



# Loose Lips, Sink Ships

## A lesson from Queen Esther

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### Source

The key to אסתר remaining in the palace of אחשוורוש was her ability to keep a secret. מרדכי told אסתר not to reveal her origins; that she was a איד. The time was not yet ripe. אסתר was required to master the quality of silence.



### Introduction

Today we will focus on the power of silence and its many benefits.

**“סיג לחכמה שתיקה”**

*“Silence is a fence around wisdom”*

פרקי אבות ג, יז

“If words are worth a coin, silence is worth two”

Rav Shimon Ben Gamliel said that he had never found anything more powerful than silence:

**“כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה”**

*“All my days I grew up among the חכמים and did not find anything better for the body than silence”*

פרקי אבות א, יז



### Understanding

The ability to communicate is an essential part of every human being. Speech enables a person to express their feelings, develop their emotions, explain ideas, influence others and build relationships.

**Why do the רבנים suggest then that silence is something worth pursuing? Isn't silence the absence of speech?**

The answer is that there are **two types** of silence. One is just the absence of speech and the other is the foundation for effective speech.

The first silence is a **negative one**. This is someone who doesn't communicate properly. This type of silence causes separation and ruins people's relationships.

### **Can you think of some examples?**

- Ignoring people and giving them a cold shoulder when one is upset at them.
- The silence of weakness, when a person isn't able to stand up for themselves.

The second is a **good silence**. It enables the goals of what communication is really supposed to achieve. True communication can only happen, when both sides respect each other. For this to be achieved, we need to utilize silence appropriately.

### **Can you think of some examples?**

- Waiting for the other person to finish what they have to say, before we respond.
- Thinking before we speak, so that our speech is not impulsive.
- There are times in life that we must guard our privacy or someone's confidence. How many relationships have been harmed and friendships broken because we could not keep silent? We were given a trust to maintain and couldn't contain ourselves, or we overshared and exposed private details of our life.
- Ensuring that what we are about to say is beneficial and will achieve the goal of what we are trying to say and not the opposite "n.

### **Ask students if they can explain the expression: "Loose lips, sink ships"**

The tongue is very light and speech flows easily. The **לשון חיה** tells us that the reason for that is because man was created to talk. Yet- **לשון חיה** gave us two lips and teeth to guard our tongue for a reason.

If a person takes a hammer and only uses it to bang in nails, or if one has a screwdriver and only uses it to screw in screws, then it will last for tens and tens of years. When you use something for what it was intended and you use it properly, then it can keep going and going without getting tired. A door

knob can be turned tens of thousands of times and it will continue to work. However- what would happen if you sit on the door knob or use it to hold something very heavy? You will very likely break the door knob.

The חפץ חיים says that we were created to speak דברי תורה, so therefore talking is easy; it flows. Since it's so easy to talk, a person has to make sure that they create a fence, to slow down their speech. Speaking too much is a tremendous load and a lot heavier than remaining quiet. What does he mean by this?

When a person talks, he has to take responsibility for what he says. He just obligated himself to do something, whether it's that he said something that hurt someone's feelings or he revealed something that he was not supposed to. Now he's going to have to protect himself from getting hurt or exploited. Silence is less comfortable, but weighs so much less. If a person hears his friend talking, he should remain silent until his friends finish talking.

This is what our חכמים mean. Before we can be successful communicating to others, we have to master the art of silence. Silence when timed correctly, is the language of connection.



## Stories

**Story 1:** There was once a Chassidische Rebbe named R' Michel. He was a תלמיד of the Maggid of Mezritch. He had inherited a very unique, valuable and special pair of תפילין from his father. There were people who wanted to buy it from him for a lot of money. As Reb Michel was very poor, his wife would often try to convince him to sell the תפילין, but he was adamant not to do so.

Finally some time later, it was a day before סוכות and there was not a single אתרוג to be found in the whole country. There was a merchant who passed through the town with a כשר אתרוג and was willing to sell it for a huge amount of money. Rav Michel took his תפילין, sold them, took the money and bought the אתרוג.

When his wife came home, she saw the אתרוג and realized what he did. She lost herself and started yelling at him. "Are you serious?? We don't even have food for יום or new clothes and this is what you sold the תפילין for??" She then picked up the אתרוג and bit off the top.

The אתרוג is now completely useless.

He moves aside and doesn't say a word. He says "ד, I don't have the תפילין, I don't have the אתרוג, I don't have the money but I'm not going to lose my marriage as well. Therefore- I'm not saying a word."

Rav Ovadia Yosef says over this story and continues.

That night this man had a dream from his father. He told him that as great as what he had done initially, the fact that he had no money, had sold the תפילין and bought the אתרוג, none of that was as great as the fact that he kept quiet. As a reward, ד is going to bless his family and support his family in the most beautiful ways. He had a powerful זכות; the זכות of silence.

If you're in an argument or a fight, do you honestly think that this person wants to hear your logic or proofs? They never do. The world stands on that silence. Silence doesn't just avoid problems, but you should walk over to that person now and give them a hug to thank them for the זכות. They just gave you an unbelievable merit. A person becomes so much more powerful after they have remained silent.

**Story 2:** In א"י, there was a secular neighbourhood which many frum people had started moving into. Most of the apartments did not have a special porch that the people could build a סוכה on. There was a family who had no place to build a סוכה on their porch and so they found a corner in front of the building. It was in a place that didn't affect anybody and so they started building their beautiful סוכה.

