

TETZAVEH

IN BALANCE

Life is a balancing act. Throughout our lives, conflicting forces compete for dominance. Love and fear, speech and silence, revelation and concealment, physicality and spirituality, peace and war... Situations arise daily that require us to decide between the opposing sides. The solutions are never simple, because different circumstances call for a different combination of ingredients. In delicate internal negotiations, we use our judgment to strive to achieve proper balance. Our task is to find the equilibrium that will best serve our Creator.

Parashas Tetzaveh discusses the garments of the *cohen gadol* (high priest). The priestly clothing was not just a costume or uniform. Since each detail was commanded by Hashem, we know this clothing was imbued with deeper spiritual symbolism. Two of the garments, the *Eifod* and the *Choshen*, represent the balance between opposite energies, as we will soon see.

The Torah commands that the *Choshen* and the *Eifod* were always worn together. “And the *Choshen* shall not be detached

from upon the *Eifod*.”¹ From this verse, the Rambam learns that it is an actual Torah prohibition to separate them.² If separating them is such a major transgression, their unification must be significant. Let us explore the connection between the *Choshen* and the *Eifod* and how they complemented each other. We will understand the importance of their symbiotic relationship and how it represents our life-purpose.

The Physical and the Spiritual

The *Eifod* and the *Choshen*, although designed to fit together perfectly, served completely different purposes. The *Eifod*, according to Rashi’s description,³ looked like an apron worn backwards. The cloth draped over the lower back and legs of the *cohen gadol*, wrapped around to partially cover the front of his body, and tied in the front. Straps in the back went up to the *cohen gadol*’s shoulders. A *shoham* (onyx) stone was attached to each shoulder strap. The names of the twelve Tribes of Israel were written on these stones, six names on each stone. Two golden chains attached to the shoulder straps came down in the front. Attached and hanging from these chains was the *Choshen* – a breastplate.

The *Choshen* was the signature magnificent ornament of the *cohen gadol*. It displayed twelve precious stones, upon which were written the names of the Tribes of Israel. The *Choshen* contained

¹ *Shemos* 28:28.

² *Rambam, Klei Hamikdash*, Chapter 9 Halacha 10.

³ Commentary on *Shemos* 28:6.

the *Urim VeTumim*, inside which was written one of Hashem's special Names, according to Rashi.⁴ The *Urim VeTumim* was the *cohen gadol's* mystical communication system. He utilized it to ask Hashem questions and, through the illumination of the letters engraved on the stones, he received Hashem's answers.

Rabbi Moshe Breslover explains⁵ why the *Eifod* looked like an apron. It was a simple, practical garment that resembled the women's clothing of that time; it was a representation of the physical world. One wears an apron to protect the clothes underneath while working. Physical work is dirty work, such as cooking and cleaning. The *Choshen*, by contrast, was the divine channel for Hashem's revelation, containing within it one of the special names of G-d. It was a representation of the spiritual world.

The *Eifod* and the *Choshen*, then, represented opposite worlds, but they were always worn together. They share an eternal, essential bond. The physical world can only reach a state of perfection and lasting existence if it is attached to the spiritual world.

The relationship between the physical and the spiritual manifests itself in many different forms.⁶ Their juxtaposition has existed since the beginning of time. In the beginning of *sefer Bereishis*, Rashi explains⁷ that two letters were symbolically involved in the creation of the world: the *yud* and the *heb*. *Olam HaBa* (the World to Come) was created with the *yud* and *Olam HaZeh* (this World) was created with the *heb*. These two letters,

⁴ *ibid.*, 28:30.

⁵ *Lemachar A'atir*, p. 158.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁷ Commentary on *Bereishis* 2:4.

which are both components of Hashem's name, correlate with the spiritual and the physical. Interestingly, the Hebrew words for "man" and "woman" have almost identical spellings. The singular difference is that *Isb* (man) is spelled with a *yud* in the middle and *ishbah* (woman) has a *heb*⁸ – are the letters of one of Hashem's Names. Our Sages teach us that "a man and woman who merit – the Divine Presence is among them."⁹ The *heb* and the *yud*, representing *Olam HaZeh* and *Olam HaBa*, also correlate with the *Eifod* and the *Choshen*, the physical and the spiritual, female and male. Both partners of the pair are equally necessary; they can never be detached. The combination of the two and the symbiotic relationship between them create *sheleimus* (completeness, wholeness) in the world.

