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**הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל**

**Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha**  
Adapted from his Tapes, Seforim and Writings of Talmidim



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————— This week's booklet based on Tapes: —————

#S-6 - Silence | #R-53 - Great by Silence | #270 - Depths of the Mind |  
 #587 - Silence | #947 - Skill of Silence



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בעזרה שׂית

## פרשת תזריע

With Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l

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### *Silence is Golden*

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### Part I. Hashem is Here

#### HE'S TAMEI, HE'S TAMEI, HE'S TAMEI

“All the days that the *tzara'as* is upon the person he shall be *tamei, tamei* he should be. He should dwell alone; outside the camp should be his place of residence.” (13:46) When reading this *possuk*, we are immediately struck by the repetition of the *tamei* status of the *metzora*, “He shall be *tamei, tamei* he should be” and that requires an explanation.

So we'll say as follows: The root “*tum*” denotes something that is “closed off”. That's what the word *tumah* means, and that is the principle underlying all the laws of *tumah*. Wherever we find *tumah* we must understand that it is a decree of Hashem to teach us what should be avoided and shunned.

So we read the *possuk* as follows: “All the days that the *tzara'as* is upon the person he shall be ritually unclean” - the first word “*tamei*” speaks of the status of *tumah*. He is an *av hatumah*. It's information we have to know. It's a technicality the Torah is

teaching us; the basic law that this man is *tamei* and makes *tamei* anything that comes in contact with him. But the second expression of *tumah*, “*Tamei* he should be,” is giving us the *reason* for the *tumah* being imposed on him; as if to say: “He shall be *tamei*, because Hashem desires that he should be *closed off* from society.” “He is *tamei*”, because “*tamei*, shunned and avoided, he should be.”

#### THE LONELY SEDER NIGHT

Now that’s something we have to study. Because we’re talking here about a *frum* Jew. He’s a father, a husband, a loyal servant of Hashem who puts on *tefillin* and *davens* three times a day with a *minyán*. His home is a kosher home and his children are all *frum* boys and girls. He’s one of us! And yet, one morning he wakes up with *tzara’as*; and now he must take leave of his family and friends and make his way beyond the walls of the city to live alone. This friend of ours, a fellow Jew, is now *tamei*; he’s closed off from the rest of Mankind. *Badad yeishev* - “He shall stay in isolation,” meaning that even other *tamei’im* are to avoid his company (Rashi *ibid.*).

So our fellow Jew is now sitting alone outside of the walls of his city; and there he will remain until the *tzara’as* heals. He’ll miss the Shabbos *seudos* with his family. He might even be spending the Seder night all alone! And it’s no accident of fate here. The Rambam says that *tzara’as* is not a natural form of leprosy; it’s a miraculous phenomenon. “*Tzara’as* is one of the miracles that Hashem provides to His nation” (Moreh Nevuchim 3:47) and that’s why a *goy* can’t become *tamei* with *tzara’as* (Negaim 3:1).

Hashem miraculously sends upon a Jew *tzara’as*, and now he has to be shunned. And it’s not because of contagion, or merely because he can be *mitamei* others - it’s because Hashem wants him to be “closed off” from people. Hashem wants that he should leave the *machaneh*; that he should separate from society and dwell alone outside of the city.

## LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING

And that's because actually this man is a dangerous man; he may appear to be very *frum*, but the *gemara* (Eirechin 15b) says: בל המספר לשון הרע נגעים באים עליו. "One who speaks wrong words, he uses his mouth in the wrong way, is stricken by leprosy." And so we understand that this man misused the gift of company of people; when he was healthy he sat around with his friends and wagged his tongue - not only that he ridiculed and belittled other people, but even just to talk *d'varim b'teilim* is misusing the tongue.

And so in the great days of *nevuah*, the *nega* of *tzara'as* spoke to this man the word of Hashem: "He shall be *tamei*, and he should be closed off from people and avoided." He will dwell alone where he won't have anyone with whom to speak; and now he will begin the study of how a person is to use his tongue, and he will understand that *the proper way to use a tongue is primarily by not using it.*

## BRING MANUFACTURING JOBS BACK!

The Rambam gives us an insight into this: לעולם ירבה אדם -בשתיקה "A person should always be *producing* a great deal of silence" (Rambam Hilchos Dei'os 2:4). You hear that? You have to produce silence as much as you can. Imagine you're producing goods for a certain purpose. Let's say you're making toothbrushes, or you're a tailor and you're sewing suits. Whatever it is, you're producing. So you have to keep *cheshbon*, "How many goods did I produce today?" "Did I do better today than yesterday?" "What could I do different tomorrow in the factory to produce more toothbrushes?" And it's the same with silence. A man should always be *producing* silence in this world. You have to think about that! "How much silence did I produce today?"

