹¹ teaches that man's





occupation, the one skill that he is meant to occupy himself with learning and mastering in this world, is how to be silent like a mute. In our generation, we are focused on what is permitted and prohibited to say, but this isn't what's asked of us; what's asked of us is to master being silent like a mute.

CAN WE EVER RESPOND?

So, the obvious question is: do we always need to remain silent or are we ever permitted to respond?

We find a great principle regarding this in the gemara. It's well known that the Talmud is full of *machlokes* (argument) – Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel; Abaye and Rava; Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish. Until today, there are no two *talmidei chachomim* (Torah scholars) that have one opinion in Torah – and this is the beauty of the Torah.

But, this wasn't always the case.

Before the era of the famous Rabbis

Shamai and Hillel, there was clarity in Torah and there wasn't *machlokes*! The first *machlokes* in Israel was between Shamai and Hillel regarding the law concerning leaning one's hands on an offering on Yom Tov – the issue was: did a person need to lean his hands on the offering or not?

The gemara says¹² that there was an incident with a student of Beis Hillel who brought his burnt offering to the courtyard of the *Beis HaMikdash* in order to lean on it. He found a student there of Beis Shamai. This student of Beis Shamai said to him: “*Mah zu semicha?*” “What is this leaning that you're doing?” In other words, are you going to lean on that animal and transgress the ruling of Beis Shamai? Surely, we argue with you.

The student of Beis Hillel responded: “*Mah zu shtika?*” “What is this silence?” As Rashi explains, he was saying, “You should have been silent and you weren't silent.” The student of Beis Hillel silenced the student of Beis Shamai with this rebuke and

the student of Beis Shamai went away.

The gemara continues: Abaye said, therefore from here we learn, a Torah scholar, who has a colleague say something to him, should not answer that colleague back and add more than what his colleague had originally said to him, as we see from this incident that the one said, “*Mah zu semicha?*” and the other responded in the same language, “*Mah zu shtika?*”

AVOIDING THE KITCHEN SINK APPROACH

Sometimes there are situations where a person needs to respond, but there are two types of responses. There is a type of responding where someone does something to us and we limit our response to what was actually just done, but there is another type of responding where, instead of responding to the particular action that was just done, we go beyond the limits of the present incident and can't help but address more, perhaps even including every-

Anchor Instant Yeast

Wishing you a Sweet New Year Breakfast Crumpets

Makes: 24 Crumpets

Method:

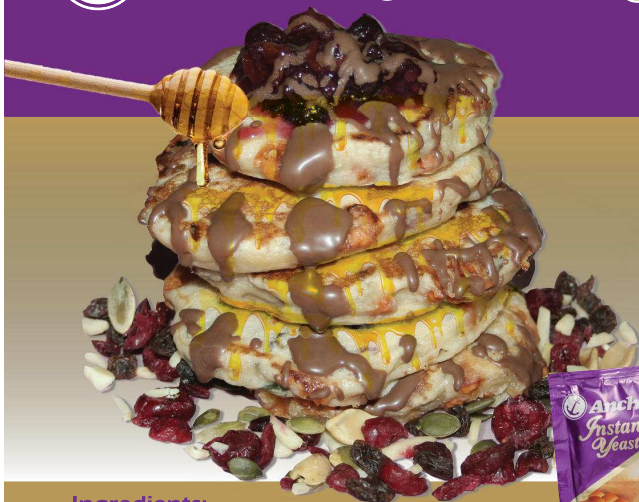
1. Mix the flour, salt and sugar together. Add the Anchor Instant Yeast and mix.
2. Combine the warm milk, cold water, oil and beaten eggs together and add to the flour mixture to form a batter. Mix well until smooth.
3. Cover the bowl with plastic and allow to rise in a warm place for 15 minutes.
4. Add the cranberry health mix and mix until well distributed.
5. Heat a little oil in a fry pan; griddle or an electric fry pan and pour spoonfuls of the mixture into the pan. Fry until bubbles appear on the surface of the crumpets. Turn the crumpet over and fry until golden brown. Remove and drain on a paper towel.
6. Serve warm with whipped cream, berry jam and melted chocolate.

Hint:

Eggs may be substituted with vinegar in the case of non-egg users. Use 30 ml (2 tbsp) vinegar and 20 ml (4 tsp) water per egg. Mix as per the method and add in place of the egg.

Ingredients:

- 500 g Cake flour (4 x 250 ml / 4 cups)
- 10 ml Salt (2 tsp)
- 60 ml Sugar (4 tbsp)
- 10 g Anchor Instant Yeast (1 packet)
- 125 ml Warm milk (½ cup)
- 310 ml Cold water (1 ¼ cup)
- 30 ml Oil (2 tbsp)
- 2 Large eggs, beaten
- 125 ml Cranberry health mix (dried cranberries, peanuts, almonds, raisins and pumpkin seeds)
- Oil for frying
- 125 ml Fresh cream, whipped
- Berry jam, to serve
- 100 g Dark baking chocolate, melted





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thing that has ever transpired throughout our relationship with this person.