When creating a home, Rabbi Moshe Breslover tells us, a husband and wife have an opportunity to build a relationship in which they complement each other. Generally speaking, the woman is responsible for the *heb* – for purifying the physical home and making the environment a suitable vessel for sanctity. She is in charge of spiritual home maintenance, deciding what will or will not enter. Part of this job description entails protecting the inhabitants of the home from exposure to spiritually dangerous influences. Once the home is a worthy vessel, her husband can assume responsibility for the *yud* of *Olam HaBa* – connecting this spiritually-ready home and family to Hashem through living and teaching his Torah.

Together woman and man can achieve completion and perfection. The physical vessel the woman created needs to be

⁸ Commentary on *Sotah* 17a.

⁹ *Sotah* 17a.

connected to the spiritual to be complete. Extending Rabbi Breslover's idea, it would seem that the reverse is equally true; pure spirituality needs to be expressed through a physical channel. Torah learning requires a physical outlet to be whole. In addition to preparing her home as a proper channel for the spirituality of Torah, she also transforms Torah ideals into a physical reality. Male spirituality is only abstract concepts; the woman translates those concepts practically into the everyday life of the physical world. "The *Choshen* shall not be detached from upon the *Eifod*."¹⁰ Balance and connection between physical and spiritual worlds guarantee their lasting existence.

Rabbi Breslover defined the role difference between women and men as preparing the physical vessel for spirituality versus actively filling it with spirituality. Rabbi Pincus¹¹ takes a slightly different approach, explaining men must put in significant effort to embody *kedushah* (sanctity). Men have many active responsibilities: praying in synagogue with a *minyan* (quorum of 10 men), learning Torah in a *Beis Midrash* (house of study). Women have more inherent *kedushah*, making their role protecting their inherent *kedushah* rather than extending themselves to attain it. Rabbi Pincus explains that a woman is called the *bayis* (home) because it is her job to guard the sanctified atmosphere of the home, to ensure that it remains worthy of Hashem's Presence. When the angels inquired of the whereabouts of Sarah *Imeinu*, Avraham *Avinu* replied, "*Hineh ba'ohel* (behold she is in the tent)."¹² The spiritual protection of the home was her role. She instructed¹³ Avraham to banish

¹⁰ *Shemos* 28:28.

¹¹ *Nefesh Chaya*, p.150.

¹² *Bereishis* 18:9.

¹³ *ibid.*, 21:10.

Hagar and Yishmael because they were a destructive influence. Hashem confirmed that Sarah was correct, “*Shema bekolah* (listen to her voice)”¹⁴ because she is responsible for the purity of the home.

The husband and the wife also have different responsibilities in *chinuch banim* (education of children), as seen through the stones of the *Eifod* and the *Choshen*. Rabbi Breslover¹⁵ interprets the word *even* (stone) as a contraction of the two words *av* (father) and *ben* (son).

The woman carries upon her shoulders the majority of the responsibility for raising the future generations of *Klal Yisrael*, as represented by the stones that were on the shoulder straps of the *Eifod*. The *Eifod's* two stones contained together the names of the twelve Tribes, representing *Klal Yisrael* as a whole. The verse says “*venasa Aharon es shemotam al shetei cheteifav lezikaron* (and Aharon bore their names on his two shoulders as a remembrance).”¹⁶ Rashi explains¹⁷ that the “remembrance” is that Hashem sees the two *Eifod* stones and remembers the righteousness of the twelve Tribes. Shoulders represent both the symbolic bearing of a spiritual responsibility and the physical carrying of a practical burden. The *cobanim* (priests) carried the Holy Ark and different vessels of the *Mishkan* on their shoulders. Both the physical and spiritual maintenance of the home is on the woman's shoulders. Not only does she supervise the practical details to raise physically healthy children but she is also responsible for the overall spiritual well-being of the entire family, as a unit.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 21:12.