And it's considered a service of Hashem: לך דומיה תהילה - "To you Hashem, silence is praise" (Tehillim 65:2). That's an interesting idea, because we always understood that the *Hallelukahs* and the *brachos* are praise. *Ashrei*, *Hodu* and *Modim*, that's how we praise Hashem. And now we're being told that *keeping quiet* is the real way to praise Hashem; to produce silence

is actually a career of praising Hashem. And that needs a good explanation.

#### A LESSON FROM THE WISE MAN

And so, who better to turn to than the *chochom m'kol adam*. Shlomo Hamelech tells us in Koheles (5:1): אל תבהל על פיד - "Don't be in a hurry to express yourself, ולבך אל ימהר להוציא דבר לפני השם - Your heart, your mind, shouldn't be in a hurry to say something in the Presence of Hashem". When you're sitting at the table with your family, your friends, Hashem is present. So keep quiet! כי אלוקים בשמים ואתה על הארץ - "Hashem is in the heavens and you're down below on the earth, על כן יהיו דבריך מעטים - Therefore your words should be few". Oh, now something else comes into the picture; *Elokim* is now in the picture! *Elokim* is in *shomayim*, above you, looking at you. And you're down on this earth. על כן יהיו דבריך מעטים - "That's why your words must be few."

If a man opens up his mouth and words flow out without restraint, so it means he doesn't feel like he's in *anybody's* presence! Let's say you were standing in the presence of the mayor, or in front of the president of the United States - he's not such an important person today - but still you wouldn't talk too much in his presence. You definitely wouldn't be shooting off your mouth.

#### DO YOU HAVE EMUNAH IN THE PRESIDENT?

Now להבדיל אלף הבדלות, if you are talking with the *gadol hador*, with let's say Rav Shach, Rav Moshe Feinstein, whoever is the *gadol hador*, would you talk much? If you have any sense you wouldn't say a word! Let's say you meet the Sigheter Rav, you're standing in front of the Satmerer Rav, and somebody comes over to you, "Hey, Chaim! What time is it?" Would you say, "It's three o'clock"?! No you keep quiet, you keep your mouth shut; you're standing in front of your *rebbeh*! Let *him* talk; you keep quiet. חכם אינו מדבר בפני גדול ממנו - "Someone with *chochma* doesn't open his mouth when he's standing in front of somebody bigger than him" (Avos 5:7).

So the fact that you keep your mouth closed indicates that you realize that you're standing in the Presence of Hashem. It's a demonstration that you possess a sensory perception of the closeness of Hashem; it's not merely words, theories. Just like you wouldn't talk in the presence of somebody important, you don't open your mouth in the presence of *Elokim bashomayim*. You keep quiet, at least as quiet as you would be in front of the President. At least that! If the President of the United States was standing here, you'd be careful with every word that comes out of your mouth! That means you believe in the President more than you believe in Hashem!

### THE PECULIAR MAN OF OUR PARSHA

So now we can understand why this *frum* man is shunned by Hashem, sent out to live in solitude. If he's hasty with words, if he doesn't think before he speaks, so he needs to be sent out where he will have time to think about this great principle of *Elokim bashomayim*. The *metzora* had to cover his mouth, did you know that? It's an open *possuk*: וְעַל שֵׁפֶם יֵעָטָה, it means that he had to wear his cloak in certain way so that it covered his mouth. What for? Because he was proclaiming to the world this lesson! Part of his *kapparah* was to walk around dressed in this peculiar way; and he had to make a lot of noise too: טַמְמָא טַמְמָא יִקְרָא, wherever he went he had to proclaim to everyone that he's *tamei*.

So here's a man with his cloak covering half his face, all the way over his mouth, and in his muffled voice he's crying out: "I'm *tamei*, I'm *tamei*!" It was a strange sight, and anyone who saw him took his condition to heart and learned that he'd better get busy covering up his mouth before the *nega* comes to *him*. And so we gained a lot by seeing a *metzora* with his covered mouth.