All of a sudden, after they had finished, one of the neighbours came and started questioning them. "Who gave you permission to build here? You are not allowed to do that. You are taking away valuable space from the building. You can't just do whatever you want."

The frum איד was thinking to himself that no one used this space, no one even wanted it or cared about it, but now that he came to start putting up a סוכה, this neighbour had to come and give him a hard time. He thought maybe he should protest and answer him and ask him why he's so against it. But he was smart and he knew that there's nothing better than silence. Better to let go of his ego and not argue.

After the neighbour went away, he told his children that they had to take the whole סוכה down and find somewhere else to move it. The children were very upset and wanted to know why. The father replied that he doesn't want the סוכה to be a סוכה of מחלוקת, rather he wants it to be a סוכה of שלום.

He and his children took down the entire סוכה and before the neighbour left,

he suggested that they put it up behind the building instead and have as much privacy as they want.

The first night of סוכות, the entire family decided to sleep inside the סוכה. In the middle of the night, all of a sudden they heard a huge crash. They all jumped up startled. They looked around, but saw nothing and so they went back to sleep.

The next morning, they went to the front of the building and exactly where they had wanted to build their סוכה, a huge piece of construction material had fallen down. ח"ו, had they not been willing to pursue peace and not been מעביר על מידותיהם...

Whoever can keep quiet and learn how to speak carefully, is deserving of great מתנות in life. We have to apply this message within our own lives; there's a time to talk and there's a time to be silent.



## Discussion

### Why is silence much harder nowadays?

In today's world, where technology reigns supreme, we are privy to many photos and conversations that should really be kept hidden. צניעות isn't just about dress. It's about living with dignity and sensitivity, knowing what and when to share, and what and when to keep private.

If you look around the world, you can see how people try to avoid silence at all costs. You go to a shopping centre and even aside from all of the noise of the shoppers, they feel a need to have constant background music.

Look around at nature! ד' created a beautiful and incredible world and so many of the powerful forces that He created in nature are actually silent.

### Can you think of some examples?

- Space. Because space is a huge empty vacuum, there are no sound waves at all. It's one big mass of silence.

*[For those who are curious: Astronauts in Outer Space do talk to each other. In the spacecraft, there is plenty of air, so they just talk normally.*

*When they are spacewalking, they talk by means of radios in their helmets.*

*The radio waves, again, have no problem in space, but they're not sound; they're radio, which has to be converted into sound by the*

*astronauts' headsets.]*

- Gravity
- Electricity
- The warmth of sunlight
- Turning of the tides
- Organic growth
- The division of cells (occurring every second)



## Can you relate?

**Scenario 1:** Don't you love it when you can go out with friends and just be comfortable sitting together in silence; when none of you feel a need to 'have to speak'?

It's often the people who always feel a need to talk, who will be happy to just speak empty words, to fill the silence.

A lot of times we just talk and talk, but without actually saying anything. Maybe it's because we want to feel that we're heard and that people acknowledge our presence and existence. But is that really the way to feel heard? Wouldn't it be wiser to talk less and say more, while at the same time immersing ourselves in those moments of silence and allowing them to just be, without feeling the need to fill the time with fluff?

It seems that a lot of times we talk, just so that we won't be forced to walk or converse in silence- with the feeling that silence is something to be ashamed of, or something to be avoided. There's nothing wrong with silence- when one is happy within themselves- silence can be embraced, not shunned.

**Scenario 2:** Did you ever experience a time when you were unable to speak, but had something to say? For example: you were in the middle of benching and had something to add to a conversation? Did it ever happen to you that after you finished benching and had thought about it again, you were grateful that you didn't say it?

**Scenario 3:** Did you ever wonder why your best ideas come about in the shower or just before you fall asleep. One of the reasons for this is because of the power of silence. In today's society, we are all so busy; there is so much going on around us. As soon as we're able to cut off from all the rush and noise, we give our brains some space to think and that's when creativity hits us.

**Scenario 4:** You are in school and the teacher starts saying an amazing

story that you just heard.

**Scenario 5:** You are the last in the line at the lunch queue and are feeling very hungry.

**Scenario 6:** You hear a friend singing someone else's praises, but in your case, you actually know the opposite to be true.



## What are the benefits of silence?

- Saves us from saying things (secrets or personal) we shouldn't say
- Makes us more respected and attractive
- More creative
- Makes us more focused
- Avoid לשון הרע
- Makes a person more intelligent- bec the more they listen to others, the more they learn.



## Can you think of anyone else in תנ"ך who displayed שתיקה?

- נפטר אהרן הכהן- וידום אהרן (after אהרן discovered that his two sons were רחל אמנו)
- פנחס (didn't stay silent)



## Tips on how to practice silence?

- Wait a few minutes before you say anything
- Think: "Will I regret what I am about to say?"
- The more a person is at peace internally, the less they need to speak and call attention to themselves.



## Souvenir

Teachers can print out the poster in a mini version and laminate it. Then they can attach a keyring, so that students can hang it on the zip of their pencil case and have a constant reminder.

*[Lesson based on and inspired by: Slovie Jungreis-Wolff on Queen Esther, Rav Gabi Fried, Silence- Good or Bad? By Michoel Gourarie]*