

Dvar Torah - Vayigash

You don't have to shout!

What is the best way to get your message across?

In Parshat Vayigash, there is an intriguing absence of a letter. Yosef dramatically reveals his true identity to his brothers. It is just the family in one room - but the news spread like wildfire - and the Torah says 'Vehakol nishma' - 'his voice was heard' the voice of Yosef saying "Ani Yosef" - "I am Yosef". It was heard in the palace of Pharaoh and throughout the land. And in fact, that very same voice is heard to this day and people are still speaking about it.

But have a look at the spelling of Vehakol - the voice. The 'vav' of Kol which is usually spelt 'kuf, vav, lamed,' is missing, to indicate that his voice was somewhat diminished. So what is Hashem trying to tell us?

The message must be that often, to get your point across you can speak in soft, measured tones. You don't have to shout your message to others. I often notice that with great public speakers, sometimes they get their message across in the most impactful way, by lowering their voices. When a speaker speaks more softly, the audience is inclined to listen more carefully. And when the words are passionate and come from the heart, one can certainly make one's mark.

We find in this spirit, that immediately after the greatest event that has ever taken place on earth - the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai - the Torah says 'Vha'am ro'im et hakolot' - 'and the nation saw the voices'. Those voices were not ordinary voices that they heard with their ears. Rather they had a full sensory experience and were spiritually uplifted. The emotion of the day swept them in the most incredible, holy direction and as a result they 'saw' voices. Elsewhere in the Torah, in Parshat Vayechi, when Ephraim is favoured over Menashe, to this day we remember what Menashe said: absolutely nothing. His silence made a mark. Sometimes you don't even have to open your mouth in order for your voice to be heard.

We find this in 'Hilchot Lashon Harah' as well - in our laws relating to slander. According to our tradition, sometimes, just by pulling a face, you can send a very strong message because that represents your reaction to a person or situation.

I would like to add a word of caution - because sometimes the way people look does not say it all. Perhaps a person always looks grumpy or there are some people who, beautifully, have an eternal smile on their faces. Or perhaps someone has a toothache and that is why they are reacting in what seems like a negative way. But as a rule, we can say so much without ever opening our mouths. And when we do say something, the 'Kol demama daka', the soft, still voice, is certainly among the most powerful that exists.

So therefore, from the absence of a single letter in our Parasha, we learn such an important lesson. If you want your message to get across, you don't have to shout.

Shabbat Shalom