### GAINING EMUNAH; A GUIDE

What we're learning is that no matter how *frum* a person is, he has to have *hargasha*, *emunah chushis*, that he's standing in front of Hashem and that's why he doesn't talk. What does that mean? Suppose you're an ordinary Jew who never worked on these concepts; you don't actually feel the Presence of Hashem. But you'd like to do it; you aspire to become a *ma'amin*. Now,

certainly you won't admit that you're not a *ma'amin*, but at least you'll admit that you don't feel the Presence of Hashem all the time. And so by training yourself not to talk just for this purpose; each time you wish to open your mouth you remind yourself: כִּי אֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל כֵּן יְהִי דְבָרֶיךָ מְעַטִּים - "Hashem is listening and therefore your words should be few." And little by little you bring into your *neshama* an awareness of this tremendous principle, and you thereby achieve *yiras Hashem*.

When someone approaches you and makes a remark, don't be in a hurry to answer. You'd like to talk; you have a wisecrack or a rejoinder, you want to say something. "No. I won't say it because I'm standing in front of Hashem." Sometimes you don't have to answer at all. If someone says something to you, do you have to say something back? Let's say a cow says moo, do you have to moo back? A dog barks as you pass by, you have to bark back? So if someone speaks to you, unless it's necessary, don't say anything. Just listen. Who says you have to answer?

And suppose you must answer; sometimes you *must* say something, so you should count your words. You know, some people are like a faucet; they start pouring out all they have. All the emptiness they have in their minds comes pouring out. That means that they're being *masiach da'as* from Hashem. A person must always keep in mind that Hashem is listening. Keeping your mouth closed, and keeping your words few when you do have to speak shows that you have *emunah* that wherever you are Hashem is listening. If you open your mouth and you talk without restraint so it means you think you're a free bird. It means that you have no *emunah*, because belief in Hashem requires that we should keep quiet. He's standing right here after all, and He's listening.

## Part II. Your New Profession

### EXTRACTING HONEY AND GEMS

Now in order to appreciate more this career of *yiras shamayim*, we have to see how the *gemara* in Chullin (89a) *darshens*

a *possuk*. As a matter of fact, the following *gemara* was once used by the Alter of Slabodka *zichrono l'vracha* as an illustration of how to appreciate every word of a *ma'amar chazal*. The Alter thought about every word that the *chachomim* said and he sucked as much honey as he could from the *ma'amar*. The *gemara* quotes the following *possuk*: אַמְנָם אֵלֶם צִדִק תְּדַבְּרוּן - "The truth is, silence is appropriate; only speak righteous words" (Tehillim 58:2). That's the *poshut pshat*, but *chazal* discovered some hidden gems in that *possuk*.

First I'll say the words of the *gemara* and then I'll tell you how the Alter explained them: אַמְנָם - מַה אֹמְנָתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה - "What is a man's profession in this world?" From the word אַמְנָם, comes *umnus*, profession. And the *gemara* asks a question: What's your job here in *Olam Hazeih*? And the *gemara* says that the next word in the *possuk*, אֵלֶם, that's the answer: יַעֲשֶׂה עִצְמוֹ כְּאֵלֶם - "Make yourself as if you were a mute, as if you couldn't speak." So we read the *possuk* like this: אַמְנָם, what's your *umnus*, your profession? אֵלֶם, to be a mute. That's your business in this world.

#### BARUCH HASHEM FOR ACCOUNTANTS!

The first thing we see is that man has a *profession* in this world. A "profession" means it's not just a hobby to keep silent, it's not even just a good thing, an added perfection. No; silence is *your business* in this world; that's what we came into this world for. Now at first glance that's hard to understand; because how could everyone have the same profession? If everyone was a shoemaker so we'd all have comfortable shoes, but we'd have to tailor our own pants. Without good Jewish accountants we'd be paying a lot of extra money to Uncle Sam. So what we're learning now is that whatever you're doing in your life; that's only your second job, a side business; you have to pay the bills after all. But your main *business* in this world is to be *k'ileim*, to keep your mouth closed.

Now, the Alter *zichrono l'vracha* made the point that an *umnus* is not something that you just pick yourself up and do; you have to train yourself for a profession. It's necessary to undergo a course of training to learn the skill of silence, just like you would

for any other serious profession. If you want to be a plumber, let's say, so you'll just put on a pair of blue overalls, grab a wrench and that's all?!