¹⁵ *Lemachar A'atir*, p. 162.

¹⁶ *Shemos* 28:12.

¹⁷ Rashi, Commentary on *Shemos* 28:12.

Rabbi Moshe Breslover underscores why these stones faced upward. The righteous woman's approach to *chinuch banim* (education of children) spiritually elevates every member of her household, turning them toward Heaven. Hashem sees the stones, "remembers" them and brings His *Shechinah* (Divine presence) to dwell in her home.

The more male quality of *chinuch banim* is represented by the unique, individual stones of the *Choshen*. The role of the father is to ensure that his individual children are taught Torah in a manner best suited for their needs. Together the parents prepare and guide their children to a life of *avodas Hashem*.

Speech and Silence

Two well-known figures that represent the same sort of delicate spiritual-physical balance are Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *Hacohen*. The *Sefas Emes*¹⁸ points out that Moshe and Aharon had complementary roles in leading the Jewish people. Moshe brought the spiritual down to the physical; he was the conduit for the Torah. Aharon raised the physical up to the spiritual; he was the priest who brought *korbanos* (sacrificial offerings). His priestly garments were physical coverings that elevated the body for a spiritual purpose.

Silence is the *middah* related to the physical. We learn in *Pirkei Avos*, "All my days I grew up among the sages, and the only thing that I found good for a body was silence."¹⁹ Silence was the *middah* exemplified by Aharon. After the dramatic death

¹⁸ From the year 5662.

¹⁹ *Avos* 1:17.

of his sons, “Aharon was silent.”²⁰ By contrast, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was Hashem’s mouthpiece for the giving of the Torah; he represents the power of speech, which is a quality of the *neshamah*. Like the physical and spiritual, speech and silence are also complementary; a balance of both creates *sheleimus*.

Note the irony of speech being Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s strength; he tried to refuse a position of leadership, saying “I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech.”²¹ To make matters more complex, Rabbi Akiva Tatz explains²² that Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s speech disability was actually caused by his lofty spiritual level. Language is a limited form of expression. When trying to describe an emotionally powerful experience, we often say, “I can’t find the words...” Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s reality was one of inconceivable G-dly truth; he struggled to limit his perspective by expressing it in words. So how can we prove the spiritual nature of speech when words are so restricting? How do we reconcile this limitation with the *Sefas Emes*’ teaching that speech is spiritual and silence is physical?

The answer is that there are two types of speech: internal and external. The purpose of both kinds is to clarify and articulate concepts. The audience is the difference. When we define to whom we are speaking and for whom the ideas are being clarified, we can determine if we are using internal or external speech. Any abstract concept is difficult to grasp. It takes thought to clarify ideas for ourselves. The first kind of speech is an internal dialogue of processing concepts thoroughly. Internal speech is unlimited, because we are talking to ourselves. We choose any language we want, because we

²⁰ *Vayikra* 10:3.

²¹ *Shemos* 4:10.

²² *Living Inspired*, p. 92-93.

know exactly what we mean. For example, when one uses the word “happy,” she might know that “happy” means exactly the kind of emotion she feels when she has just completed a big project for the *chesed* (acts of loving-kindness) organization she volunteers for. She might define “beautiful” as a certain pure radiance she sees on her little cousin’s face when she falls asleep in her arms. If she uses these terms when describing a concept to herself, she will understand exactly what she is talking about. Nothing is lost in translation with internal speech.

On the other hand, communicating your understanding of concepts to others requires external speech. Additional challenges arise in the physical articulation of your ideas, because language becomes limiting. The meanings of words are subject to the perceptions of the audience. The words you say are not necessarily the words that others hear. Two people can listen to the same *shiur* and walk away with two completely different messages. How can that be, if they heard the same lecture with the same words?