We all strive to be polite, but each of us has powerful feelings of anger hidden deep within him. We can't constantly cry out and get angry, so we wait for an occasion that gives us the opportunity to open our mouths and breach this dam of courtesy, causing all of the anger that has accumulated behind this dam to burst forth in destructive torrents.

When we respond to wrongs that have been done to us, our response is meant to be a measured one, in accordance with the wrong that was done to us. In other words, if someone wrongs us, so to speak, to the tune of two metres, then we can answer that person in this same amount. But, if because of this small wrong that was done, we will open our mouths and begin to speak disrespectfully about every pain that the person has ever caused us,

lumping things together, and steamrolling the person with the entire history of the wrongs that he has done to us over the years – for this there is no allowance. This is where a person needs to toil to acquire the character trait of silence.

The student of Beis Shamai said, “*Mah zu semicha?*” In a situation like this, the student of Beis Hillel might have responded disrespectfully and said, “You know that you are destroying *Am Yisrael* with your *machlokes*! And not just today, but even a year ago!” But, he didn't say so. He only said, “*Mah zu shtika?*” and nothing further. He measured his response precisely so as to address the wrong that had been done.

This is the rule that our Sages learn from here. It is sometimes permissible for us to respond, but we need to take care that our responses are not a generator of bad character traits, allowing things like anger to surface and reign without re-

straint, but rather precisely measured in accordance with what was done to us.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

Let's imagine the following: a woman asks her husband to bring home some milk for their child. Because it's so important, she even reminds him a few times before he leaves the house and, perhaps, even throughout the day. Later that evening, the husband returns home and, as it turns out...you guessed it...he forgot to buy the milk. The shops are all closed and his wife will now have to go to the neighbours and ask to borrow some milk.

This is not the first time that this has happened between them. It happened yesterday and the day before that. It's irritating. Let's imagine the woman's reaction as her husband enters the house and his hands are empty:

“What happened?”

“Ummm...I forgot.”

“How could you forget?”

“See, I was speaking with Ploni and I wasn't paying attention and...”

In a situation like this, should she remain silent or is it permissible for her to respond?

Our approach needs to be like the words of the gemara.

“IN OUR GENERATION, WE ARE FOCUSED ON WHAT IS PERMITTED AND PROHIBITED TO SAY, BUT THIS ISN'T WHAT'S ASKED OF US; WHAT'S ASKED OF US IS TO MASTER BEING SILENT LIKE A MUTE.”





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If the woman is able to say only: "Why didn't you get the milk? You know that Yankel needs milk and that it's very important. I'm asking you not to forget again." In other words, she gives a measured response according to what was done wrong. He did two metres of wrong and she returns to him two metres in response. If this is the form, then it's permissible and even a mitzvah to respond.

But, if he returns home without the milk and she instead pounces on him: "You always forget!" And she begins to steamroll him with the entire history of his forgetting along with the other wrongs that he has done to her over the years, allowing the dam to burst, "Since I met you, you have not thought of me even once!" And on and on...

And he, of course, will also have what to say in response to this outpouring from her. In a situation like this, this is not simply a response to the wrong that was done, but the bursting of a dam that holds be-

hind it tremendous anger and the incident with the milk only causes a small opening, a hairline crack, which allows everything being held back by the dam to burst through it all at once. This is not a desirable response, but an expression and a generator of anger and other bad character traits.

CRYING OUT IN SILENCE

And this rule for responding applies to all relationships, not only between a husband and wife. Only when we are able to properly measure and respond in an appropriate, commensurate way is it ever appropriate for us to respond at all – to anyone. When we have something burning inside us that is trying to burst forth, in such a situation it is forbidden to respond and we need to hold ourselves back and learn to keep our mouths closed.

On this idea was said the well-known words of the Vilna Gaon: "For each and every moment that a man closes his mouth, he merits a hidden light that not even any

angel or creation are able to imagine." Mastering control over one's mouth, being able to remain silent in the face of wrongs that are done to him is the greatest thing that a person is able to do – and this is the trait of Hashem – "a thin, silent sound", as the *Navi* (prophet) describes Hashem's appearance to *Eliyahu HaNavi* (Elijah the prophet) – a crying out of silence. **III**

Based on Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus, ztz"l, (Nefesh Chaya – Mi Chamocha Ba'eilim Hashem)

¹Eichah Rabbah Pesichta 24

²Talmud Yerushalmi Brachos 9:3; Bereishis Rabbah 67:9, 72:6

³Yirmiyah 31:15-16

⁴Vayikra Rabbah 29:9

⁵Bereishis 22:16

⁶Bereishis 22:2

⁷Bereishis 21:12

⁸Bereishis 22:2

⁹Bereishis 12:4

¹⁰Gittin 56b

¹¹Chulin 89a

¹²Beitzah 20b



Chag Sameach

CONTINENTAL linen

WHITEHOUSE