#### BECOMING A PLUMBER IS NOT EASY

Nobody ever became a plumber by saying "I decided I'm a plumber." You're going to have to roll up your sleeves and get under a sink. And you'll have to lie there on your back and watch the master plumber for months and months learning all the tricks of the trade. You'll have to carry his tools for him and you watch: When do you use this tool? When do you open that valve? When do you close it? It's a *chochma*, and there's a lot to learn. And if silence is our career in life, that means we have a lot to study.

To become a professional mute, you can't just buy a padlock for fifty cents at the corner hardware store, lock your mouth firmly, and then walk around the street without worries. It's not that easy. If that's all it was, it wouldn't be a profession; it would just be a fifty cent expense and finished. But no it's a profession, it's the "profession of a person in this world."

Now the Alter points out something else in this *gemara* that's worth our attention: It says "What is the profession *shel adam* in this world?" The profession of an *adam*! It's *this* profession, making yourself into an *ileim*, a mute, that will cause you to earn the title of *adam*. An *adam* is expected not to open his mouth unless it's justified. And only the one who has mastered this art can boast that he's made it, that he's graduated. Otherwise, you're not an *adam*. Maybe you're a croaking frog, or a blue jay; something you are, absolutely; you're making noise after all. But you're not yet an *adam* unless you've mastered this career of silence.

#### GET BUSY BANGING YOUR HEAD!

Now, what usually happens when I speak on this subject? I'll tell you. There's always one idealist who wants to get busy accomplishing. Why not? Rabbi Miller said so! He said it's a profession for *everyone*. A young man who comes here and he's inspired by the words of the Alter; he's ready now to make changes! So he goes home after the lecture, and as soon as he

walks into the house he hears his mother talking on the phone. So he bangs on the table, “Uh, uh, uh. Nu, nu!” He wants to make sure his mother knows what *her* new profession is!

So the *Alter* tells us that we have to know how to learn a *ma’amar chazal*. The *gemara* says *ya’aseh atzmo* - “Make yourself into a speechless person.” Yourself! Oh, that’s a different story already. What are you banging on the table for? Get busy banging on *your own* head! Don’t bother others!

That means when a man comes home to his wife, and he heard my lecture tonight, and now his wife wants to talk, she wants to tell him about what happened with the children today. And also she’s talking about what her sister said and probably some other things as well. So he should let her talk about whatever she wants. He shouldn’t say, “Keep quiet; in this house we work on producing silence.” He’s a dumbbell! He’s working on *her* silence! *Ya’aseh atzmo!* He has to make *himself* an *ileim*; that’s who he has to worry about.

#### TALK TO PAPA!

Now this profession, this career we’re speaking about tonight, wouldn’t be so difficult if all you had to do was to buy a padlock. Mazel tov, you’re an *ileim*! But that’s not what Chazal are demanding of you; it doesn’t say you should *be* an *ileim*, it says *k’ileim*, like a mute. You know that the extra letter *kaf* seems like an unnecessary addition. It could have just as well said, “Make yourself into an *ileim*.” What’s *ya’aseh atzmo k’ileim*, make yourself like a mute?

What it means is that you *can’t* padlock your lips shut! You have to make yourself *k’ileim*, like a mute, *as if* you can’t speak. You have to talk, and sometimes you have to talk and talk, but you have to talk like somebody who is an *ileim*. If you have to walk through the street, you have to say good morning or good evening to the people you see. You can’t just walk around with a deadpan face ignoring people. Why should your neighbor suffer because you’re learning a new profession?! You come into the home, so you have to walk in and say, “How was your day

Chanaleh?" At least that you have to say! You can't come in and be an *ileim*. A boy comes in from the yeshiva, he can't walk in quietly and go to his room. He has to say "*Vus machstu mammeh?*" "How are you Papa?" *Something* he has to say! He's *k'ileim*, not an *ileim mamish*.

That's why the *gemara* says, *Yachol la'kol* - "You might think that once you adopt this practice so you shouldn't open your mouth for *anything*." תלמוד לומר צדק תדברון - "So the *possuk* says, 'Speak righteousness.'" When it comes to words of righteousness *you have to talk*." *Divrei Torah* you have to talk. Words of kindness you have to talk. If someone is sad and dejected you *must* go over and put your arm around his shoulders and say a few kind words to him. *Tzedek tidabeirun*. Good things you *must* say!