The answer is that everyone came to the *shiur* with their own past experiences affecting how they receive the words that were spoken. Each person has their own understanding of what words mean. Spoken words often lose the inner meaning that the speaker intended to convey. To assure accurate communication through external speech, the speaker needs to first fully understand the audience’s perspective. This implausible task makes external speech a great challenge.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was a master of internal speech. Moshe lived a spiritual existence, so perceiving and clarifying spiritual concepts for himself was natural. External speech, however, was challenging to him; he was “heavy of mouth and heavy of speech.” His difficulty in accurately communicating with others

was because of his lofty level. His perspective was so spiritual that it was nearly impossible for him to translate his understanding into words that other human beings would be able to understand.

Being another spiritual-physical pair, speech also has its expression in the man-woman complement. Women are stronger in external speech. Our Sages tell us, “Ten portions of conversation came down to the world. Women took nine and the rest of the world took one.”²³ They are the masters of communication. Men, on the other hand, are generally stronger in internal speech. The internal processing of abstract concepts tends to be a male quality, while women tend to think practically.

Our Sages tell us that “the only thing that I found good for a body was silence.”²⁴ This is referring to the speech of the body, external speech. Why does external speech specifically receive this recommendation of restriction? Unlike spiritual, internal speech, external speech requires the challenge of finding the right balance between speech and silence. It is not appropriate to communicate in every instance and it is not appropriate to communicate about every topic. Achieving this fine balance is something which everyone, and especially women as the masters of physical speech, have the power and the responsibility to work towards.

²³ *Kiddushin* 49b.

²⁴ *Avos* 1:17.

Silence Is Golden

The balance of external speech, between when to communicate and when to remain silent, is exemplified by two of our *Immahos* (matriarchs), Rachel and Leah. The *Midrash* tells us that Rachel “took hold of the art of silence, and all her children were masters of concealment.”²⁵ The *Midrash* lists several examples, one of which is Binyamin, who kept secret the sale of Yosef. Shaul, another descendant of Rachel, “did not tell [his uncle] about the matter of the kingship”²⁶ right after he was anointed, before it was made public by the prophet Shmuel. Esther also was a master of concealment since she did not “tell her birthplace and her nation.”²⁷

An example of Binyamin’s ability to remain silent is brought by the *Chazon La’moed*.²⁸ According to the *Midrash*, when Binyamin was caught with the goblet in his sack, the brothers beat him and said, “Robber! Son of a robber! You stole the goblet and your mother stole the idols!” Binyamin’s response was silence; he did not utter one word of self-defense. The multi-colored stone on the *Choshen* that represented the tribe of Binyamin was called *yashfeh*. According to Rabbeinu Bechaye, it signified that different thoughts passed through Binyamin’s mind before he made his decision not to speak.²⁹ Imagine Binyamin’s internal struggle in the goblet incident. *This is a setup! I should speak out because I did not steal the goblet!* The *Midrash* we mentioned earlier claims that Binyamin knew about the sale of

²⁵ *Bereishis Rabbah* 71:8.

²⁶ *Shmuel Aleph* 10:16.

²⁷ *Esther* 2:20.

²⁸ *Chazon La’moed*, p. 137.

²⁹ Commentary on *Shemos* 28:15.

Yosef and decided to keep quiet. Surely he thought to himself, *This will be painful to my father! I should tell him!* The name of Binyamin's stone, *yashfeh*, is spelled *yud-shin-feh-heh*; the *Midrash* divides the word in half to spell two separate words: *yeish peh* (there is a mouth).³⁰ Binyamin had a mouth with which to defend his innocence or to reveal the sale of Yosef, but he overcame his *yetzer* and remained silent.

Binyamin's act teaches us about the nature of true silence. Real silence isn't when there is nothing to say. It's when you have something to say, but you make a conscious decision not to speak. Rachel, Binyamin, Shaul, Esther – all of them could have shared information that would have been considered important and valuable. Yet they decided that it would be the higher thing to do to remain silent.

