

Rabbi Shaul Engelsberg

The Middah of Silence

With Purim just behind us, a very important component of the Purim Story is Esther haMalka. We are introduced to her in the megila by her name of Hadassa and then we are told, Haddasah he Esther. That she was also known as Esther? The question the gemara asks, “what was her given name, Hadassah or Esther? Rabbi Yehuda says that her given name at birth was Haddasah but she was given the name Esther, ‘because she hid her words’. She had the ability not to say what she didn’t need to say. And we know this is referring to her not saying her who she was and what nationality she belonged to. She did not divulge this information because Mordechai had commanded her not to do so.

Why did Mordechai command her to be silent?

-he was interested in hiding her origin because he was interested in having the King release her. If they would have known her yichus that she was the daughter of Royalty, that she had royal lineage coming from the family of Shaul HaMelech, Achashverosh would never release her. Rashi explains that if she wouldn’t give her last name, they would understand, that she comes from some lowly house and might send her home.

-the Yiben Ezra says, if she were to tell that she was Jewish and she would try to keep the mitzvos, kosher, not working on Shabbos, the King would tell her, “here you are not allowed to keep the mitzvos”. But by keeping quiet, no one knows her heritage, she was able to eat natural foods, she was able not to work on Shabbos etc.

-The Vilna Gaon explains that she had been in hiding, not appearing on her own at the beauty pageant. Someone tattled on her and exposed her. If they would know she was Jewish, and she hid herself because she did not want to live with a goy, they might kill her for that.

A person’s Hebrew name is their essence, it speaks to the character the person has. It is interesting that in Esther’s case, she got this name for the simple reason that she kept silent.

Rabbi Engelsberg explained that if we read the megilla slowly and properly we will realize what a huge deal this was for her to keep silent. When we read the megilla, and we read that she was crowned, then we go on to read how Haman convinces Achashverosh to kill the Jews and all that transpires, but Rabbi Engelsberg said, we are missing 2-3 crucial pesukim before we get to the part of Haman asking to kill the Yidden.

After Esther was crowned, Achashverosh made a big party for his new bride, which he called, “Mishta Esther”, he reduced taxes, he gave the people presents from the King and he makes another beauty pageant to look for another queen. What was this all about? And besides telling us all this, the Megilla repeats again that Esther does not tell her name or her nationality as per the instructions of Mordechai haZaddik.

Achasvarosh was desperate to know who his Queen was. He married a woman with no name. This is usually the first thing someone finds out about a potential shidduch-their full name, who their parents are, which nationality they are from. But Esther does not talk. So the King makes her a party , a lavish party in her honor. What the megilla is telling us –is that Esther was under tremendous pressure to tell, The King tried to persuade her with this party, then he lowered taxes in her honor, then he gave the populace beautiful presents-all to pressure her to speak. Esther , please tell me who you are? And Esther does not tell.

Why the 2nd pageant? Achashverosh was desperate, so he went outside to Mordechai and he said, Mordechai, you are a wise man, tell me how to get Esther to speak? So Mordechai says, your majesty, you know women are very jealous by nature. Make a 2nd pageant , let her see you are looking for someone else, maybe this will get her to speak. Really what was Mordechai's plan-that he finds himself a different wife, and lets Esther leave her prison-the palace.

Where did Esther get this middah of silence from? It was in her spiritual genetics. She got it from her great grandmother Rochel Imenu. Rochel suspected that her father would swindle away her husband from her and allow Leah to marry Yaakov. Rochel and Yaakov even made up a code. When Rochel saw what Lavan was doing, she could have told Yaakov, she did not have to tell Leah the code, but Rochel remained silent. She was not going to embarrass her sister.

And this middah of silence continues in Rochel's family, through her son Binyamin. Binyamin knew that his brothers had sold Yosef into slavery. He could have told his father and spared him 22 years of heartbreak, but he would have had to tattle on his brothers. He remained silent.

And it goes further to Shaul HaMelech. Shaul is anointed with oil by Shmuel Hanovie. Afterwards he meets his uncle on the way, who asks him what is new. He could have told him, "I've just been chosen to be King over Yisroel." But he remained silent.

The Zohar explains that Esther was under tremendous pressure to speak, but in the merit that she remained silent, she merited to get Ruach hakodesh and be a prophetess.

We also see the middah of silence from Ahron Kohen Godol . The Yidden are busy building the Mishkan, Moshe is practicing putting it up, taking it down every day for a week, He is practicing all the korbonos and Rosh Chodesh Nissan finally arrives, the day the Mishkan will be put up permanently. The Shechina will come and rest there and this will be a sign from Hashem that the cheit haegel was finally forgiven. Finally Rosh Chodesh Nissan, 3, 325 years ago arrives, but the fire does not come down. Aharon thinks he is at fault because of his part in cheit haegel. Both Moshe and Aharon daven together for the fire to come down and it finally does. What joy-the shechina is here and then tragedy strikes. Ahron's 2 sons, who were big tzaddikim do something wrong and a fire comes out and burns them, "v'amusu l'fnei Hashem".

What was Ahron's response, "Va'idom Aharon" . Ahron was silent. As Koheles says, there is a time for everything and Rashi says, the time to be silent, is when Hashem has acted towards you with the middas hadin and you remain silent, you accept the judgment.

Another example of being silent, is when someone embarrasses you in public. Keep quiet and give someone a brocha-those brochas come true.

The 3rd time a person has to be quiet is in Shul .It is a place to daven not speak

The 4th time a person has to be quiet is when learning from his Rebbe. Stop talking and listen to the words of Torah, but if you have a question, ask them.

Of course, one must not speak lashon hora, richilus about another person. Then also a person must be quiet.

We have to remember the legacy of Esther HaMalka-she knew she had to keep quiet. Rochel Imenu, Binyom and Shaul ha malech all knew they had to be silent.

“Sometimes silent is the sweetest sound of all”