#### DON'T COMPLIMENT THE CHALLAH...

To say words of encouragement to your fellow man, to comfort a fellow Jew, that's what you have a mouth for, that's part of your profession. You don't have to babble though. Think of ways and means of making people happy, by saying a timely word. If it's a child then sometimes a little *glett* on the cheek and a word or two can be a lifesaver. Tell him something that buoys his self respect, something that gives him the ambition to continue improving.

If you tell your wife that she cooks well - that's very important by the way - that's *tzedek*. You make sure to compliment your wife when she serves you anything: "Chanaleh, this challah tastes excellent." Now if she bought it at the bakery, make sure *not* to praise the *challah*; find something else to be *m'shabeiach*. "This chicken soup is *m'ein Olam Habah*, Chanaleh. *Yi'yasheir koi'ach*"

Now usually it *does* taste good; you can find many things to compliment. Don't be bashful! It's not the time to be *k'ileim* - now it's time for *tzedek tidabeirun*. And even if it happens, an unusual incident, when supper is not such a success, if you'll say it's excellent, there's no harm either. Only that most people have it all wrong; when they have what to complain about, then the words come gushing forth, pearls of "wisdom." But when it's time

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for *tzedek tidabeirun*, then suddenly this “*tzadik*” remembers his profession of being *k’ileim*.

#### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

It’s an art. Sometimes you have to talk and talk, but you have to talk like an *ileim*. You’re always careful not to say what you’re not supposed to say. But what you have to say, you must say. So when you come home tonight and your wife says, “What did he say over there?” Don’t say “Ummmmmm.” Say something. Say it briefly but say something. Don’t just keep your mouth closed. *K’ileim*, like a mute! Oh, now that’s already an *umnus*. It’s harder than just lying on your back under a sink studying how to plumb!

And therefore we should get busy practicing this profession of *shtikah* because it means that we’re practicing the career of *yiras shamayim*! You’re sitting at the table at the Shabbos *seudah*, and everyone is prattling away. Talking and talking and talking. So what do you do? You say to yourself, “I’m going to train myself now for my profession in this world. I’m going to sit for two minutes - two minutes on the clock - and listen *and not open my mouth*.”

Let’s say you were forced to go somewhere; sometimes you have to go to visit your in-laws in Boro Park. You can't say no this time. So they're eating *melave malka* and everybody is chatting. Or maybe you're sitting at a *chasuna* and all around you all the tongues are clacking. While their minds are being ground to pieces by the idle chatter, you can grab the opportunity for getting to work on your profession. So you’re paying attention; you’re trying to seem interested, smiling at the right times. But you’re telling yourself, “Chaim, keep the mouth closed. As much as you can keep quiet because *Elokim* is *bashomayim* listening.”

### Part III. The Best Medicine

#### VALUABLE HEALTH ADVICE

Now, to make a career out of silence because of *Elokim* *Bashomayim*, that would be enough. That’s our primary obligation

in this world - to prepare for *Olam Haba* by training ourselves to become more and more aware of Hashem. But it's more than that; it's also your happiness and success in *Olam Hazeih!*

There's a *mishnah* in *Avos* (1:17) that says the following: שמעון בן אומר, "Shimon, the son of Rabban Gamliel said, כל ימי גדלתי, בין החכמים, all the days of my life I grew up among the wise men, ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב משתיקה, and I found nothing better for the body than silence." Now, if someone on the street would offer you some health advice, I don't know how valuable it would be; could be it's worth something, but you never know for sure. But here you have a man who spent years and years sitting at the feet of the sages. "All my days, I grew up among the sages." And he heard many important ideas, many important attitudes, and he studied them all. And after many years of investigating he came to the conclusion that of all the things that are good for a person, the best one is *shesikah*, silence.

Now if Shimon bequeathed to us this gem, it pays for us to study his words. He said, "I've found nothing better for the *body* than silence." He didn't say it's the best for your *neshama*; it's certainly *is* good for your soul too, but Shimon is telling us here that for your *physical health*, there is nothing as good as keeping your mouth closed. If you're worried about your health, if you're a person who wants to live a long healthy life, then the first thing to think about is the remedy of silence. סמא דכולה משתוקא - "The best medicine of all is silence" (Megillah 18a).