The Maharal deepens our understanding of the nature of true silence and the decisions of Leah's descendants. "Minimizing speech is an indication of *tzni'us*."³¹ He continues, "Minimizing the revelation of things is an indication of *tzni'us*, which is the meaning of the term '*tzanua*.'" he writes. The word '*tzanua*' literally means 'hidden away.' The Maharal clarifies further: "Therefore he is *tzanua* in his speech as well and does not bring things out into public view, which is a departure from *tzni'us*."³²

Tzni'us is internality, explains Rabbi Chaim Friedlander³³, based on the Maharal. *Tzni'us* is the *middah* of keeping internal things inside and refraining from externalizing them if it's

³⁰ *Bereishis Rabbah* 71:8.

³¹ *Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaShesikah, Perek Aleph*.

³² *ibid*.

³³ *Sifsei Chaim, Middos vaAvodas Hashem* vol. 1, p. 268-270.

unnecessary. The essence of silence is keeping things internal. Speech is the opposite; it is revealing, externalizing.

Rabbi Friedlander brings an example from the life of the Alter of Kelm. The Alter wrote about a particular visualization that helped him greatly in his *avodas Hashem*, but he made it public only after decades of keeping this visualization to himself. Revealing it earlier would have diminished its power for him, for as soon as something internal is externalized, it loses the strength to have any significant internal impact.

It says in *Mishlei*, “A worry in a person’s heart – *yaschenah*.”³⁴ Our Sages disagree³⁵ about the meaning of the word “*yaschenah*.” One explanation is that “he should tell it (to others).” According to this opinion, sharing your worries with another person is comforting. Even if the other person does not solve the worrier’s problem, the act of telling itself is an unburdening. Why does talking about your problems provide relief? Speaking about worries transforms internal thoughts into something more external. Bringing problems out into the open deflates their impact on you.

Although this method might be helpful with destructive thoughts like worry, it’s often harmful to externalize constructive spiritual thoughts or internal aspects of your personality. Sharing everything with everyone can turn us into superficial people. Sharing everything we hear or feel doesn’t give us the opportunity to gain from the full internal impact of our experiences.

So the ability to remain silent shows the *middah* of *tzni’us*. You are able to keep internal matters that are meant to remain

³⁴ *Mishlei* 12:25.

³⁵ *Yuma* 75a.

internal. As mentioned earlier, this *tzni'us* is not reflected in a situation where you are “empty” and you are not sharing because you have nothing to share. *Tznius* is “*yeish peh*” – you have a mouth; you have something significant you could say. Yet you are making a conscious decision to keep it internal; you choose not to share if it will be a disservice to you in remaining a deep, internal person.

We all know how difficult it is to hold our tongues and keep our speech internal. Rabbi Friedlander’s prescription for spiritual growth in this area is the following: once a day, when we have something that we’re bursting to share but it is unnecessary for anyone to hear, we should practice holding back, and stay silent. We should withhold our external speech, saying to ourselves, *I’m not going to reveal this because an internal person doesn’t need to let everyone know everything*. This is one way to develop the *middah* of *tzni'us*, the ability to be an internally-focused person.

To Admit the Truth

Leah and her descendants, by contrast, are described by the *Midrash* as masters of *hodayah*. She “took hold of the art of *hodayah* (admission/ thanksgiving) and masters of *hodayah* stood forth from her.”³⁶ Leah utilized this *middah* immediately after the birth of her son Yehudah (whose name has the same root as *hodayah*), articulating her feelings of gratitude to Hashem: “This time I shall thank Hashem.”³⁷ The *Midrash* lists examples of Leah’s descendants with this *middah*. Yehudah admitted he was

³⁶ *Bereishis Rabbah* 71:8.

³⁷ *Bereishis* 29:35.

wrong in the incident with Tamar.³⁸ David wrote *sefer Tehillim*, much of which expresses thanksgiving to the Almighty, as it says, “Give thanks to Hashem for He is good.”³⁹ Daniel said, “To You, the G-d of my fathers, I thank and praise.”⁴⁰

It is not always appropriate to be silent. As alluded to by the examples in the *Midrash*, two of the most appropriate times to speak out are instances that call for thanksgiving to Hashem or admission of error. The stone on the *Choshen* representing Reuven was a red gem called the “*odem* (redness).”⁴¹ *Rabbeinu* Bechaye explains⁴² that Reuven’s stone was a reference to his *middah* of admission. His face reddened after he sinned involving Bilhah and he admitted to his sin. His embarrassment did not prevent him from *hodayah* when it was fitting.

