

Torah Musings on Psalm 62:2

דַּמְיָה תְהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּצִיּוֹן

Listen to the Silence

Rabbi Malchah

Nissan 3, 5783 March 25, 2023



Listen to the Silence

Noise: the subway trains bellowing by, the bus making the way to a final destination, the incessant sounds of respirators and iPods detonating their music through headphones that even bystanders can hear. Televisions are blasting a myriad of noise with the jingle jangle of their commercials and theme song jingles.

Noise: the incessant interruptions of the rings of cellphones with their annoying ringtones, email alerts, text messages, facetime chats, talking, talking more talking.

Noise!

Our lives are punctuated by one simple thing, noise. Life begins with the clattering noise of monitors and talking in the delivery room. Life ends with the abrasive, resounding, definitive thudding sound, unlike any other, that we encounter as mounds of dirt are thrown onto the caskets. It is no longer from dust thou art but “from noise thou art to noise thou shall return!”¹ I am yearning for silence!

Psalm 65:2² has an interesting perspective on silence. Morphologically and grammatically, the verse can be translated several different ways³ but following the hint of the Targums⁴ and Rashi⁵, I translate "To You silence is praise, O God, in Zion." How is silence praise? In our liturgies we heap on praises such as great, mighty awesome, powerful, strong, terrible, firm, valiant, sure, revered, certain, but we are warned:

הַהוּא דְנִחִית קַמִּיה דְרַבִּי חֲנִינָא, אָמַר "הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגְּבוּר וְהַנּוֹכָא וְהָאֲדִיר וְהָעִזִּי וְהָרִאֵי, הָחֶזֶק וְהָאֲמִיץ וְהַיִּדְאִי וְהַנְּכָבֵד".

With regard to additions to prayers formulated by the Sages, The Gemara relates that a **particular**

individual **descended before the ark** as prayer leader **in the presence of Rabbi Hanina**. He extended his prayer and **said: God, the great, mighty, awesome, powerful, mighty, awe-inspiring, strong, fearless, steadfast and honored.**⁶

מִתֵּיּוֹן לֹא עַד דְּסַיִים. כִּי סַיִים אָמַר לֵיהּ: סַיִימְתֵּינְהוּ לְכוּלְהוּ שְׁבַחֵי דְמַרְדָּךְ?! לָמָּה לִּי כוּלֵּי הָאֵי? ... מְשַׁל לְמַלְכָּךְ בְּשַׁר וְדָם שְׁהִי לֹא אֶלְפֵי אֶלְפִים דִּינִרֵי זָהָב, וְהִיּוּ מְקַלְסִין אוֹתוֹ בְּשַׁל כְּסָף. וְהִלָּא גִנְאֵי הוּא לֹא!

Rabbi Hanina waited until he had finished, then said to him, 'Have you completed all the praises of your Lord? What use is all that? Yet you come and say all this! It is as though a mortal king had a million gold coins, but they praised him for having silver - would that not be an offence to him?'⁷

How can verbosity, even if beautiful words, capture the true essence of holiness? Words can only hint to us what God does, not what God is. There are some things that words cannot express and silence in the presence of the Holy will more than suffice. Silence should become our praise because we are instructed to be silent in the presence of God,⁸ however our homes, workplaces and places of worship can be anything but silent. The praise songs, the shouts, the prayers, the announcements, the meetings, the choirs, the musicians and the sermons or dvrei Torah, wipe away any impression of quiet, solace or peacefulness. Even when engaged in communal prayer, some of the prayers are so lengthy and verbose that it is impossible to calm our countenance long enough to discern an answer.

Attending a Quaker meeting is calming because they have mastered the art of silence. During the service one can sense the quiet, solemn, pervading presence of the Holy. Absent are the recitations of creeds of faith. There is not an Amidah to recite or hear, and absolutely no hymns, prayers or an order of service that one must adhere to. Every soul sits in silence only seeking to come nearer to the Holy. Two hours may pass and not a word is uttered. You may hear a voice but only if a higher yearning compels the person to speak. The sheer silence of the Quaker meeting is freeing, enlightening and a place of escape from all of the earthly noise.

This is a place in which one can be at one with the Creator and creation. Here one may find Psalm 65:2, "To You silence is praise, O God, in Zion."

Choosing words wisely is an art, that if we practiced it, would become praise. It is taught that at the final judgment the Holy One will ask:

"Have you been honest in all thy dealings?"

Have you set aside a portion of thy time for the study of the Torah?

Have you observed the first commandment?

Have you in trouble, still hoped and believed in God?

Have you spoken wisely?"⁹

Have you spoken wisely? Would you pass this test? How many disagreements would have ended more amicably if we had limited our words or perhaps even entertained silence? We often regret what we say, but we rarely, if ever, regret what we did not say.

A physicist would say that noise is a disturbance that reduces or obscures the clarity of a signal. Our signals from on high are nearly obliterated by far too much noise. Unless we learn to decrease the decibel level of our noise, I fear that we will cease to hear from on High. Our human noise will inevitably obstruct the clearness of the Holy One's signal. It is not that the Holy One won't be speaking, it is just that we will not be able to hear Him. Let us heed Psalm 65:2 and allow silence to be our most sincere praise. Shush. Quiet. Hush and

Listen to the Silence

דְּמִיָּה תְהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּצִיּוֹן
To You Silence is Praise, O God, in Zion

שבת שלום מביתנו לביתך
Shabbat Shalom From Our House to Your House



Happy New Year
This Shabbat We Welcome the New Year and Spring

Rabbi Malchah

Nissan 3, 5783 - March 25, 2023, 2023
© Copyright All Rights Reserved

Endnotes

¹ Genesis 3:19

² Psalm 65:2 in the Tanakh, 65:1 in the Protestant Bible and 64:1 in the Catholic Bible:

³ Other translations and various ways of understanding 65:2

1. "Praise is fitting for You, O God, In Zion"

A. Latin Vulgate-*Te decet hymnus Deus in Sion,*

B. LXX-*σοὶ κρέπται ὕμνος, ὁ θεός, ἐν Σιών,*

C. See also RSV, NJPS,

2. "**Praise waits for You, O God, in Zion.**" This translation regards the psalm 65 as a pilgrimage song which was sung during the trip to the Jerusalem Temple.

A. *KJV*, --"Praise waits for You, O God, in Zion

B. Ibn Ezra 65:2

ודומיה - מגזרת דמות, או הוא כמו: אך לאלהים דומיה נפשי, כטעם דום לה' והתחולל לו, דומו עד הגיענו אליכם. והטעם: כי התהלה ממתנת לך בציון מן הבאים שמה להלל במקום הארון, ושמה לך ישולם נדר.

C. See also Kimchi

3." To You Silence is Praise"

A. Rashi :

. - לך דמיה תהלה: השתיקה תהלה לך לפי שאין קץ לשבחך והמרבה בשבח אינו אלא גורע:

B. Targum. קדמך מתחשבא היך שתיקותא תושבחתא אלהא די שכנתיה בציון.

⁴ Targum-- Aramaic translation of the Tanakh

⁵ Rashi -- רבי שלמה יצחקי. Sh'lomo Yitzhaki"(1040-1105). A medieval French Torah and Talmud commentator

⁶ BT Berakhot 33b

⁷ BT Berakhot 33b

⁸ Habakkuk 2:20.

ויהוה בהיכל קדשו הס מפניו כל-הארץ

But the LORD *is* in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

⁹ BT Shabbat 31a