#### THE CAUSE OF MOST ILLNESSES

You know that most illnesses, most of the disturbances that take place in our bodies, are caused by emotions that have aroused a raw reaction in our bodies. It's remarkable what a great effect emotions have on a person's physical nature. We are full of glands and hormones that stimulate the functions of the body; and if the body is overstimulated by emotions like anger, tension, and nerves, then instead of being beneficial, these hormones are harmful.

It's established already in medical science. All over the body there are results that come from wrong stimulation of the emotions. And how are the emotions stimulated most? Talking! Someone says something and you answer back, then you talk and argue, and that's when the trouble begins. The metabolism is upset and very many people become ill as a result. A world of illnesses are caused by talking. Very many cases of cancer are due to friction in human relationships.

### YOUR MIGHTY MOUTH

A man told me, "Do you know why I'm blind?" A blind man told me this. Because he was so aggravated - these are his words - he was so aggravated because of troubles in the family that he acquired diabetes and became blind. Blindness many times comes from aggravation, from excitation. When people go to an eye specialist one of the first questions they'll ask you is, "Do you get angry or excited?" Dovid Hamelech said (Tehillim 6:8) עששה עתקה מכל - מכעס עיני צוררי, it grew old because of those who aggravated me." So if you talk to people and get into arguments, it's bad for your eyesight. And if it's bad for your eyes that means that it's wreaking havoc in your body; it's bad for everything.

Heart failure too! You open your mouth when you could have kept it closed and the heart becomes subjected to too much stress; the valves cannot take it and there's a breakdown somewhere, a weakness in a valve someplace. Just by talking too much, there's quarreling, there's tension, nervous excitement, and your heart is suffering from it. I'm not saying that it happens all of a sudden, but gradually your big mouth is weakening your heart, and then one day, *chalilah*, it breaks down.

### WHERE DO PEOPLE DIE?

I know of a man who dropped dead in the middle of an argument with his wife. He was a fine man, by the way, a good man. But if he would have studied this *mishna* in *Pirkei Avos*, he would have known "Don't answer back!" And that would have saved him; he'd probably still be alive today. Who told you to answer back?! If you can be a diplomat and say something nice,

do it. But if not, don't say anything. He was a *frum* young man - he probably even knew this *mishna* - but he never studied it, and so he acted according to his nature and he answered back. He said his piece, and she answered back, and it went back and forth, back and forth until he dropped dead.

It happens again and again. Don't you read sometimes in the paper - a certain man, so and so, died of heart failure. Where did his heart attack happen? Did he die in his business because of his competitors? No, people don't die because of their competitors. Did he die on the street because someone in the street insulted him? People don't usually die because someone insulted them. He dies at home! People die because of their wives! Of course the newspaper will never say that. The obituary published in the newspapers will never say, "Mr. Anderson dropped dead Sunday night after an argument with his wife!" No, no, it won't say that! It says, "Mr. Anderson died peacefully in his sleep at his home this past Sunday." But if you know how to read the obituary pages, so you already know what that means.

#### COMMUNICATION ISSUES?

Why didn't he die at his business? Why at his home? The answer is at home he has a wife, and most people die as a result of words. I'm not saying he's right - who told him to react?! Who told him to bump his head against a stone wall? Arguing with a wife? Do you know what it's like? It's like he's sticking a needle into her, a real needle. And she's sticking needles into him. Is that fun? All of their lives they are "needling" each other. Only that his heart, his constitution was a bit weaker than his wife's. You can't win an argument! You think you'll win an argument with your wife?! You'll never win! The only real way to win an argument is to avoid it. So don't get excited over nothing. Keep quiet and that's all. Just keep quiet! And both of you will live longer as a result. And you'll live happier lives as well.

Women call me up; they say, "We have communication issues. My husband doesn't 'communicate' with me." The trouble is *there's too much communication!* If they wouldn't communicate so

much they'd be much better off; in most cases people will profit by not talking.