When Reuven made his confession, the *Midrash* tells us that Hashem responded, “No person has ever sinned before me and done *teshuvah*. You initiated *teshuvah* first.”⁴³ Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer challenges⁴⁴ this proposal that Reuven initiated repentance. We learn about Adam and Cain, among many others, who did *teshuvah*, long before Reuven was ever born! Rabbi Yaakov Naiman addresses this question⁴⁵ by noting that Reuven was the first one to repent for an unintentional error. Adam intentionally transgressed Hashem’s command, and Cain knew that murder was wrong. Reuven acted with pure

³⁸ *ibid.*, 38:26.

³⁹ *Tehillim* 118:1.

⁴⁰ *Daniel* 2:23.

⁴¹ *Shemos* 28:17.

⁴² **Commentary on *Shemos* 28:15**

⁴³ *Bereishis Rabbah* 84:18.

⁴⁴ *Ksav Sofer al HaTorah, Likutim Mei’Inyanei Teshuvah*.

⁴⁵ Rabbi Yaakov Naiman, *Darchei Mussar*, p. 15-16.

motives, for the honor of his mother, yet he still repented. He did not use his good intentions to avoid taking responsibility for his mistake. He did not excuse himself, saying, *Oh, I meant well, so it doesn't matter that I was wrong.* The greatness of Reuven was his ability to admit he was wrong, even though he had thought he was right.

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir ben Menachem offers⁴⁶ another interpretation, that Reuven was the first one to do *teshuvah* before being confronted or punished by Hashem. The consequences of Adam and Cain's actions motivated both of them to repent; thus, their *teshuvah* was out of fear and awe of Hashem. Reuven, by contrast, was never confronted, nor did he suffer any immediate consequence. His *teshuvah* was independent, from his own initiative. Reuven knew from his own awareness that it would be irresponsible to remain silent. He recognized the time for *hodayah* and was the first to do of *teshuvah* out of love for Hashem and His truth.

***Ge'ulah* – it's all in balance**

Even though this *middah* of *hodayah* was the primary heritage of Leah's descendants, we see it in the children of Rachel as well. Remember that speech and silence, like all the pairs we have discussed, are **both** necessary; our goal is to strike a balance between them. The strength of Rachel's silence was that she knew when to keep a secret and when to reveal the truth.

Rachel's watershed moment in the Torah was the incident on her wedding night. The well-known *Midrash* recounts⁴⁷ how

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rashi quoting *Gemara Megillah* 13b.

Rachel and Yaakov assumed that her evil father Lavan would try to deceive Yaakov and bring Leah instead as the bride. Upholding her strong *middah* of concealment, Rachel and Yaakov prepared against the ploy with secret signals between them. On the wedding night itself, however, Rachel realized that revealing Lavan's trickery would publicly shame her sister Leah. In a magnanimous action of *mesirus nefesh*, Rachel revealed the secret signals to Leah! Rachel was put to the test; despite her natural tendency to be silent, she knew it was a time to speak. In the end, her defining moment became one in which she used speech in the most trying circumstances.

We see that Rachel's descendants were also able, when necessary, to defy their natural inclination in order to utilize their "opposite" *middah*. In the Purim story, Mordechai instructs Esther to approach Achashveirosh with an appeal to annul the decree against the Jews. Esther expressed a desire to maintain her silence, because if anyone "approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, there is but one law for him that he be put to death."⁴⁸ Mordechai's strong reply was, "if you remain silent at this time, salvation will come to the Jews from a different place, and you and your father's house shall perish. And who knows if it was for a time like this that you achieved royalty?"⁴⁹ Characteristic of a Rachel descendant, silence was the essence of Esther. As per Mordechai's direction, for many years she refused to reveal her origins. Here Mordechai gives her opposite instructions, informing her that her silence was out of place in this case. *This is the time for speech. You need to speak out, to be the agent for the redemption.* Otherwise, "salvation will come to the Jews from a different place."