### IGNORE THE BUM

In Mesichta Sanhedrin (7a) it says: טוביה דשמע ואדיש - "Happy is the man who hears people saying things that insult him, that bother him, and he ignores it, חלפוה בישתיה מאה - A hundred evils will pass him by." Memorize those words; say them to yourself again and again. Learn to ignore any words you don't like; somebody said something sharp to you, so שמע, you heard it, but אדיש, it doesn't bother you. Pay no attention; make believe you never even heard it, and you'll be spared from many troubles. If your husband is mean to you, pay no attention. If your wife is mean to you, pay no attention. And one hundred evils will pass you by. You'll live together happily for the rest of your life.

Most of the time, a punch in the nose is a result of opening up a mouth instead of ignoring. Suppose you're walking in the street and a bum says something insulting to you. Forget about it! Don't feel that you have to stand up and defend your honor. Oh no! Don't do that. I know a man who did that and he got beaten up. Don't even look at him; it's dangerous. As far as you're concerned you didn't hear it, you didn't hear anything. Keep walking and in another minute, you're out of danger. And thank Hashem that you're able to keep on walking. If it's a goy who insults you, so you can give him a *bracha* that he should drop dead. Don't let him hear you though! Don't even mutter; don't say it with your mouth. The mouth always stays closed!

### CHINESE WISDOM FOR LIFE

I was walking in the street once, and two *shkutzim*, two young men came over to me and blocked the sidewalk; they didn't let me go further. I couldn't walk; I was stuck. So I got out off the sidewalk and I kept going. I didn't say anything, I didn't even take a peek over my shoulder. Suppose I looked back and said, "What do you think you're doing? What right do you have to do that?" Ohhh, what would have happened to me! Don't be a *chacham*, a hero. I always quote to you the wise Chinese proverb. The Chinamen say "The greatest hero is the one who runs away."

If you ignore and run away you're a hero. And the one who opens up his mouth is not a hero, he's a loser.

I always say this story; it's a tragic story. A young man from YU was going on *chamisha asar b'shoat* outing to Madison Square Garden. He was with a group of younger boys, a *chaburah* of boys with *yarmulkes* on, and he was leading them. And two twenty year old *shkutzim* were ridiculing the boys' *yarmulkas*. Now this young man, he didn't take the advice of *chazal*. At least the Chinese he should have listened to!

Instead he looked at the gentile boys with anger and said something. Now a *goy bleibt a goy*, so the *shkutzim* went back to their car, they took out a hammer from the trunk, and they attacked him. They hit him over the head with the hammer and they killed him. He died there on the street, *nebach*. That's why it says, "There's nothing better for the body than keeping quiet."

#### HOW TO DEAL WITH HATE

Let's say somebody calls you on the telephone and insults you. It happened to me a number of times. People have called the house and cursed me. You know what I did? I didn't say a word! Not a word! And they hung up. It happened again a few months ago and I knew who it was; I knew. And after that he came into my *shul* one evening to *daven* and I didn't say a word. And it was finished. But once you start up with these people, who knows what's going to be? A word for a word and it turns into who knows what! There's no knowing how it's going to end up! So just grin and bear it.

How many people have lost their jobs by talking back to their boss? Sometimes their boss is in a bad mood, so just swallow down what he said and it could be that an hour later he'll be a good boss. He might even promote you. I had that experience once. In my first position in *rabbanus*, a man once came into a meeting of the board of directors and he made a grand announcement: He said, "Rabbi Miller, I greeted you last week and you didn't answer me! You didn't answer me 'Good Shabbos.'" He brought it up to the board of directors at a meeting;

a complaint against the new rabbi. So the president of the shul came over and asked me about it. Now, it wasn't true, but I didn't say anything. I could have opened my mouth, but I remembered this *ma'amar chazal* and I kept my mouth closed.

#### RABBI MILLER GETS A RAISE!

I met this man again and again, he was a shul member, and I was always friendly to him. One day he gets up by the meeting of the board of directors and he makes a motion to give me a raise. *This* man! No one thought of giving me a raise except this one man! Now, had I answered him back it would have never happened. And so I learned the lesson that it "pays" to keep your mouth closed.

I've seen it all! I've watched as people put themselves in danger by opening a mouth. Just because they answered back, I've watched good people lose jobs, lose customers. They lost their wives or their husbands, siblings and friends. And sooner or later they lose themselves; they excite wrong reactions in their bodies and they end up sick. Many lose years from their life because of their mouths.

#### THE KEY TO A GOOD LIFE

And that's what Dovid Hamelech tells us (Tehillim 34:13-14): מי האיש החפץ חיים - "Who is the man who wants life?" We think it means eternal life, and that's true; but it's not the whole truth. There's more to it: Who wants to live *in this world*? אוהב ימים - "You're an *oheiv yomim*?" You like days, don't you? You want more and more of them. לראות טוב - "You want to see happiness and good times during those days?" You want to see yourself getting along well with others? You want a successful marriage? You want to see good health? That's all included in *lir'os tov*. "Oh," you say. "That's me! I want to live long! I want to see good times!"

But you don't! You're not really interested in trying to live long. You'll say it, you'll repeat it, you'll even sing it, but you don't think about it. You have to take steps to live long, and one of the most important steps is to *keep the mouth closed*. נצור לשונך מרע -

“Guard your tongue against evil”. What does “evil” mean? Not only you shouldn’t say derogatory things about people or quarrel with them. The real *lashon hara* is opening your mouth to say stupid things, to chatter and babble and say nothing. The general rule is to keep your tongue on the inside of the mouth and keep the mouth closed; that’s the rule you should follow. If we live according to that, our physical happiness in this world will increase and we will attain a life of *lir’os tov*, of seeing good times.

#### A MOMENT OF SILENCE

So we go back to the great principle that the job of a person in this world is to learn the skill of being quiet, the profession of being like an *ileim*. And before we conclude we’ll listen to the words of a great man, the Vilna Gaon (Igeres Hagra); these words deserve to be remembered by us. שׁעַל כּל רִגַע וּרִגַע - “For every moment, for every minute, שׂאֲדָם חוּסֵם פִּי - that a man muzzles his mouth, זִוְכָה לְאֹר הַגִּנּוּז, - He’ll be rewarded by that secret brilliance, שׂאִין כּל מִלְאָךְ יִכּוּל לְשַׁעַר - that no creature, no angel, is capable of measuring its magnitude.”

The splendor of reward is so great for one minute of silence! We’re not talking about a whole lifetime of silence; he says there that for every *moment* that you keep your mouth closed, you’ll be rewarded with a splendor, a brilliance that is so great that even an angel is not capable of measuring the magnitude, the extent of its greatness. I know that this is a very extreme statement but the Vilna Gaon is a very responsible personality. So it’s not only a profession of *yiras shamayim*, and not only is it the best advice for good health and long life, but it’s a career that will reward you beyond your highest dreams.

#### LEARNING THE LESSON

And so we have to get busy. How can you read about the *metzora* every year, and continue to ignore the lessons for your own life? Even if today we aren’t privileged to see the miraculous hand of Hashem bringing *tzara’as* on a person, but the lessons remain as applicable today as they were then. When Hashem separated a good man, a loyal frum Jew, from his family and friends, he was expected to learn this lesson of “*Elokim* is

*ba'shomayim* listening to you ... therefore your words should be few." And we, no less than him, are expected to learn that lesson as well.

And so we have to delve into these *pesukim* and apply them to our own lives. This man had to cover his mouth; what about me? Am I an *adam* yet? Am I producing enough silence? Am I succeeding at my profession of making myself *k'ileim*? And so when we study this *parsha*, we can't just let it pass by. As often as you can during the day, a minute here and a minute there, you remind yourself that it's your job to be as silent as you can. Not complete silence - *tzedek tidabeirun!* But as far as everything else we will try to be as careful as possible and remember that לך דומיה תהילה, to You Hashem silence is praise, and thereby we gain the great reward of Hashem, a reward unknown even to the angels.

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"שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך"



## Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

**Q:**

**You say a lot of times here that we have to use the opportunity of this world to achieve — שלימות perfection, because we only have one chance. But don't we believe in — גילגולים reincarnation?**

**A:**

Here, in this place, we speak only about the one chance. Because this is your chance to succeed.

I'll tell you what they say about גילגול נשמות, about reincarnation. גילגול נשמות is something that you should not look forward to. Don't look forward to it! That's what they all say. It would be a very unhappy thing, if you'd have to come back. So I don't want to speak about it at all. I never spoke about it.

This is the chance! - היום לעשותם "Today is the time to do!" Don't rely on anything else! Not מחר. Don't rely on tomorrow and the day after. - היום לעשותם This world is your one chance. " Tomorrow is the time for reward" (Eiruvim 22a). But the time for doing is right now. This is your one chance, so don't waste it.

TAPE # 827 (June 1991)

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