⁴⁸ *Esther* 4:11.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 4:14.

Mordechai understood Esther's potential to be the agent of the *ge'ulah* because she had already demonstrated the *middah* of admission in a previous incident. Our Sages say that "anyone who says something in the name of he who said it brings redemption to the world,"⁵⁰ using Esther as the example. After Mordechai informed Esther about Bigesan and Teresh's assassination plan, "Esther told the king in the name of Mordechai."⁵¹ She gave credit to Mordechai when she revealed life-saving information to the king, even though she could have taken credit for herself.

This seemingly small detail of how she shared the information actually defined her as the savior of the Jewish people. The very purpose of *ge'ulah* is that the Jewish people recognize that Hashem is the One who redeemed us.⁵² If there are open miracles, as in *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim* (the Exodus from Egypt), then it is clear to all that Hashem was responsible for the salvation. But the *ge'ulah* of Purim took place through natural means. Esther, as the medium for the salvation, had the opportunity to either direct the Jews' thanksgiving toward Hashem, or to indicate that all the thanks was due to her. Had Esther been the type to take credit for herself, Hashem would not have considered her a proper conduit for the *ge'ulah*. But Esther had already proved that she never attributed to herself the actions of another. She gave credit where credit was due. Hashem knew that, despite the seemingly natural course of events, Esther would openly reveal and publicize the identity of their Redeemer.

⁵⁰ *Avos* 6:6.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 2:22.

⁵² *Ohr Chadash*, opening words: "*Vayaged le'Esther*" (*Esther* 2:22).

The actions of Rachel and Esther teach us that we too can create a delicate balance between opposing forces. Each situation calls for its own recipe of admission and concealment. The Sfas Emes explains⁵³ why we have two lips. *Sefatayim* (lips) have two functions: to speak and to remain silent. Practically speaking, how can we strike a balance? How can we know when to speak out or when to stay quiet?

Notice the single common factor between the actions of Rachel and Esther, Binyamin and Reuven: the drive to do G-d's Will. Rachel's intuition guided her to reveal the secret signs to Leah, because her desire to do Hashem's will was stronger than her personal yearning for Yaakov. Esther recognized Hashem's command coming through the *tzaddik* (righteous person) Mordechai; she followed his divinely inspired instruction, even though it seemed counter-intuitive and illogical to her. Binyamin struggled with internal voices arguing for justice and defending his father's well-being; ultimately he heeded the voice of Hashem that told him to remain silent. Reuven, out of his great love for Hashem, openly admitted his error and repented for a sin he had committed with good intentions.

A person living with G-d-consciousness knows what is appropriate to say and when. We need to constantly ask ourselves, *Is this what Hashem wants me to do, or do I have other motives?* The world is in existence in the merit of those who can remain silent in times of argument.⁵⁴ If we are aware that everything we hear is divinely directed, we can tune in to how Hashem wants us to respond.⁵⁵ Hashem literally puts words into our ears all the time. If our goal is to do G-d's will, we can

⁵³ From *Succos* of the year 5654.

⁵⁴ *Gemara, Chulin* 89a.

⁵⁵ *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, vol.2, p. 53.

utilize our internal speech and refine our character while remaining silent in external speech. One who uses his speech appropriately, with this higher purpose in mind, brings redemption into this world.

Ratzon Hashem (G-d's will) is the common denominator for every kind of balance. It is our responsibility to elevate the physical to the spiritual and create a proper physical conduit for the spiritual. So too, a man and a woman are a complementary pair; their opposite traits have a symbiotic relationship. Together, they serve their Creator with completion and wholeness. Silence and speech, when used each at its proper time, develop our internal connection to Hashem. When we work to balance these characteristics in our lives, we acquire the ability to reach our highest potential and fulfill our mission as Hashem's people.